

How to control anger?

O let me count the ways ...

Kipling noted you are mature "if you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you." Given the chaos around us, and that we create, keeping one's temper is not easy. Here are a few anger management tips.

Count down, take-off

Thomas Jefferson said, "When angry, count to 10 before you speak. If very angry, a hundred." Counting -- delaying, really -- works because it allows time and distraction to dissipate the "energy" of anger. Given enough time to cool off, most people can control their initial impulses that commonly make things worse. Take a slow deep breath between each number as tool to cool anger even more.

Walk away from a situation if necessary, but don't slam the door and stomp off. To get time to regain self-control, politely say, 'I need to cool off before I can talk about this. Can we talk later?'

Respond

Don't react, respond. To make sure you actually understand what you're angry about, para- phrase or clarify what the other person has said to you. Choose the best course of action by using empathy, compassion, and assertion. Empathy is the ability to see a situation from another person's point of view. Compassion allows you to respond tolerantly but calmly. Assertion is not impulsively acting-out anger. Rather, it is standing up for yourself with direct, honest, and appropriate expression of feelings and beliefs.

Five constructive steps

Use an "I" statement, question, or observation, as in "I'm concerned," "I'm confused," or "I'm frustrated" are good ways to begin your exchange.

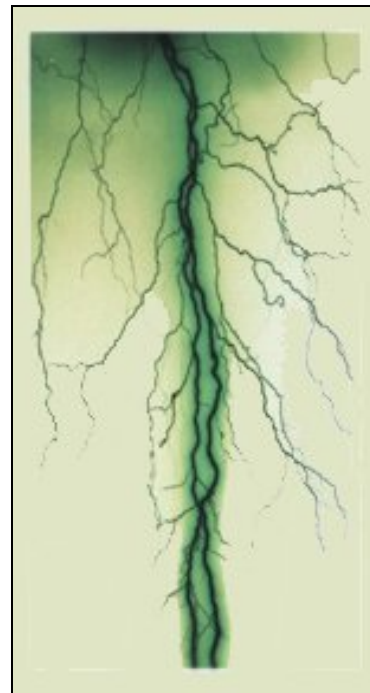
Describe the problem specifically. Avoid judgmental accusations, but be specific. Explain why you're upset. Talk about effects and expectations. Acknowledge the other person and ask for input. Be open to question your assumptions. Listen.

At this point you need to be more objective, let go of any existing anger and hurt feelings and don't hold a grudge for having been angered.

Practice, practice, practice

These are good ideas, but how do you use them when you're so angry you can't think? Training and practice help prepare for optimal responses in sports and among the police and the military. Practice dealing with anger before you're actually angry. Role-play confrontational situations. Likewise, this is how to teach children how to deal with their anger. (Note: success in teaching others requires you to be a good, practicing role model.)

In addition, to better avoid going over the edge, you need to keep farther from it. If you have shorter fuse these days, find ways to minimize the stresses and irritations that build up. Knowing your weak points can help you avoid situations that make you angry. Since you can't always avoid anger, prepare for it in order to control it.



A digest of "Anger Management: Counting to 10 and Beyond", Carol Sorgen, reviewed By Brunilda Nazario, MD, WebMD, Monday, September 22, 2003. (c)2003 WebMD.com