

Choose not to be angry



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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Yes, being angry is your choice. If you choose to be angry, recognize that it can be an all-consuming and destructive emotion. Alternatively, you can learn to manage your anger well, let go of it and create an experience where you feel in control and feel good about yourself.

While everyone experiences anger, how you choose to deal with it will impact your physical and mental health. If you're repeatedly angry over the same issue, then you've likely not dealt with it at all, and your anger will probably resurface until you do. Recognizing your triggers and anticipating your anger – be it with a stranger, the government, a colleague, your partner or your family – are crucial for moving on.

On a day-to-day basis, why and with whom are you angry? For example, while you may be angry with your children because they stayed on their screens for too long, are you really annoyed with yourself because you, too, were on your screen, simply wanting to veg out? Perhaps you are annoyed with your partner, who “should” be controlling “his” children when you cannot. It's important to identify the source. It may be all three.

Knowing where in your body you feel your anger and your typical response will help you better control it.

Does your anger suddenly seem to appear from nowhere so that you're “in the situation” before you even know what got you there? It's like having the traffic light go directly from green to red without giving you any warning passing through amber.

It is difficult to prevent this kind of anger or predict what will trigger it, without learning to notice your body's early warning signs.

You can do this only when you are calm. At the height of your anger, the logical part of your brain, your prefrontal cortex, goes offline, and you can't respond to reason.

Once you're calm and can reexamine your behavior in detail, you may discover that it's often not the event itself that causes you to feel angry (your child being on his screen), but perhaps the trigger was your child wasting time, not listening or going to bed. This allows you to respond differently.

This entire process of going from level No. 1, where you are calm, to level No. 9 or 10, where you are screaming, may take place within minutes. Your goal must be to slow down the process enough to calmly assess what is happening and why, and then begin to make changes. By taking a step back and allowing yourself to breathe properly, you insert time. This puts your logical brain back online.

Learning from your anger allows you to control it better, and everyone benefits. Being in touch with how you're feeling, recognizing your triggers and reframing a situation so that you don't feel “done to” can restore your sense of control.

THINK OF a time recently when you were angry. Review the scenario, with some added distance and the perspective of time. What and who made you angry and why?

Visualize the people, the place, and put yourself there in the moment. What deeper triggers does this situation evoke? What do you notice in your body? How do you react physically? Do you have pain, clench

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your teeth, want to sleep or have palpitations? What are your feelings or emotions telling you? Do you feel angry, guilty or depressed?

Do you scream, cry, yell, attack, withdraw or become passive? How often do you get angry, for how long, how bad is it, and what makes it better?

Do you resolve things in minutes, hours or days? Time allows your body the break it needs to calm itself. You can give yourself that time by noticing what “number you are” in your body early on, and then take the proper steps to deal with it, in this moment, and before it's too late.

What did you handle well, what needs improvement and what can you change?

Did you use “I” statements to let people know how you felt? Were you open and direct? Did you avoid making accusations or blaming others? How was your tone? Did you communicate well? Did your internal feelings match the external expression of your anger? Did you fight fairly or hit below the belt or attack? Was there name-calling or threatening? Did you bring up unresolved issues not relevant to the current disagreement?

In the future, how can you better manage your anger?

Can physical outlets such as running, shooting baskets or doing some housecleaning help?

Can you actively problem-solve or wait to discuss your anger when you both are calmer and more receptive to listening?

Can you be empathetic and attempt to understand the other person's perspective?

Could you write a letter to the person with whom you're angry, put it away for a while and then reread it, only then deciding what to do?

Are you using relaxation techniques to help you manage your anger? Practice when waiting in line or at red lights. Do music, positive self-talk, visualization and other methods of stress reduction figure in your repertoire? By foreseeing difficulties and role-playing, can you resolve scenarios in your mind?

Letting go of the “poor me” attitude and acknowledging that you're equally responsible for what happens in the discussion can enable you to work on creative solutions.

Can you apply the advice you'd give to your best friend to your scenario?

At a time when you're not annoyed with someone, can you sit together, get some constructive help with conflict resolution, and see how you could better disagree? Under what circumstances are you both better able to hear and respond to advice, be better listen-

ers, and speak only for yourselves? How you talk to your “opponent” will determine how and whether you're heard.

You can turn your anger around by catching the other person doing nice things for you, talking in a way that reflects how you would like to be treated, and actually becoming friends.

Know what your needs are and how they can best be met. What would make things better in the future?

Everyone needs to be appreciated and respected. It is nice to have these positives pointed out in the form of a thank you, compliment, praise or simple recognition of a quality that's appreciated or admired. If it is your partner, family, boss or colleague, this goodwill is essential for carrying you through more difficult moments.

Behaving in a more kind, considerate and caring manner helps you practice forgiveness for yourself and others. No one is perfect, and the acceptance of this comes only when you are able to let go of blame, not accuse others, and take responsibility for your own actions and behavior.

There are times when you may be more serious than you may want to be, more controlling than you need to be, and more self-critical when you would benefit most from nurturance.

If you don't take time for others and communicate this caring, then what are you really left with?

HOW YOU see your anger will determine how you resolve it. You have the power to choose to respond assertively and confront a situation, act aggressively, or passively sit on it. You can also decide whether to make an issue out of something. You determine your level of anger or resentment and whether you will react calmly or with rage.

While it may be very easy to adopt an “I'm right, you're wrong” attitude, this is not a win-lose competition but a time for working together as teammates. The truth may indeed lie somewhere in between your beliefs and those of the other person, and your ultimate goal is to create a win-win situation.

There is a fine balance between seeking approval and passing judgment, and at times you may be too hasty in your response. Walking away for a minute and counting to five slowly before you respond, and to 10 in a really big situation, may enable you to keep your cool and put things into perspective.

You are ultimately the one who can choose to accept what you cannot change, in the past, present, or future, by changing yourself and your perceptions and by adopting more realistic expectations.

You may need to visualize yourself as being more patient and understanding, less of a perfectionist, more tolerant, less self-centered and even less sensitive.

While, for example, it may be unreasonable for you to assume your children won't be on their screens, you can have a clear say in how they use them. This is so important as you prepare for the new school year.

Empowering yourself will help you move forward. You can decide whether it is really worth it to get angry, choose to practice forgiveness, give yourself permission to determine what you want in a relationship, and ultimately allow yourself to go after it. This can give you the freedom to let go of your anger and truly move on.

It is all in your hands. ■

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