

# MIND YOUR ANGER

The purpose of this document is to help develop a thoughtful approach to managing anger. We all have times when temper gets the better of us. Unfortunately, when passion takes over we say and do things we later regret. These simple steps can prevent explosions while effectively addressing the root problem.

There is “righteous indignation,” but most human anger is plain old anger. The problem with simply “letting off steam” is that the in anger, the human brain tends to become more like an “animal brain,” meaning less rational and thoughtful. Often we say things that escalate the feelings and worsen the problem.

But to merely suppress anger doesn't work, either. Internalized stress causes health problems and can lead to habits and addictions. Responsible anger management involves expressing the anger in the most productive way.

This document works like a timeline, beginning with prevention, moving through the anger-causing event, then on to the follow-through process.

**Admit-** you're mad. We gain nothing by lying to ourselves about our feelings. Increase your self-awareness by noticing your emotions, and simply admit to yourself that you're angry. Beware of excessive rumination, but do take time to process the problem, even writing it down or talking it out with a trusted friend or counselor. Pray about the situation, frankly admitting your anger to God.

**Resolve** - the problem. We consider anger a secondary emotion, used as a means of coping with frustration, pain, or fear. Take time to resolve the underlying problem. First, deal faithfully with your own feelings, and resolve any grudges you may have (see “Forgiveness Worksheet”). If possible, talk directly to the person involved. If this fails to resolve the issue, it may be necessary to bring a mediator along. Jesus laid out the reconciliation process in Matthew 18:15-20.

**Plan-** for victory ahead of time. To fail to plan is to plan to fail. Envisioning a potentially escalated situation ahead of time works like a fire drill: when the forebrain shuts down and good judgment is hampered—both of which happen in anger—the previously decided-upon plan of action will help you do the right thing. Memorize the next three steps—wait, breathe, leave—to ensure that you do the right thing under stress.

**Wait-** before acting. Think not in terms of being passive and doing nothing—which for an angry person feels repressive—but think in terms of *delaying* your response to the situation (See, for instance, Romans 12:19). Thomas Jefferson said, “When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry, an hundred.” Anger is a God-given blessing, rightly directed. God doesn't expect you to be indifferent to wrong done to you, but He does ask you to *wait* for the wrong to be righted. Think of yourself putting the anger in a box to be opened later.

**Breathe-** deep and slow. Medical research shows that deep breathing oxygenates the brain and brings about a state of calm. In addition, because you breathe slow when calm, purposely slowing your breathing “tricks” your mind into thinking you’re calm even when you’re not. Think 8-6-8. Breathe in to the count of eight, hold for six, then breathe out to the count of eight. Do this ten times in a row.

**Leave-** the immediate situation. If at all possible, remove yourself physically from the situation while the emotions are intense. A quick, ten-minute walk can work miracles by oxygenating the brain, deepening your breathing and giving you a needed break. Anger is often an attempt to control another person. By taking a break from the situation you give yourself the important message that you can’t control *them*, but only *yourself*.

**Move-** your body. Make sure to exercise after a stressful event. Stressful situations cause catecholamine buildup in the body, and exercise metabolizes these hormones. The ideal exercise is walking outside. Walk until you feel calm. An hour at the gym or riding a bicycle works, too. It helps to pray while exercising; this would give you an ideal opportunity to process the situation with God.

**Think-** about your thoughts. Give yourself a “check up from the neck up” to discover if there are any “imageries or any high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” Then “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” 1 Corinthians 10:5. Are you thinking irrational things such as “I must get even!” or “If I wasn’t so stupid, people wouldn’t treat me that way.” Use the “Distorted Thoughts” document and the F.A.R. method of replacing misbeliefs.

**Listen-** to others when it’s time to deal with the situation. The act of listening carefully requires forebrain activity—and the forebrain is your friend in anger management! The wise counsel is “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” James 1:19. Listen to understand, not agree. Use reflective listening, repeating back to the individual, in your own words, what you heard them say. (see “Establishing Empathy with E.A.R.”) This will set a tone of self-control and will also help calm them.

**Speak-** in a low, clear tone. State your case assertively but respectfully. In close relationships, you may want to use the Fact, Feeling, Followthrough method. Don’t let fear keep you from speaking up. Jesus said, “*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,*” inferring that fear is something we allow. “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,” 2 Timothy 1:7. Act on faith that God will give you power, love, and a sound mind, even if you don’t feel powerful, loving or sane!