

# BELIEFS THAT EASE ANGER

When someone takes away your power it is natural to get mad. The justified anger of childhood comes from having to give up primitive wants and desires in favor of socially acceptable behavior. The firm, controlled voice of adult anger can replace the strident outbursts of youth when three things happen:

1. Society's rules become your own.
2. You can trust yourself to find both support and freedom.
3. You acquire enough self-esteem that it cannot be taken away by an off comment or a minor mishap.

Once these developmental tasks are accomplished, people can look through others' eyes to see the whole picture and decide when they need to take action to correct a true loss of power. If you have many mad moments, it may be because beliefs instilled during early life experiences make it difficult to empathize with others and consider your options.

<p><b>Directions:</b> Mark any of the thoughts below that you've had in your "mad moments." Then, mark the beliefs you would like to have to pick your battles and take constructive action.</p>	
<p><b>Turn Provocative Thoughts into . . .</b></p>	<p><b>Beliefs That Ease Anger</b></p>
<p><b>Underlying painful thoughts</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm unimportant if I don't get my way.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm weak or a loser if I don't defend myself.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm stupid or foolish if I'm deceived.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm defective or guilty if I'm corrected.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm a failure if I don't make things go right.</p> <p><b>Thoughts of entitlement</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People should accept me as I am.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I should get what I want.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I shouldn't have to . . .</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I should be able to release all my anger.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others cause my anger.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others are too sensitive.</p> <p><b>Generalizations and distortions</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People are evil, greedy, out to get me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> All men (women) are . . .</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I cannot trust anyone.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I know what others feel without asking.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The worst will happen.</p> <p><b>Perfectionist, rigid thoughts</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm better than others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My way is the best.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Things are either right or wrong.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People should be appreciative, courteous, hardworking, fair, good drivers, etc.</p>	<p><b>Underlying healing beliefs</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I still count even when I don't get my way.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My power comes from understanding others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Deception is caused by others' dishonesty.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have the right to cry and be illogical.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm responsible only for my part.</p> <p><b>Accepting, responsible beliefs</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> People can love me without liking all of me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can ask for what I want and negotiate.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can take care of myself, do my part, and say "No."</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can turn my anger into effective action.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm responsible for how I handle my anger.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding others gives me choices.</p> <p><b>Observant, curious beliefs</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There are reasons for the worst behavior.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can see differences in people.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can learn whom and find people to trust.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Assuming without asking is asinine.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Most of my "catastrophes" don't happen.</p> <p><b>Realistic, flexible beliefs</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm as good as others and they're as good as I.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There are many good ways of doing things.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can respond when I don't like others' actions.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others don't have to live by my rules and can experience the consequences of their mistakes.</p>

For more ideas, see *Feeling Good* by David Burns (Avon Books, 1980); and *EMDR: The Breakthrough Therapy* by Francine Shapiro (Basic Books, 1997).

## INSTILLING BELIEFS THAT EASE ANGER

When you are not upset, the beliefs that prevent (unnecessary) anger may seem completely true. It will be harder to maintain them during conflicts of interest, when you feel controlled or unsupported or when things aren't going "right." To begin to change thinking patterns, start keeping a journal of your mad moments. Use the questions below and the previous table to identify the provocative thoughts that each incident triggers. Write a calming belief that you would like to have instead and affirm it regularly.

- When others disturb me, what does that mean about me?
- How do others' actions make me feel about myself?
- When did I first have this disturbing thought about myself?

<b>Journal of Mad Moments</b>		
<b>Upsetting Incident</b>	<b>Provocative Thought</b>	<b>Preventive Belief</b>
Someone cuts you off while you're driving.	I have to do something or I'm weak.	If I can report him, I will. Otherwise, he'll eventually get caught.
Your boss blames you for a mishap you didn't cause.	I must be defective. I have to make her understand.	I can understand her reasoning and then decide what to do.
A sales clerk keeps following you, even though you've said you are just looking.	No one respects my wishes—not even salespeople.	She's just doing her job. I can be kind and firm in my wishes.

## BACK UP BELIEFS WITH ACTION

You can bolster beliefs that reduce the frequency of mad moments by acting on them. Don't wait until you feel good enough to change your behavior. Acting as though the beliefs you want are true is the fastest way to make them work for you. You will find yourself going from fury to frustration, anger to annoyance, and ballistic to bothered without even realizing it. Check the strategies you most need to adopt:

- \_\_\_ Practice seeing the whole picture. Look for good intentions in others' behavior and positive possibilities in negative situations.
- \_\_\_ Do not hide from hate. Admit what you are feeling and examine the incident that caused it. Identify the choices you now have. Take action to reclaim any power you lost. It is your responsibility to recover from past hurts.
- \_\_\_ Check out your assumptions and generalizations with at least two people who do not have problems with anger.
- \_\_\_ Burn your bridges. Let significant others know how you use anger for power, to look tough, or to distance.
- \_\_\_ Act as if healing beliefs are true—"I am good (enough), I'm loveable, I belong." Hold your head high, quit apologizing, take praise, and be more open. Don't turn your lack of self-esteem on others.

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For more strategies, see *Letting Go of Anger* by Ron and Pat Potter-Efron (New Harbinger, 1995).