

Anger itself isn't a problem - it's how you handle it. Consider the nature of anger, how to manage anger, and what to do when confronted by someone whose anger is out of control.

What is anger?

Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage. Like other emotions, physiological and biological changes accompany anger. For instance, your heart rate and blood pressure go up when you get angry, as do your energy hormones, adrenaline, and noradrenaline levels.

Both external and internal events can cause anger. You could be angry at a specific person (such as a coworker or supervisor) or event (a traffic jam, a canceled flight) or anger could be caused by worrying about personal problems. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings.

So, it's not "bad" to feel angry?

Being angry isn't always a bad or negative emotion and being angry can motivate you into positive action. For example, expressed anger can inspire you to practice healthy activities, such as exercise, starting an anger management journal, or taking on a personal cause.

What causes people to get angry?

You might have many things to feel threatened about, from financial problems and peer pressure to drug addiction and war. Some people respond negatively. Still, most people don't walk around feeling mad all the time.

When someone explodes with anger, there's usually a triggering event, such as a disagreement at work or being stuck in traffic, that brings a mix of simmering emotions to a boiling point.

Your personal history feeds your reactions to anger as well. That's why some people react so angrily to specific situations, such as losing a parking space, while others take it in stride.

For example, one learned that being angry is negative. In that case, you may not know how to express your anger appropriately. So, your frustrations simmer and make you miserable or build up until you explode in an angry outburst.

Brain chemistry or underlying medical conditions can trigger angry outbursts in other cases.

What is the best way to handle anger?

The instinctive way to express anger is to respond aggressively. Since it's a natural, adaptive response to threats, it inspires assertive, often aggressive, feelings and behaviors, allowing us to fight and defend ourselves when provoked. A certain amount of anger, therefore, is necessary to our survival.

We can't physically lash out at every person or object that annoys us; laws, social norms, and common-sense place limits on how far our anger can take us.

People use various conscious and unconscious processes to deal with their angry feelings. The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing and calming.

- **Expressing** your angry feelings in an assertive but not aggressive manner is the healthiest way to express anger. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.
- **Suppressing** your anger happens when you aim to inhibit it and convert it into more constructive behavior. The danger in this type of response is that your anger can turn inward - on yourself if it isn't allowed outward expression. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure or depression. It can also lead to passive-aggressive behavior and cynical and hostile personalities that constantly put others down. Not surprisingly, these people aren't likely to have many successful relationships.
- **Calming** down means controlling your outward behavior and internal responses. You take calming steps by lowering your heart rate and subsiding the feelings.

Anger Management

Anger management helps you recognize frustrations early and resolve them in a way that allows you to express your needs - and keeps you calm and in control.

Some signs that you need help controlling your anger include:

- The regular feeling that you must hold in your anger.
- Constant cynical, irritated, impatient, critical, or hostile feelings.
- Frequent arguments with your partner, children, or coworkers that escalate frustrations.
- Physical violence, such as hitting your partner or children or starting fights.
- Threats of violence against people or property.
- Out-of-control or frightening behavior, such as breaking things or driving recklessly.
- Anxiety or depression about anger so that you withdraw.

When is professional help needed?

Learning to control anger is a challenge for everyone at times. Consider seeking help if your anger seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret, hurts those around you or takes a toll on your relationships.

What can you do if someone whose anger is out of control confronts you?

Usually, the most rational thing to do is walk away. If you stay, the situation may escalate into violence. If leaving the situation is difficult or impossible, take reasonable precautions to protect yourself. Don't engage the other person in a manner that is likely to increase the angry behavior.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsVq5R_F6RA

What is conflict resolution?

Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship. After all, two people can't always agree on everything, all the time.

Learning how to deal with conflict - rather than avoiding it - is crucial. Mismanaged conflict can cause significant harm to a relationship. Still, when handled in a respectful, positive way, conflict provides an opportunity to strengthen the bond between two people.

By learning these skills for conflict resolution, you can keep your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

Understanding conflict in relationships

Conflict arises from differences, both large and small. Whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires, conflict can occur.

Sometimes these differences appear trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal need is often at the core of the problem.

These needs can be a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued or a need for greater closeness and intimacy.

Conflicts arise from differing needs.

Everyone needs to feel understood, nurtured and supported, but how these needs are met vary widely. Differing needs for feeling comfortable and safe create some of the most severe challenges in our personal and professional relationships.

Think about the conflicting need for safety and continuity versus the need to explore and take risks. You frequently see this conflict between toddlers and their parents.

The child needs to explore, so the street or the cliff meets a need. But the parents' need is to protect the child's safety, so limiting exploration becomes a bone of contention between them.

The needs of both parties play essential roles in the long-term success of most relationships, and each deserves respect and consideration. A lack of understanding about differing needs can result in distance, arguments and break-ups in personal relationships.

In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes, resulting in broken deals, fewer profits, and lost jobs.

When you recognize and become willing to examine conflicting needs, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building and improved relationships.

Conflict 101

- A conflict is more than just a disagreement. It is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat (whether the threat is real or not).
- Conflicts continue to fester when ignored. Because disputes involve perceived threats to our well-being and survival, they stay with us until we face and resolve them.
- We respond to conflicts based on our situation perceptions, not necessarily objectively reviewing the facts.

- Conflicts trigger strong emotions. Suppose you aren't comfortable with your feelings or manage them in times of stress. In that case, you won't be able to resolve conflict successfully.
- Conflicts are an opportunity for growth. When you're able to resolve conflict in a relationship, it builds trust. You can feel secure knowing your relationship can survive challenges and disagreements.

How do you perceive conflict?

Do you fear conflict or avoid it at all costs?

Suppose your perception of conflict comes from frightening or painful memories from previous unhealthy relationships or early childhood. In that case, you may expect all present-day disagreements to end badly.

You may view conflict in relationships as demoralizing, humiliating, dangerous and something to fear.

Suppose your early life experiences also left you feeling out of control and powerless. In that case, conflict may even be traumatizing for you.

If you view conflict as dangerous, it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When you go into a conflict situation already feeling extremely threatened, it's tough to deal with the problem at hand in a healthy way. Instead, you are more likely to shut down or blow up in anger.

Healthy and unhealthy ways of managing and resolving conflict.

Unhealthy responses to conflict:	Healthy responses to conflict:
An inability to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person	The capacity to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person
Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions	Calm, non-defensive, and respectful reactions
The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment	A readiness to forgive and forget, and to move past the conflict without holding resentments or anger
An inability to compromise or see the other person's side	The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
The fear and avoidance of conflict; the expectations of bad outcomes	A belief that facing conflict head on is the best thing for both sides



Tips for managing and resolving conflict.

Managing and resolving conflict requires reducing stress and quickly bringing your emotions into balance. You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by sticking to the following guidelines:

- Listen for what is felt as well as said. When we listen, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions and those of other people. Listening also strengthens us, informs us and makes it easier for others to hear us when it's our turn to speak.
- Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right." Rather than "winning" the argument, maintaining, and strengthening the relationship should always be your priority. Be respectful of the other person and their viewpoint.
- Focus on the present. If you're holding on to grudges based on past resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Instead of assigning blame from your past, focus on here-and-now to solve the problem.
- Pick your battles. Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is worthy of your time and energy. Maybe you don't want to surrender a parking space if you've been circling for 15 minutes, but if there are dozens of empty spots, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.
- Be willing to forgive. Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.
- Know when to let something go. If you can't agree, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

If your conflict with someone feels too overwhelming, try completing the [conflict resolution worksheet](#) or come in to talk with one of our campus counselors.

Adapted from: [The Mayo Clinic – Anger Management: Your questions answered](#) and [American Psychological Association – Controlling anger before it controls you](#)