

**"Ahh ...I'm Burning Up!"
Coping with Anger in Relationships**

by

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It's human to feel anger. It's a natural response to external and internal events that trouble, irritate, frustrate, abuse, or violate our physical, mental, and emotional selves. Anger allows us to fight back when attacked. It performs a valuable self-protective function in our lives. Problems occur when anger takes over and we lose our ability to manage our thoughts, feelings, and actions. That's when people get hurt.

The best way to deal with anger is to express your feelings in a clear assertive (not aggressive) manner. Use "I" language. Don't start with an accusation or an insult like, "YOU made a mistake or YOU'RE a jerk." Start by saying, "I feel angry/frustrated/hurt when you _____ (fill in the blank) and I would like to ask you to _____ (fill in the blank)." This technique is very helpful, but most people need more than one strategy.

A second way to manage your anger is to inhibit it and then redirect it into constructive behavior or action. Give yourself a "time-out" and then remind yourself of what you like or love about the person who triggered your response. The aim is to move away from self-righteous thinking and replace those thoughts with positive stories and images. The risk in this approach is "stuffing" your anger, which can lead to outbursts and passive-aggressive behavior. You still need to express your feelings AFTER you have calmed down.

A third way to cope with anger is to reduce the physical tension that often accompanies it. Relaxation techniques include deep breathing, meditation, and soothing "self-talk," like saying "Relax. Let it go," to yourself.

It's important to realize that people vary in their ability to control anger. Some people are genetically or biologically predisposed to anger

easily. Others grew up in combative families and did not learn how to control their negative emotions. Others were raised in families where expressions of anger were prohibited, so anger looks like an explosion when it finally comes out.

If you see anger as a problem for you or someone you love, you might want to read more about coping with anger. Check out the following website: www.apa.org/topics/controlanger.html or read *When Anger Hurts: Quieting the Storm Within* (2nd ed.) (2003) by McKay, Rogers, & McKay or *The Anger Control Workbook* (2000) by McKay & Rogers. Consider counseling at UCSB Counseling Services if you're a student or UCSB Hosford Clinic if you are a community member. Mental health professionals can help you learn to live with anger constructively. For information about the Hosford Counseling & Psychological Services Clinic at UCSB, call 893-8064.