

Understanding anger:

How psychologists help with anger problems



Everyone gets mad at times. The target of your ire might be a stranger, a loved one or even yourself. Or, you might find yourself furious over external events, such as a delayed flight or a political incident. While anger is a normal human emotion, misplaced or uncontrolled anger can quickly become problematic.

You can learn [strategies to help control your anger](#). Sometimes, though, people need extra help to keep their rage at bay.

Psychologists can help people recognize and avoid the triggers that make them angry. They can also provide ways to help them manage the inevitable anger that sometimes flares without warning.

Uncontrolled anger

Uncontrolled anger looks different from person to person. Some people are quietly seething at the world most of the time. Some can't help but dwell on events that made them mad. Others have quick tempers and may even exhibit aggressive or violent behavior.

Uncontrolled anger can be hard to define. Unlike depression (which can be thought of as a dysfunctional form of sadness) or anxiety (a dysfunctional form of worry), uncontrolled anger doesn't have a name or an official diagnosis.

Nevertheless, anger can be dysfunctional, and people who experience it often don't realize how big a problem it is. That's because in the short term, anger can be effective. Blowing up at your kids might seem like a good strategy if it results in them doing their chores. Losing your temper at work might feel productive if it gets your coworkers to do things your way.

Unfortunately, people often fail to see the long-term consequences of uncontrolled anger. Those can include health effects such as high blood pressure and increased risk of heart disease, as well as social disharmony among family members, friends and coworkers.

You might need some help learning to control your anger if you recognize any these signs:

- Your friends or family members have said they think you have an anger problem or have distanced themselves from you as a result of your behavior.
- You have discord with coworkers.
- There are business establishments where you're no longer welcome.
- You feel angry a lot of the time.
- You're nursing a grudge or thinking about getting revenge.
- You have been or think about being aggressive or violent when angry.

Seeing a psychologist about anger

Hundreds of research studies have explored the effectiveness of therapies for treating anger. Several large analyses of the published research suggest that overall, approximately 75 percent of people receiving anger management therapy improved as a result.

- The majority of research on anger treatment has focused on **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)**. In CBT, patients learn to identify unhelpful or negative thought patterns and change inaccurate beliefs. One CBT-based anger treatment is known as Stress Inoculation. This method involves exposing the person to imaginary incidents that would provoke anger, providing opportunities to self-monitor their anger and practice coping methods. Though there has been less research on other methods for treating anger, several appear to show promise. Those include:

- **Family therapy** helps family members resolve conflict and improve communication. It may be helpful in addressing anger problems directed at a romantic partner and/or children.
- **Psychodynamic therapy** is an approach in which therapists help people use self-reflection to focus on the psychological roots of their emotional distress.

Anger often goes hand-in-hand with other problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression or alcohol problems. Psychologists can help treat those conditions while also providing strategies for managing the anger that goes along with them.

Psychotherapy for anger: What to expect

If you see a psychologist for help with anger problems, you can plan on examining the triggers that set you off. You'll explore how your experiences of anger were helpful or harmful, both in the short-term and in the long-term.

You'll probably examine the thoughts that precede your anger and explore whether they're accurate assessments of reality. Psychologists may also help you learn to resolve conflicts in a more constructive way and rebuild relationships that have been damaged by your anger.

Unfortunately, not all anger management classes are based on the latest scientific evidence. If you're seeking help for your anger, look for a trained mental health professional with experience treating anger. They may offer treatments in one-on-one or in group settings.

Psychologists are highly trained experts who tailor a treatment plan to address the unique needs of each patient.

The American Psychological Association gratefully acknowledges psychologists Raymond W. Novaco, PhD, and Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, for their help with this fact sheet.

The full text of articles from APA Help Center may be reproduced and distributed for noncommercial purposes with credit given to the American Psychological Association. Any electronic reproductions must link to the original article on the APA Help Center. Any exceptions to this, including excerpting, paraphrasing or reproduction in a commercial work, must be presented in writing to the [APA](#). Images from the APA Help Center may not be reproduced.