

Ten Tips to Keep a Lid on Anger

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Anger – an emotion that hijacks us and leaves destroyed relationships and property in its wake. Constantly losing your cool stresses your personal and professional relationships and demonstrates low emotional intelligence. It also leads to psychosomatic problems like stomach aches, headaches, heart attacks and high blood pressure.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been shown to be one of the best predictors of a successful and enjoyable life. EI is comprised of four competencies:

1. Emotional self-awareness
2. Emotional self-control
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship management

The latter three competencies are all based upon the first – self-awareness. To control your emotions, you have to recognize them as they are occurring. To control your anger, you must first be aware of it. Emotional awareness increases with practice. The more attention you pay to your emotions, the greater your self-awareness.

Anger is recognizable by the physiological characteristics that accompany it. Some of the physiological characteristics of anger include quickening heart rate, tightened muscles, frowning of the brow, clenching of teeth, and an increase of adrenaline in the bloodstream to prepare for a fight.

Here are 10 tips to help you keep your cool when the pressure is on.

1. **Count Backwards From 10.** When you recognize that something or someone is beginning to make you angry, allow yourself time to calm down before you react. You rarely want to react to a situation while being emotionally hijacked by anger. Your thought processes are impaired, your problem solving abilities are reduced and your focus is myopic. Rather than reacting to an anger-inducing situation, give yourself some time to *allow the anger to pass through you*. You are under no obligation to hold onto anger. Count from ten to one backwards (it seems to work better than counting forward from 1 to 10 as it takes slightly more concentration thereby distracting your mind).
2. **Breathe.** While you are counting backwards from 10, take 3 or 4 deep breaths into your diaphragm. You should feel your stomach inflate and deflate fully as you breathe. The essential point to remember is to exhale, or breathe out, fully. Typically, what we do is retain old, used up air in our lungs. At any given time, if you are not consciously breathing deeply, you have old air filling approximately 50% of your lungs. This is air that does

not help your body. It needs to be expelled. Once it is forced out, you can breathe in new, fully oxygenated air. Diaphragmatic breathing increases oxygen to the brain and body, lessens temper flare-ups, reduces impulsivity and increases the ability to think clearly. Research has shown that slight changes in oxygen content in the brain can alter the way a person feels and behaves.

3. **Reduce Anger By Walking.** Removing yourself from the situation is always a wise move. Take a brief stroll to rethink or reframe the situation. Often a change in scenery will allow you to reinterpret the situation in a way that causes less anger. Take a second and third look at the situation and your reaction to it.
4. **Believe in the Goodness of Others.** Anger can be greatly influenced by your core beliefs. It helps to believe that people are basically good. If you assume that everyone is out to get you, that belief will create a self-fulfilling prophecy and cause you a great deal of anger and pain.
5. **Distract Yourself.** Play some relaxing music. Listen to a relaxation tape. Start a simple task to distract your mind from your anger. Think positive thoughts to counter the negative ones.
6. **Keep a Log.** On a piece of paper, or in a journal, monitor your thoughts, particularly the hostile and angry ones. Notice how quickly they run through your mind. The more negative thoughts you have, the more frequently you will lose your temper. Occasionally, ask yourself, "Is my behavior getting me what I want?" This exercise helps you to be aware your thoughts and change your thought patterns to more constructive ones.
7. **Exercise.** Intense aerobic exercise 20-45 minutes five times a week. Exercise boosts the blood flow to the brain. Exercise also increases serotonin availability in the brain which has a tendency to improve your overall mood and the flexibility with which you think and problem solve.
8. **Smile.** Smiling, even when you don't feel like it, can improve your mood. When we are happy we smile and when we smile, we feel happier. Feedback between levels of the brain is *bi-directional*. Information goes both ways.
9. **Reduce Your Stress.** Stress hormones have been shown to be toxic to memory centers in animals. Brain cells will die due to prolonged stress. Managing stress effectively is essential to optimizing your brain and reducing chronic anger and irritability.
10. **Ask for Help.** If you cannot control your outbursts, don't be opposed to asking for professional help, such as a counselor or psychiatrist. Other options include yoga, meditation, and/or lifestyle changes. No one is perfect. Don't be afraid to ask for help from others. Change may be easier than you think!