

Do You Need Anger Management?

If episodes of rage threaten your relationship and job, the answer might be 'Yes.'



Rather than yelling and screaming when angry, you may want to use a cognitive behavioral technique like stepping away until you calm down.

By [Lisa Esposito](#) July 10, 2015 | 11:45 a.m. EDT+ [More](#)

You're a great performer at work, but you lash out at subordinates. Or you're Mr. Nice Guy at the office, but your wife and kids walk on eggshells, waiting for the next outburst. Maybe friends refuse to get in the car with you after that last show of [road rage](#).

Anger management is the process of learning to recognize when you're becoming angry and finding skills to express the emotion in a positive, constructive way. Therapists help people explore the roots of their anger, train them in anger-control techniques and teach them better ways to communicate and ultimately, to manage, reduce and prevent harmful anger.

When do you need anger management? A) It's a condition of probation. B) Your anger is getting worse. C) You can't control your anger. D) Anger is causing consequences in your relationships and at work.

Sometimes it's court-ordered but most of the time, anger management is [a choice people make](#) – when their careers are on the line, when people they love back away and when they're forced to deal with destructive anger so it won't define who they are. It's estimated that 1 in 5 Americans has anger management issues.

On-the-Job Anger

Workplace anger is less acceptable than ever, says Robert M. Fraum, a clinical psychologist in New York City. Back in the 90s, corporations would refer highly valued employees – men and women with anger management problems – to him for treatment. "Nowadays, they just get fired," Fraum says. Today, people refer themselves for therapy, he says, before [the company cuts ties](#) or they miss the next raise. Of the patient referrals he receives, three-fourths are for anger management.

Screaming and abusiveness are still tolerated in certain arenas, Fraum says. "Down on Wall Street, it's not considered a problem. But in other corporate environments, you really have to behave well."

If you think being a yeller is just a harmless facet of [your dynamic personality](#), think again. "That's a rationalization, because it's really inappropriate to be yelling at work," says Anita Gadhia-Smith, a psychotherapist who practices in the District of Columbia, and Bethesda, Maryland. "Everyone deserves respect."

Part of anger management is learning cognitive behavioral techniques and other [methods to control anger](#). Simple stalling tactics can help. "If somebody is talking to you in a way that provokes you, you need to get out of that situation as soon as possible to calm down," Fraum says. "So you would say in a respectful way, 'Excuse me, I'd really like to think this over. Then I'll come back and give you an answer.'"

Relationship Hazard

Theories like "It's healthier to express your anger" and treatments like primal scream therapy were once a big deal. Well, the 70s wants its psychology back, Fraum says. "Sometimes anger has a healthy purpose in a relationship or situation – it tells you that something is wrong," he says. Anger can be the start of a conversation, the beginning of a plan, a signal that something is wrong you need to address. "But the idea of letting it all hang out, saying it like it is – you try that with a spouse, and see how far it goes."

On one level of anger management, people can [learn how to communicate better](#) as part of a couple; how to use anger in a constructive way as motivation to either change a situation or adapt, as opposed to becoming angry and aggressive toward partners, Gadhia-Smith says.

On a deeper level, people need to "unpack" the anger they've carried for years. "There are times when people have a much more intense reaction to something than is really warranted," Gadhia-Smith says. "That falls under the category of – when it's hysterical, it's historical."

Unprocessed anger, pain, stored grief and trauma from childhood or previous relationships can show up in the present. "When these old hot buttons get pushed, that's when you see a lot of overreaction," she says. "You can see a whole lot of anger coming out at an unsuspecting partner in a marriage."

If it's your partner who [needs anger management](#), how do you get him or her there? "First, there's the loving approach; the soft request," Gadhia-Smith says. "That doesn't always work." Often, she says, it takes an incident or a consequence to cause people to wake up and realize they need help.

If all else fails, you might need to issue an ultimatum – to take care of yourself. It's not so much telling your partner what he or she has to do, she says, but telling them what you're going to do – like leave – if they don't seek help.

Driving While Dissed

When drivers cut you off at 70 miles per hour, do you mutter a few choice words – or chase them down the freeway? "People with road rage, especially men, tend to feel disrespected," Fraum says. "Like, 'I've been dissed; I'll show him – I will disrespect *him*.'"

One technique is to look at external triggers – events that infuriate you and will surely happen again – and plan a different response next time. "You can practice in advance saying to yourself, 'This isn't a matter of life or death. I don't need to chase him,'" Fraum suggests. You can tell yourself it's not about disrespect, he says; after all, the other driver doesn't even know you. Learn to say, "If I let him go, my feelings will be gone; I will be fine; the ride will be over. I don't need to do this."

Letting Anger Go

Anger management therapy can last as little as 12 weeks or much longer. "Sometimes it takes up to a couple of years for someone to really go through an inter-transformative process," Gadhia-Smith says. "But it absolutely happens, and it's a beautiful thing to watch." The more people realize they're changing, the more motivated they are to move forward, she says: "I believe as a psychotherapist, that there's no limit to the amount of growth and change and healing that can occur for human beings."

Gadhia-Smith has seen many people, relationships and [family situations heal](#) from toxic anger. Sometimes she hears feedback from grateful partners. "They have someone they can really feel safe with and talk to, and they have a whole new relationship," she says. "It's not a matter of getting back something that you lost. It's a matter of creating something new."