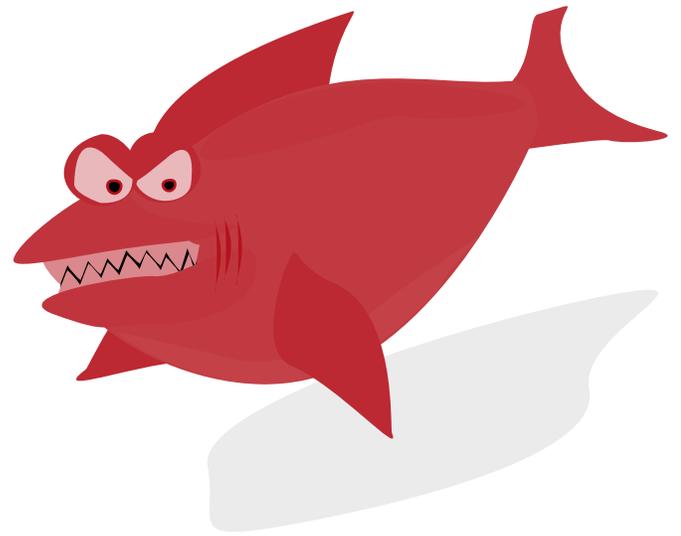


I can't believe my mother would say something like that

that driver just cut me off

my tax return is so complicated

I'm so ANGRY!



## does any of this sound familiar?

Read on to find out if you have a problem with managing your anger and what to do about it.

**ANGER** is an emotion that tells you something is wrong. It might show that someone or something has interfered with your goals, gone against you or wronged you in some way. Anger can make you feel like defending yourself, attacking or getting revenge.

Everyone feels angry from time to time. How you experience and express your anger may be influenced by many factors, like gender, culture or religion.

**Anger is not a bad feeling.** Some people believe that anger is bad and that they shouldn't express anger. This is not true! It's completely normal to feel angry when you feel threatened, but anger sometimes gets the upper hand. As a result, you may do or say things that hurt others.

**Anger can lead to positive change if you express it in a useful and constructive way.** Anger can motivate you to make positive changes in your life. It can push you to solve problems. It can help you stand up for yourself and others. For example, people who feel angry about social injustice may speak out and bring about positive change to the system.

**On the down side, too much anger is bad for you.**

Some people who experience frequent and intense anger may avoid expressing their anger. Others may express their anger in unhelpful ways, like yelling or making hurtful comments. When you have a problem with anger, you may judge other people unfairly. You may unfairly blame others for bad events or assume that other people have wronged you on purpose. All of these reactions can lead to problems in family life, relationships and work.

Anger can also lead to problems with your health. When you experience anger problems, you may not cope well with stress. You may have lower self-esteem and may be more likely to experience drug or alcohol problems. Anger can also have significant effects on your body. It can lead to muscle tension, increased heart rate, and other uncomfortable or unhealthy body responses. People who don't manage their anger well are more likely to get sick because their bodies aren't able to fight illness or disease. Poorly managed anger can even lead to heart problems.

# how do I know if my anger is a problem?

## Anger becomes a problem if it is:

### 1. Too frequent

Anger may be appropriate, and it may help motivate you. However, if you are coping with lots of anger on a daily basis, it may be reducing the quality of your life, your relationships and your health. Even if your anger is justified, you may feel better if you pick your most important battles and let go of the rest.

### 2. Too intense

Very intense anger is rarely a good thing. Anger triggers the “fight or flight” response, which causes all kinds of physiological reactions—your heart pumps faster, your breathing increases, and others. When you become very angry, you are also much more likely to act impulsively and do or say something that you regret later.

### 3. Lasts too long

Angry feelings that last for a long time are hard on your mood and on your body.

### 4. Leads to aggression

You’re more likely to become aggressive when your anger is very intense. Lashing out at others either verbally or physically is not an effective way to deal with conflict. When anger leads to aggression, no one benefits.

### 5. Disrupts work or relationships

Intense and frequent anger can lead to problems in your relationships with co-workers, family members and friends. At its worst, anger can lead to the loss of employment and damage or destroy important relationships.

## what causes anger?

### Anger-provoking situations

Many different situations may provoke anger. These might include frustrations, irritations, abuse and unfairness. Some situations fall into more than one category.

**Frustrations:** Anger is a common reaction when you’re trying to achieve something important and something gets in the way of success. For example, you really want a particular job but don’t get a job offer.

**Irritations:** Daily hassles are annoying and can trigger anger. For example, you keep getting interrupted while you’re trying to work.

**Abuse:** Anger is a normal and expected reaction to verbal, physical or sexual abuse. For example, someone putting you down, hitting you or forcing you to do something that you do not want to do.

**Unfairness:** Being treated unfairly can also trigger anger. For example, you’re blamed for failing to meet a deadline at work when it was actually your co-workers fault.

### Internal causes

Different people may have different types of thoughts about the same types of situations. This is why some people become angry more often and more intensely than others. Listed below are some internal causes of anger.

**Evaluations:** How you evaluate the situation will influence your emotions. Often, people become angry because they take other people’s behaviour personally. For example, if you think that your friend is late because she doesn’t value your time, you will probably feel quite angry. However, if you think that she is late due to busy traffic, you probably won’t feel as upset.

**Expectations:** Expectations about how things ought to be can also lead to anger if things don’t work out as planned. If your expectations are unrealistic, you may feel disappointed, angry and frustrated when things inevitably don’t work out.

**Private speech:** Angry self-talk may make angry feelings more intense and long-lasting. Thoughts like, “I’m going to show them!” or, “He’s always getting on my case!” often make you feel worse.

**Tension/Stress:** It’s much easier to become angry when you already feel tense or stressed out. You may notice that you’re more likely to have a hard time dealing with anger when you’re having a stressful week at work than when things are running smoothly.

# what can I do about my anger?

Anger is a sign you need to take constructive action. Anger is a source of energy to get things done and to solve problems. The goal of learning to manage anger is to minimize the negative consequences of this powerful emotion and maximize the positive ones. Strength lies in composure, not confrontation.

**Anger management is about:**

- Problem-solving
- Understanding how anger affects you
- Building skills to control anger

There are three main ways to manage anger:

## 1. Emotions

### Relaxation

You can't be relaxed and angry at the same time. Think of anger as your boiling point. If you turn down the temperature, you keep yourself from boiling over. Learning to relax can help lower your daily arousal level. Then, when you're provoked, you have a much greater distance to travel before you get extremely mad. Visit [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca) for more information about using relaxation skills and other tips on managing emotions.

### Humour

It is also difficult to be angry when you're laughing. It is easy to take life's annoyances too seriously. Making an effort to see the humour in your frustrations and aggravations can help to combat an automatic angry reaction.

## 2. Thinking Patterns

### Manage Your Thoughts

A good way to lower anger is to manage angry thoughts about the situation. Take the following steps:

- Examine the evidence—What evidence supports your view of the situation?
- Look for alternatives—What are some alternative ways of viewing the situation or conflict? Can you think of some other explanations for why this has happened? What evidence supports the alternative explanations?

### Empathy

You may feel angry when you think that the other person's behaviour was intended to hurt you in some way. Often, other people's behaviour has nothing to do with you personally. It usually reflects how they are coping with things in their own lives. To make empathy work for you, ask yourself: "What does this situation feel like for the other person?"

For more tips and tools on managing upsetting thoughts, see our Healthy Thinking module at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

## 3. Behaviours

### Problem-Solving

Anger management is a strategic and calculated confrontation aimed at solving a problem. The trick to managing anger well is to have a problem-solving goal. This means making sure that your response to your angry feelings is directed at solving the problem. Don't take your feelings out on everyone around you, use them in a directed way to solve the problem.

### Being Assertive Without Being Aggressive

How you communicate depends on your goals. Your goals (even when angry) may include improving a valued relationship, maintaining your self-respect, solving a

problem, making a request, communicating your feelings, showing understanding, and more.

Anyone can learn assertive communication skills. Being assertive does not mean behaving aggressively to get your own way. Genuine assertiveness is about respecting yourself, respecting others and learning how to communicate your feelings honestly and with care. You communicate your needs without hurting others. See our list of resources on the next page for more on assertiveness.

For additional tips and tools, see our Problem-Solving wellness module at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

# negative reactions to anger: the 3 don'ts!

How you behave once you've experienced an anger-provoking situation can have a big impact on how angry you feel and how long it lasts. You may increase your angry feelings if you respond to anger-provoking situations with any of the three don'ts: bottling it up, getting defensive or lashing out.

## The three don'ts:

### bottling it up

One way to deal with anger is to avoid saying anything and walking away mad. This way of coping with anger is usually ineffective for a number of reasons:

- The problem doesn't go away
- When you think about what happened, you just get angrier
- Over time, your anger turns into resentment
- You haven't tried to solve the problem, so you may feel discouraged and worse about yourself

### getting defensive

If you react too quickly to anger, you may express unhelpful hostility towards others. When you come across as bitter or hostile, the other person may act hostile in return.

### lashing out

Physical or verbal aggression is rarely the best response to an anger-provoking situation. Aggressive acts are usually impulsive acts that you regret later. Aggression leads to negative consequences for everyone involved and doesn't solve anything in the long run.



## Sometimes anger can lead to serious problems in our life

Please consider getting help if anger is damaging your life in any of the following ways:

- Anger interferes with family life, job performance or school performance
- Anger leads you to lose control of your actions or what you say
- Anger prevents you and your loved ones from enjoying life
- Anger leads you to act in a threatening or violent manner towards yourself, other people, animals or property

Ask your physician or trained health professional about anger management courses and other helpful resources in your community.



## Select sources and additional resources

- Visit [www.angriesout.com](http://www.angriesout.com) for Get the Angries Out, a range of tools for kids, parents and families on anger management.
- Visit [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca) for Kelty Mental Health's information and resources on anger for children, youth and families.
- Visit [www.albertahealthservices.ca/2629.asp](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2629.asp) for Alberta Health Service's anger management worksheets.
- Visit [www.apa.org/topics/anger/index.aspx](http://www.apa.org/topics/anger/index.aspx) for the American Psychological Association's anger resources.
- Patterson, R.J. (2000). *The Assertiveness Workbook: How to Express Your Ideas and Stand up for Yourself at Work and in Relationships*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- Deffenbacher, J.L., Oetting, E.R. & DiGiuseppe, R.A. (2002). *Principles of empirically supported interventions applied to anger management*. The Counseling Psychologist, 30, 262-280.
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