

# Tips for Managing Anger

From The Jed Foundation website ([www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org))

Anger is a natural feeling, especially when we feel threatened or attacked in some way. Feeling anger and responding defensively is an instinctual survival skill. And, it's also a natural, instinctive response to lash out when [feeling threatened or angry](#). Read on for tips on how you can manage anger in most situations. And as always, if you feel you have an anger management problem, there are ways to get help. Text "START" to 741-741 or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

## *Approaches to Managing Anger*

There are three approaches that we suggest for managing anger: expressing, suppressing, and calming.

### **Expressing**

There's a reason people use phrases like "he exploded with anger." If we suppress our anger or don't find ways to express it healthfully, it's bound to pop back up, and may show up in unexpected or aggressive ways. This is why it's important to acknowledge anger and do our best to figure out what's underneath the anger and find healthy ways to express how we're feeling. Sometimes it can take some honest self-reflection time to figure out what's causing the feelings of vulnerability, threat or injustice that most often underlie anger. During this time it may be helpful to talk with someone who can help you figure out what's happening and who can provide a sounding board for ideas about how to express it in productive ways. After that, it's important to express the anger and, if possible the underlying causes, to the person/people who need to hear what you have to say.

### **Suppressing**

While suppressing anger over the long haul can make things worse, there are moments when we just need to step back and take a pause so we can avoid acting out in harmful or inappropriate ways. It's OK to say something like, "I need to take a step back to calm down and regroup. I'll come back to you when I'm ready to talk."

During this time it can be helpful to take some deep breaths, listen to music, or participate in an activity that can distract you from your anger for a few minutes (a game on your phone, watching silly YouTube videos). Keep in mind that unless the situation is time sensitive, it's fine to take the time you need to calm down and get ready to address what happened and the anger you felt in response.

## **Calming**

While suppression is about preventing negative reactions in the moment, calming is about dealing with our internal reactions. Calming techniques slow our heart rate and let those big feelings give way to a little more inner peace. Breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, or simple movements are all good ways to find a calmer internal space so it's more productive to express and examine our thoughts and feelings.

## ***Strategies for Dealing with Anger***

### **Relaxation and Self-Care**

Our ongoing relaxation and self-care routine plays an important role in our overall mental health and in managing anger when it arises. This is because our response to anger reflects our state of mind in combination with the coping skills we have available to us at the time. If we're tired, overwhelmed, and on edge, it's going to be a lot easier to get angry (think about a cranky baby). Similarly, if we're at peace inside, then a situation that would have caused anger may simply wash over us.

Find activities that help you feel more relaxed, like exercise, long walks, meditation apps, or reading, and make time in your schedule for them as frequently as possible. Additionally, getting enough sleep and avoiding caffeine, or anything that makes us feel jittery, can also help with keeping our anger at bay.

### **Reframing**

One effective strategy for managing anger is called "cognitive restructuring." That's simply a fancy term for challenging the internal dialogue that's contributing to anger by reframing it in a way that causes less suffering. For example, if someone ignores our ideas in a meeting, or interrupts us while we're sharing those ideas, our inner monologue might scream, "No one values my talent at this company or is respectful to me as a person." A reframed version of that experience may be something like "everyone is especially on edge right now and they all want to stand out."

Let's unpack this a little. While you might want to say something immediately, sometimes it's best to not say anything in the moment or process it in real time. When we're feeling calmer and have controlled some of the initial physical and psychological reactions to our anger, we can look at those internal assumptions. Are there times when people value my opinion and listen to me? Yes. Does the person who interrupted me always ignore my ideas? No. Could this be more about the fact that there are rumors of layoffs and so everyone is trying to step up their game and be heard? Probably. Anger is often about how we perceive other people viewing us or treating us, and that can often have more to do with them than it does with us.

## **Problem Solving**

Problem solving is especially helpful when it relates to recurring sources of anger. Do you start your morning angry because you always forget something and have to go back to the house? Do you get ticked off every day at something a coworker does that makes your job harder? Starting off a day like this can affect everything that happens afterward. Once you notice the pattern in when and why you become angry, you have more options. For example, make a list of things you could do to help alleviate specific sources of anger and experiment by trying them out to see which best help the situations from happening or bothering you in the first place.

## **Listen More, Communicate Better**

Often, when we get angry at things other people say to or about us, our internal monologue starts finishing their sentences. A boss saying, “I feel like we can do better than this report...” might be intended to help challenge you to look for a better solution, but our internal monologue runs with a narrative that our work isn’t appreciated and everyone takes us for granted. Instead of shutting down and listening to the internal monologue or reacting quickly, try just really listening with the intention of getting it. Ask simple clarifying questions to better understand someone else’s perspective and intent before you jump to conclusions. It can be an ego buster at times, but authentic curiosity and willingness to learn and grow, even when it costs us, is really powerful and has benefits all of its own.

## **Avoid Triggers**

One reason that journaling can be a powerful anger management tool is that writing about the big or difficult emotions we feel daily can help us identify trends and triggers. Do you have outbursts of anger on deadline day when everyone’s asking for things while you’re trying to finish urgent work? Instead, can you notify people you’re unavailable for the day or find a more private place to work? Do you find yourself angry every time you see a specific friend or family member? Maybe that’s a sign that the relationship is unhealthy and you should take a step back or create some distance. Become a student of yourself and watch how the simple act of seeing your patterns can change the patterns.

## **Seek Professional Support**

Sometimes we think of therapy as a last resort when things get bad or we’re dealing with mental health conditions like depression. The truth is that therapists and counselors are trained to help us track, understand, and transform emotions — big and small. Reaching out for help is a sign of strength. Don’t you owe it to yourself to at least try a few sessions of therapy to see if it can help in coming up with an effective anger management plan for you?

Remember, anger is a normal emotion. But if you feel that your anger is becoming unmanageable, there are ways you can cope and people who can help.