



Techniques for Handling Your Anger Appropriately

1) **BREATHING** : When you begin to feel angry - Keep Breathing. Fill your body with your own energy, do not take in the unhealthy energy from the person you're angry with.

Breathe In - counting to 4
Hold Your Breath - counting to 2
Breathe Out - counting to 4

2) **TALKING** : When you're angry talking with someone you trust & feel safe with about how you're feeling is often helpful. It's generally best not to talk to the person you're angry with until you've had time to think & cool down.

3) **WRITING** : It can often be helpful to write a letter to the person you're angry with. This is probably not a letter you will give them. You may also want to write a description of what happened, which can help you process the situation.

Writing is a powerful tool to organize overwhelming events and make them manageable. The mind torments itself by thinking about unresolved issues. By translating the experience into language people begin to organize & structure the surge of overwhelming thoughts. Once organized they are easier to resolve.

Writing Exercises

- a) *Make a List of the Dysfunctional Things You Do* : make it as long as you can, then go back & concentrate on them one at a time, feel what each item makes you feel. Next, write an M or an F by each one, indicating whether it was something your mother or father did.
- b) *Complete the Following Sentences* : Add any others which are important to you.
When Dad got angry, he
When Mom got angry, she
When I got angry as a child, I
Think about which parent you are most like.
- c) *Description of Your Abandonment* : Using your non-dominant hand (write with your left hand if you're right handed & vice versa), write about a time you were abandoned or the time when you were saddest.

- d) *Make a List of People You're Angry At* : go as far back as you can & write down the reasons you were angry. No reason is unreasonable, no incident too small. If you can remember it, it's significant. Allow yourself to feel & express your emotions appropriately.
- e) *Letter Writing* : Using your non-dominant hand write a letter to someone you're really angry at. It doesn't matter if the person is living because it's for you, you're not going to send it. Tell the person why you're angry, go into the details & don't try to protect the person's feelings (they're not going to see your letter !). If you begin thinking about other experiences that made you angry, write those down, too, even if they don't seem related. Keep writing as long as you've got the anger to do so.
- f) *Journal Keeping* : Start writing a journal to record your thoughts & feelings & be completely honest in what you write. Most people write in their journals in a way that would make them look good if someone else read it. They generally are not completely honest. To get the most benefit from journaling, you have to be honest.

4) **PHYSICALLY EXPRESSING ANGER** : Sometimes breathing, talking & writing exercises aren't enough. How can you tell if you're still angry ? If you still feel tense after the other exercises. How can you tell where you hold your pent up anger ? By noticing what part of your body remains knotted when you're breathing deeply. Where do you get recurrent pains ? in your head, neck, back or stomach ? How do you talk about your anger ? For example, "the whole thing makes me sick to my stomach". The part of your body where you have stored your anger is the part that has to express it. If your anger is in your jaw, throat or stomach, screaming, coughing or yawning will help. If your anger is in your arms, shoulders or neck, pounding a pillow will help. If it's in your legs, lie on a couch and kick as hard as you can.

Exercises : It is very important that you not hurt anyone, including yourself during these exercises. You must also be careful not to damage any property.

- a) *Scream in the Car* : Get in your car, roll up the windows, close the doors & scream as loud as you want, as long as you want. If you don't have a car, you could scream into a pillow.
- b) *Twist a Towel* : Take a towel in both hands & twist it as tightly as you can. As you twist your anger into the towel, let out any sounds that come up or repeat "I'm angry". Imagine the tension in your body being discharged through your arms & hands into the towel. If you also store anger in your jaw you can bite the towel as you twist it.
- c) *Dance / Exercise* : Do a shaking, stomping, primitive dance. Pound your anger into the ground. Any form of exercise will release anger if the exercise is consciously done with that in mind. For example, if you're going for a run, you want to focus your running on the anger & consciously express it in the pounding of your feet. You can even groan & yell if you feel like it.

- d) *Beat on a Drum, Play any Musical Instrument or Sing* : Using your hands to play any kind of musical instrument can help you express your anger, as long as you focus on your anger while you're doing it. Even singing can help.
- e) *Punch a Pillow / Punching bag* : you can imagine the person's face on the pillow or punching bag & yell while you're doing it, if you feel like it.
- f) *Do Something Physical* : pound nails with a hammer, chop wood, tear up magazines or phone books.
- g) *Go Outdoors* : throw rocks in the woods, beat branches against the ground or a boulder & yell.

What Can Your Body Tell You About Anger ?

If your body tells you it's miffed, annoyed, warm under the collar, etc. You're probably angry about something that just happened. That's present anger. If, however, your body tells you it's steaming, shaking, outraged, or so mad you can't see straight, you're almost certainly not angry about something that has just happened. This anger comes from the past, from your well of suppressed, unexpressed emotions.

If you can contain a feeling fairly comfortably, most likely it has been stimulated by the present moment. If you can't contain a feeling easily, it's almost certainly caused by past events, people & circumstances. You're using a present situation to release feelings you weren't able to release in the past. Uncontainable anger is almost always misplaced anger.

Other Thoughts About Anger

- Is criticism helpful when you're talking with someone you're angry with? Usually not. Why give criticism to someone you're angry with because he / she won't change until he / she is ready to. Your anger & criticism will probably not motivate someone to change, it will only make them defensive & angry with you in return. When you expect to change someone by expressing your anger (or any other emotion) you're setting yourself up for disappointment.
- The appropriate expression of anger to people who are important to us can increase our intimacy with them.