

Anger Management

This month we're looking at anger management issues. This is an area in which I specialize and many of my clients are learning to cope with this issue. The good news is that it is an emotional problem that is highly treatable. There are many options to help you learn to control the way you react to life's frustrations.



Let's talk about some of them.

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Healthy frustration or unhealthy rage?

Is rage ruining your life?

Uncontrolled anger issues can cause serious damage to your life. They can ruin your career, even cause lawsuits if inappropriate anger is directed at a co-worker. Anger can destroy your marriage, your relationship with your children and your friendships. Your relationships with neighbours, shopkeepers, business contacts, virtually everyone you come into contact with in the course of your life are all at risk. Life is very unsatisfying and lonely without other people who like and admire us.



Dealing with the trigger can fix the rage

Anger is often an outward symptom of an inward hurt. Painful memories of traumatic events, abuse, neglect or fear can manifest themselves as anger. It hurts less to lash out than to feel the pain. By addressing the root cause of anger, you can avoid the painful triggers that caused you to lash out in the first place.

Here's what happens:

Anger is an emotional and a physical reaction to an event. When you become angry, your blood pressure goes up, your face flushes, your temperature rises, your heart rate increases and your body secretes adrenaline and noradrenaline which cause a state of near panic that pushes you into "fight or flight" modality. In the presence of these physical triggers it is easy to lash out inappropriately. People in rages speaking of "seeing red" or having tunnel vision. This is a result of being in a hyped-up physical state. It is similar to what a soldier in

life-threatening combat may experience. Once you in this state it is very difficult to make rational choices. Once you're here, your rage has you by the throat.

Are you an anger addict?

This state of emotional intensity is actually emotionally addictive. You may have heard of "adrenaline junkies". They like the drama, power and thrill of these heightened emotions, however this often has serious consequences in terms of hurting others and destroying relationships. Some couples share the unhealthy attraction to the adrenaline rush of violent arguments. They live in constant chaos and hurtfulness, become stuck in a morass of bitterness and destructive behaviour, which is especially tragic if children are present.



People don't piss you off. You get pissed off at people.

You can't stop life from frustrating you. You can't make everyone else change so they don't upset you. The world, inconveniently, does not revolve around you. You also can't just swallow your angry feelings or ignore them and hope they go away. They will come out, in inappropriate ways or directed at inappropriate people, or worse, hurt you physically and emotionally, which only compounds the problem. What you can do is change the way you process your frustration and express your anger. You can learn techniques to express your frustration in a positive way and to calm down the bodily reactions which contribute to turning healthy anger into uncontrolled rage. (See Auntie Stress below)

Ignore it and it will go away

Some people feel that anger has two speeds "On" and "Off". They don't want to be seen as an out-of-control rageaholic so they swallow their anger. However, this is still a person with an anger management problem. Suppressing frustrations and anger causes it to be redirected it doesn't go away if ignored. Anger can cause hypertension, high blood pressure, depression or anxiety issues. It often comes out as passive/aggressive behaviour where they get back at people with whom they are angry, in indirect and nasty ways rather than being forthright about their feelings.

You control your anger, or your anger controls you

Sometimes people who smother their angry emotions become overly critical of others, cynical, sarcastic and bitter. Unexpressed anger can manifest as sexual dysfunction if the person has anger issues directed toward a particular sex. Some go along for a while, smiling at everything and trying to ignore their frustrations, then suddenly they erupt in a frightening rage at the last little frustration that pushed them over their limit. Ignoring or overly "controlling your temper" is not the answer.

Anger management works!

Anger management teaches you to reduce the emotional feelings that trigger rage and to control the physical arousal which anger causes before you reach the point of "seeing red". You can learn to express your frustrations in an assertive (not aggressive or frightening) manner thereby releasing them in a healthy way. Anger management can also help you to create a new way of looking at life, learn new attitudes and utilize practical actions to avoid angry outbursts. Speaking with a counsellor about anger issues can give you many tools to help you have control over your anger.