

## Getting a Handle on Controlling Anger

Imagine you are given a handful of seeds of unknown types and asked to plant a garden. You plant those tiny seeds, and plants result. Some of those tiny seeds may produce beautiful flowers or nutritious vegetables. Others may produce troublesome weeds that try to take over and choke the life from the more beneficial and enjoyable plants.

Anger can grow from the tiniest seeds of frustration or annoyance. How those seeds develop and what they become is within your ability to control. We cannot always control how we feel—being given the seeds— though we can certainly learn to manage our feelings. We can, however, always control how we express those feelings—whether we plant seeds we know are harmful, and whether we allow the weeds to choke out the flowers or pluck them from the ground when we see them start to grow.

Some of us struggle with our anger more than others. Maybe you are naturally short-tempered, or maybe you have a past that was plagued by anger or aggression. Whatever your natural inclination or past experience, you can learn to control your anger instead of letting it control you.

If your anger causes you to physically act out, striking another person or destroying property, or you have thoughts of hurting yourself or others, you likely have an anger management issue more serious than can be addressed in the space of an article. If any of these are true for you, seek professional help as soon as possible. In fact, if you ever find yourself wondering if you have an anger management problem, a professional consultation is a good idea.

Even if your anger doesn't rise to the level of needing professional intervention, chances are it can still be improved. These tips will help you learn to handle your anger better.

1. **Avoid things that trigger anger** - For example, if your morning commute leaves you feeling angry and frustrated; look for options like leaving earlier, taking a less crowded route, asking for a different starting time, or exploring telecommuting options. Know you're always irritable in the morning before you've had time to fully awaken? Plan to get up before everyone else and spend time alone before you start your day.
2. **Avoid carrying tension in your body** - A tense attitude develops more quickly in a tense body. So take care of yourself. Get enough rest, eat well, and choose activities that make you feel physically better. These could be energy releasing, such as playing tennis or using a punching bag, or relaxing, such as practicing yoga or getting a massage.
3. **Learn how to calm yourself** - Use meditation, breathing techniques, visual imagery, aromatherapy, whatever it takes to calm and center yourself.
4. **Stop and think** - If you take the time to calm yourself, make sure you understand the issue at hand, and can present your thoughts in a respectful way, you can keep a situation from escalating. At a minimum, count to ten. Better yet, take a 5 or 10 minute break or walk.
5. **Saying hurtful things is like ringing a bell** - you can't take it back. Imagine everything you say is being heard by someone you care about, like your child or parent, or someone you really respect, like your boss or pastor. Never say things in anger that you wouldn't be comfortable having them overhear.
6. **Learn how to communicate** - It's easy to become angry if you don't feel your needs are being met or your concerns aren't being addressed. The problem can sometimes be solved as simply as learning to express what you need in a more effective way. In fact, good communication can resolve a lot of situations before they become overheated.

Perhaps one of the most crucial things we can do when we become angry is to ask for forgiveness, not only from others, but from ourselves as well. While you're learning to control your anger, you will likely have setbacks. Instead of seeing these setbacks as failures, understand that they are a normal part of the learning process. Learn what the experiences can teach you, and then move

forward. The more you practice controlling your anger and expressing your feelings in a constructive way, the happier your life will become.