



Is There a Loose Cannon in Your House? Effective Strategies to Manage Anger For Adults & Adolescents

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- What is anger?
 - Anger is "an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage," according to Charles Spielberger, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in the study of anger.
 - Like other emotions, it is accompanied by physiological and biological changes; when you get angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up, as do the levels of your energy hormones, adrenaline, and noradrenaline.

- Sources of anger
 - Usually we think of anger as being caused by external events—the traffic jam, disappointment, other people's behavior. Really, though, it's not the events themselves that are directly responsible for triggering anger—it's the meaning they convey and the individual's expectations, goals and coping skills. While external events can certainly act as triggers for an angry state of mind, the true underlying causes of either a specific instance of anger or a pattern of chronic anger management difficulties tend to be due to the items listed below. When trying to learn more adaptive ways of managing anger it's very important to have a theory of why you struggle with anger, to guide your efforts towards improvement.
 - What are some of the more common underlying root causes of angry states of mind?
 - Immaturity and/or skill deficits
 - * Younger children and adolescents sometimes have yet to develop the frustration tolerance, impulse control and cognitive skills to effectively manage angry states of mind.
 - The importance of modeling
 - * Modeling is a powerful method of teaching. Often, those with chronic anger management difficulties have been exposed to a model of explosiveness. If you are a parent hoping to improve frustration tolerance, respect and anger management among your children it is essential that you first examine the model you are offering them (yourself).
 - Anger works
 - * Angry outbursts sometimes are effective in getting the person what they want.
 - Self-esteem struggles
 - * Sometimes those who struggle with a diminished sense of pride and self-esteem compensate with a grandiose view of themselves, inflated and unrealistic expectations of how the world should treat them. Invariably, though, the world does not comply, resulting in angry outbursts.
 - Attitude factors
 - * Underlying negative attitudes—the perpetrator of domestic violence with beliefs that wives should be submissive or the adolescent who believes he no longer needs rules or limits—can often be seen to be the driver of recurrent angry states of mind.
 - Use of anger to avoid feeling more painful emotions
 - * Feeling angry, for some, is an intoxicating and powerful state of mind, particularly when it is characterized with a sense of self-righteous indignation. This state of mind is often preferable to feeling small, weak or at the mercy of those around you.
 - Anger as displacement
 - * Sometimes we arbitrarily vent our anger at some person or circumstance as a means of "letting out" aggression resulting from some other trigger.
 - Angry states as a symptom of other conditions
 - * A number of psychiatric conditions can contribute to the experience of an angry mood state: the irritability which often accompanies depression, the emotional intensity of hypomania, the compromised frustration tolerance of ADHD.

- Cognitive factors
 - * Often our anger is the result of what we're telling ourselves: "This is unfair!", "This is terrible!"

□ What is "anger management"?

- Understanding the differences between aggressiveness, assertiveness and passivity, acquiring and using assertiveness in an appropriate manner
- Acceptance of the fact that we cannot lash out at every person or object that irritates or disappoints us. Also, acceptance of the fact that angry states of mind pose a threat to relationships and the attainment of other life goals.
- Learning to recognize the warning signs of an impending angry state of mind, accepting that "flooding" is counterproductive and acquiring skills to avoid hurtful, disruptive and self-defeating outbursts of anger.
- Three key points:
 - As with any form of behavior change, the key to success is motivation to change.
 - Success will depend upon the development of self-awareness—learn your own personal warning signs of impending rage.
 - Resist the notion that you "can't help it" when you become angry.

□ Anger management: three main approaches

- Expressing the anger
 - Assertiveness training
 - * Staying focused on the problem at hand
 - * Not attacking—use "I statements"
 - Use of humor
 - Problem-solving
 - Physically working-off the energy
 - Learn empathic communication skills
 - Sometimes written expression is safer than verbal confrontation
- Suppressing the anger
 - Be aware of the risks of flooding
 - Leaving the situation, if necessary
 - Editing what comes out of your mouth
 - Being honest with yourself as to your goals—what purpose will be served by having a melt-down?
- Calming strategies
 - Physical exercise
 - Insight into underlying causes
 - Leaving the situation when flooded
 - Environmental change
 - Treatment of underlying contributing conditions

References:

American Psychological Association (2007). Accessed via the web at: www.apa.org/topics/controlanger

Dr. John Jochem is a clinical psychologist with many years experience working with adults, adolescents, couples and families. Should you have any questions about this presentation, or wish to learn more about the range of services available through Dr. Jochem's practice, Hawthorn Counseling Group, feel free to call Dr. Jochem at (847) 680-0755 or contact him via email at jjochem@aol.com .