

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Does Your Temper Sometimes Take Control?

from the American Counseling Association

It's clear we are living in an age of heightened anxiety and stress. News reports are full of events that range from extremely upsetting to utterly terrifying. It's little wonder that many of us feel on edge and easily upset so much of the time.

An unfortunate side effect of feeling stressed out is that it can be easier to become angry over even small things. While your anger might not seem a major problem, if occasionally you become angry enough to strike out, speak violently, or simply seem to lose control, this is unhealthy and dangerous behavior that needs attention.

Anger usually stems from believing that something is "unfair" and believing that you simply "can't stand it" when things are unfair. Sometimes such beliefs are so deep-seated that you react immediately to an event, action or even a statement, not stopping to think about the consequences of your actions.

If your reaction is a physical one, the outcome can be truly harmful, but even out-of-control verbal anger can produce devastating results.

In order to control anger, time is a critical factor. Every second that passes between when something seems "unfair" to you and when you react greatly increases the chance that you will make a wiser, healthier decision.

And while it isn't easy to accomplish taking time to think rather than simply reacting, there are techniques that can help slow you down. The easiest is just to take one or more deep breaths. Because your thoughts of unfairness are what is causing your anger, any thought that replaces such thinking will help. Simply reminding yourself to take a deep breath, or to count to ten when you begin to feel anger, will provide such a distraction.

Some health experts recommend a method called "square breathing." Inhale slowly for a count of five, hold that breath for another count of five, and then exhale slowly. Do this repeatedly until you feel more in control of your thoughts and less angry.

Doing anything that makes you stop and think, rather than just reacting and striking out, is essential to anger control. If you find that you become angry often, and that techniques like deep breathing, or getting friends to warn you when you appear angry, aren't working for you, seek professional help. A professional counselor can offer a variety of approaches that can help you get your anger safely under control.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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