

Coping With Anger

Anger is a complex feeling. Maybe it doesn't feel that way when you're exploding with anger, but doesn't it seem that way afterwards? What was the thing that really got to you? How did you react? How did your body feel? How angry were you? But most importantly, *what did you do about it?*

Do you know that most anger comes from fear?

Fear that you are not safe or the world is not a safe place for you. Anger is the stuff that helps us protect ourselves and can motivate us to make a situation right. It's the "fight or flight" reactions.

In prehistoric times, if you were scared of a tiger or a dinosaur, fighting or running away might just save you.

But in today's world, it's not usually as simple as fighting or running away. Our fears are more complex. Your anger may be intertwined with an immense sense of sadness, fear, and injustice, especially if you've been in the foster care system. You have a right to those feelings. But what should you do with them?

Know your triggers. What are your "triggers" — the comments, situations, and people who get to you almost right away. Maybe it's a certain tone

that reminds you of someone in the past. Maybe it's yelling and swearing, which tends to be a trigger for a lot of people. Maybe the smell of cigarettes or alcohol automatically triggers some bad memories, which in turn cause you to be more uptight. Knowing your triggers will help you figure out when you might need to be extra patient, walk away, talk to a friend, listen to music or any other number of coping skills.



Blow off steam. Run it out. Exercise. Swim. Run in place and do a crazy number of jumping jacks or sit ups. It sure is better than giving someone else the control of you by letting them cause you to do or say things you will regret.

Write it out. Writing in a journal is a great way to talk about the things that get you angry.

Draw it out. Sometimes finding a quiet place to draw a picture or sketch will help your body work through some of your stress.

Do something that you love or enjoy, like listening to music, scrapbooking, skateboarding, etc. That can give you some time for your body to relax and give you the ability to rethink what made you so angry.

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Talk it out. There are often two steps to talking things out. First you might just need to talk to someone who will listen, more or less neutrally. Sometimes it even helps to let that person know that you're just "venting" and they don't need to try to solve your problem for you. Or maybe the two of you together will be able to do some problem solving.

Then the second step might be—but not always—to talk to the person who offended you. This may be the best way to handle a situation, but it's often the hardest. Try to use "I feel" statements as much as possible so the other person doesn't feel defensive.

Say "I feel embarrassed when we're late for movies because I don't like crawling over people to get a good seat," rather than "You're never on time and I hate being late."

Sometimes it's just too hard to figure out what to say. Try to find someone to talk to who you can trust. If you're seeing a therapist but you don't feel comfortable enough to talk to him or her, consider finding a new therapist.

Get help. If you scream, hit, kick, hit or punch in a situation that does not require self defense or protecting someone else, you have anger issues that hurt you as well as others.



If you're not already seeing a therapist, you consider seeing someone to help you with your anger issues. Anger often masks deeper

A Few Basic Communication Tips

Anger is intricately connected with communicating. Here are some tips that may help you in angry situations.

- Take responsibility (control) by using "I feel" or "I" statements versus "you" statements.
- Try not to use words like "always," "never," "hate"
- Try to be specific about how you feel.
- Be aware of your body language. Are you saying "Nothing's wrong" while you're looking away, not smiling, and sulking?
- Say what you mean; mean what you say. For example, "I'd rather not go to the party, but I'll go if you want to go," instead of going to the party and being resentful. (Note: if you *do* go to the party, that's your choice and it's not fair to later say, "Well I didn't want to go in the first place.")

feelings of being afraid to be hurt.

Many youth in care as—well as many kids who have *not* faced the challenges you have faced—need to talk to a counselor about anger issues.

Life has been rough for you, and you may not have had adults around you who showed you how to deal with anger appropriately or they

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may have encouraged irrational anger by the way they acted.

There might also be a group you can join to work out issues. But ask for help—either individually or in group. You have a right to good receive good therapy.

Anger is tough. It's a natural reaction, and it's one of the normal emotions in all people. Embrace your anger as a healthy emotion, but learn to react in a way that works for you.

Martin Luther King, Jr. would not have been who he was without a deep sense of anger about the injustice of racism, but he directed his anger in productive ways.

As he said, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. "



Resources

12 ways for teens to cope with anger

<http://teenadvice.about.com/od/violencebullying/a/angermanagement.htm>

How to Control Your Temper

<http://teenadvice.about.com/cs/familyissues/ht/controltemperht.htm>

Online forum about dealing with anger

<http://www.fosterclub.com/search/node/Dealing+with+anger>

Resilience

<http://www.fosterclub.com/topics/resilience>

Stressed, Depressed and Mental Health

<http://www.fosterclub.com/topics/stresseddepressed-mental-health>

Youth Communications books and DVD's, some with training guides for teens dealing with anger.

Books and tapes that you can buy to help you deal with anger, many written by and published for young people.

<http://youthcomm.org/>