

Disaster Relief

Recognizing Your Own Anger



Anger is a basic emotion. It is normal to feel angry after a traumatic experience such as a disaster. Anger often masks other emotions. For example, it is not uncommon to feel angry when we are stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, afraid, feeling helpless, exhausted, or worried. Each of these emotions is common following a disaster.

Anger has three parts. One part is the way our body reacts to anger—the **physiological component**. This has to do with how our body naturally responds when we feel angry. When we are angry our “fight or flight” response is triggered. Heart rates increase, blood pressure rises, and muscles tense in preparation to either fight or flee from the perceived threat. The second part of anger is the thoughts we have when we are angry—the **cognitive component**. This has to do with how our mind makes sense of the situation we are in. Sometimes we fixate on the anger, unable to let it go. Other times, we are able to recognize the source of our anger and reframe it. The third part of anger is what we do or want to do when we are angry—the **behavioral component**. This has to do with how we choose to respond to our anger. We can choose to respond in either a productive or unproductive manner. Unproductive responses to anger may include verbal expressions, such as yelling, or physical expressions, such as throwing something or hitting a wall.

Example Situation:

Mold in Your Home as a Result of a Flood

Body (physiological): I feel flushed.

Thoughts (cognitive): It’s not fair!

Actions (behavioral): I yell at or ignore my child.

The important thing to remember about anger is that, while we cannot control how our body reacts to anger, we can control our thoughts and behavior in response to feeling angry. In order to respond to anger in a productive manner, we must practice skills to cope with or manage our anger.

Anger Coping Methods

It is important to have some positive coping techniques available during difficult times. Here are some positive anger coping methods:

- **Back off:** You might take a walk or leave the room to reduce anger and stop an argument. This works when the anger is your own and when it is directed at you.
- **Empathize:** Understand that anger comes from the frustration of the disaster and the stress the disaster created.
- **Perception:** Think about the situation differently; the way you react to any situation depends on how you perceive that situation.
- **Exercise:** Exercise can reduce stress and improve your overall mood.
- **Breathe:** Take several deep breaths, and roll your shoulders. This helps dissipate the anger.
- **Journal:** When you journal, you can express your emotions without hurting other people.
- **Talk it out:** Talking to a counselor can help get your anger out.
- **Meditate:** Meditating, reading inspirational material, or praying can help reduce stress.

The RETHINK Method of Managing Anger

The RETHINK method of managing anger was developed to challenge typical anger responses and diminish the negative consequences of anger mismanagement. Family and friends often suffer the consequences when we do not manage our anger well. The RETHINK method can help us deal with the anger caused by a disaster and prevent us from damaging our close relationships.

R — Recognize anger in yourself and others.

Do you **recognize** when you or others are angry? Identify other emotions that may be fueling your anger or the anger of others so that you can address the underlying feeling (anxiety, concern, fear, frustration, grief, shame, etc.).

E — Empathize with the other person.

Can you **empathize** and see the point of view of others with whom you are angry? Try to understand the other person's perspective and how they may be feeling.

T — Think about the situation.

Do you know what you **think** about when you get angry? Try to reframe or redirect your thoughts and avoid taking things personally. Rather than thinking "she is doing this to upset me," think "she may feel afraid."

H — Hear what is being said.

Do you really **hear** where the other person is coming from? Listen so that you can respond rather than just react. Too often we listen so that we can defend ourselves instead of truly understanding what the other person is saying.

I — Integrate respect and love when expressing anger.

Do you know how to **integrate** expressions of your anger with expressions of love and respect? Communicate your anger in a loving and respectful way. Avoid raising your voice, being mean or unkind, and blaming others. If your anger gets the best of you, apologize for the way you expressed your anger.

N — Notice your body's reaction to anger.

Do you know what your body feels like or what you **notice** about your body when you are angry? Recognize your body's physiological responses to anger (for example, rapid heartbeat, flushed skin, tense muscles).

K — Keep your attention on the present problem.

Do you know how to **keep** the conversation in the present? Do not bring up past arguments or incidents. Stay focused on addressing the current situation.

Resources

Benson, K. (2016). The Anger Iceberg. The Gottman Relationship Blog, The Gottman Institute. Available online at <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-anger-iceberg/>.

Fetsch, R. J., R. K. Yang & M. J. Pettit (2008). The RETHINK parenting and anger management program: A follow-up validation study. *Family Relations*, 57: 543–552.

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