



Strategies For Handling Anger and Conflict

Take responsibility for your anger

You are in charge of your emotions and behavior. People and situations around you can and will be bothersome at times. Think of how you can cope with their behavior (just as they will need to decide how to cope with your behavior). Realize that you can say no to your anger.

Make a personal commitment to calmness

Calmness is a choice. It doesn't just happen to people by accident. It is a personal decision and can help you remain in control, regardless of what is happening around you.

Anticipate and intercept your anger and frustration

Think ahead and prepare yourself for events that may be stressful. Explore different ways to cope and provide yourself with alternative ways to handle the problem. It may help you reduce your frustration.

Keep your mind open.

- Get all the facts. Stay calm, ask questions and don't jump to conclusions.
- Avoid defensiveness. Defensiveness can escalate the problem and prevent you from clearly understanding the other person's point of view.
- Relax your thinking. Beware of negative thoughts that kick in automatically. Avoid using words like "always" and "never" when thinking about a problem.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes. To better understand the other person's reactions and behavior, consider how they may be feeling and what pressures they may be under.
- Accept differences. Don't confuse "you do that differently than me" with "you do it wrong".

Look for the good in others.

Moral rigidity or, the tendency to see one side as all good and the other as all bad, is a common problem during conflict. There are three ways you can keep a more balanced view.

- Separate people from problems. Learn how to attack the problem and not the person.
- Identify positive traits in the other person. Identify times when the behavior was not a problem.
- Learn to let go of old resentments.
- Praise instead of punish. One way to feel less anger and reduce the possibility for conflict is to look for things to appreciate and praise in others.

Pick your conflicts carefully

How do I decide whether it's worth engaging in a conflict? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the issue directly and significantly affect my areas of responsibility?
- Is it something that can actually be changed?
- Is it worth my time and energy?
- Is there a reasonable chance that I can get the desired result and am I willing to compromise?
- Is this conflict necessary to preserve or protect something (or someone) important to me?
- What are the personal risks involved?
- Am I prepared for the worst possible results (i.e., up to and including getting fired)?

Keep your actions reasonable.

- Loss of control usually consists of two kinds of behavior: excessive and impulsive. Learn how to keep the problem in perspective and take a "time-out" before you quickly respond or act.
- Address situations before they get too big. Loss of control doesn't just happen by accident. Almost always there is a buildup period, a time when your anger gradually escalates. Even though the immediate incident may appear to be spontaneous, normally there is a long history of unresolved conflicts, hurt feelings, and grievances.