

Tips for dealing with your anger

Key Idea: People do things that annoy me, not to annoy me (Dr Abraham Low, Recovery Inc)

Watch out for Mind Reading: If there is one thinking habit which is common to people whose anger keeps getting them into trouble, this is the one. Mind reading means imagining that the other person is thinking something bad about you or has bad intentions towards you. *“I bet she’s really laughing at me.” “He’s late for our meeting because he just doesn’t care about me.” “That child is crying just to annoy me.”* are all examples of mind reading. The next time you catch yourself mind reading, stop and remind yourself that nobody knows what is in another person’s mind. There is at least a 50/50 chance that the other person is thinking about something else altogether.

Describe your feelings instead of acting them out: Acting out your feelings means letting rip, letting go, letting it all out, with no regard for other people. In the case of anger it can mean shouting, screaming, saying the most hurtful things you can think of, pushing, hitting, breaking, throwing, even hurting yourself in front of someone else. Describing your feelings means telling people how you feel, trying to explain it to them, trying to make people understand. *“I’m angry with you for coming home late, I felt so worried about you”*, is describing your feelings. It’s a lot less damaging than screaming at your teenage daughter when she walks in the door, pushing her or flinging her dinner against the wall. Describing your feelings allows you to communicate how you feel without doing anything damaging and is almost always better than acting them out.

Trying to control less, not more: Trying to control too much of what goes on around you leads to frustration and anger. Other people’s behaviour, thoughts and feelings are outside your control and trying to control them can make you get mad very fast! You can, of course, try to influence other people and ask them to do certain things but whether they comply is in their control, not yours. So, as much as possible, focus on your own behaviour instead of frustrating yourself over how other people behave.

The good news - everything is NOT about you: Imagine that your kids fail to ring you or text you when they go out for the evening. If you assume that they are doing this to get at you or because they don’t care about you, then this assumption alone will make you madder at them than you need to be – the reality is they probably got caught up in what they were doing and didn’t think of you at all. Similarly if you say hello to someone and they don’t reply, it doesn’t necessarily mean they’ve got something against you – they may be so wrapped up in their own thoughts they don’t even notice your presence. Remember: ***People do things that annoy me, not to annoy me.***

Feel the anger and let it go: When you feel angry, instead of getting caught up in thinking about whatever you’re angry about, notice how the anger feels physically. How is it affecting your chest, your stomach, your head for instance? Stay out of your thoughts. Stay with the awareness of the physical effects of your anger. If you do this, the anger will die down as you get on with your day. It’s the thinking that keeps it alive.

Stop before you get to the top of the stairs: Imagine a stairs leading from the ground floor to the top floor of a house. Imagine that when you are on the ground floor you feel calm as you go about your daily business. Imagine also that when you are at the top of the stairs you are in a absolute rage – shouting, stamping about, throwing things, hitting things, hurting people.

Whenever you climb the stairs you get angrier and angrier. Sometimes you rush right to the top! Your aim is to learn to stay on the lower steps, and to stop and turn back when you find yourself heading for that top floor with all the trouble it can bring to you and to others. Keep this image in mind when you are getting annoyed and it can help you.

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