

EXTRA HELP FOR ANGER

It is entirely the responsibility of explosive people to learn to tame their temper. However, it is an easier task when family and friends are willing to learn responses that do not fuel a flare-up. Mark any strategies below that you would like others to use to help you or that you are willing to use to calm your significant others:

- ___ Discuss rules for dealing with anger during calm times in public places. Agree that either party can terminate a discussion if he or she fears it is heading toward violence or verbal abuse.
- ___ Assess any risk of violence during actual disagreements and do your best to leave if there is a remote possibility of abuse.
- ___ Set limits on verbal abuse—"I will leave the room when you yell or call me names."
- ___ Give reminders to take a five-minute break for a brief release of emotional energy alone when discussions become too tense.
- ___ Deal with your own discomfort with others' anger, which often comes from childhood fears of being punished or disappointing. Tell yourself to stop thinking of a rebuttal and listen to understand the other person's point.
- ___ Nod and make listening noises. Rolling your eyes and looking away intensifies other peoples' tirades and their desperation to make you understand.
- ___ Help others convert their resentment into a request or statement of feeling—"Would you tell me what is hurting you or what you want?"
- ___ Rephrase, label feelings, and validate the other person before you make your point—"You're saying I always put others before you. You must feel neglected. It makes sense that my other obligations are hard on you."
- ___ Ask if the other person wants to hear you position before making any attempt to explain yourself—"You sound convinced that I don't spend more time at home because I don't care about you. Do you want to consider any other ideas?"
- ___ Ask the other person to rephrase what you've said after making your point—"I'm not sure if I'm making sense, would you tell me what I said?"
- ___ Overlook minor outbursts and do not take them personally. Remind yourself that people who are reactive to their environment tend to increase volume when they are excited or upset. Accepting occasional irritability may be a part of enjoying a passionate person's temperament. But, take a time-out for yourself when you cannot be calm.
- ___ Pick your battles with people who tend to be inflexible. Point out when you are going along with something that is not your preference—"That's not my way of doing things, but I don't mind making a change in this situation."
- ___ Set limits on issues that are important to you—"I'm really not comfortable with what you want. I'm sure we can reach a compromise, and until we do, I thoroughly sympathize with how disappointed you are."
- ___ Give inflexible, explosive people time to consider new ideas—"I really want . . . It is important to me because . . . Please don't give me your reaction until you've had time to think about it."
- ___ Help others think through "unreasonable" demands by considering the logical extension of what they want instead of totally rejecting their ideas—"That might be a good idea. What would we do if . . . happens?"

FRIENDLY CAUTIONS

Avoid asking for help from friends and relatives who are pushy, disinterested, inept, or rigid. Attempts to involve them in your recovery or make them change will hinder your progress. Be cautious of bad advice. Input that makes you feel even worse about yourself is probably not correct. Do not argue with bad advice or try to make others understand. Thank people for their concern and tell them you'll consider what they are saying.

NATIONAL NETWORKS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Because there are numerous causes for problems with anger, there are few nationwide organizations or networks devoted to this issue. However, many 12-step groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Alanon for family members, and Adult Children of Alcoholics) often deal with this topic and are essential when substance abuse contributes to difficulties. Most communities have shelters and treatment groups for domestic violence. Mental health centers and courthouses are good sources of information. Websites and books can offer additional assistance:

- Domestic violence hotlines: 800-799-SAFE, www.domestic-violence.org/.
- General Internet sites and links: www.cmhc.com.
- *Anger Kills* by Redford Williams and Virginia Williams (Harper Mass Market, 1998).
- *Anger: Deal with It, Heal with It and Stop It from Killing You* by Bill Defoore (Health Communications, 1991).
- *The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner (HarperCollins, 1997).
- *Facing the Fire* by John Lee (Bantam, 1995).

MEDICATION

- Mood stabilizers and hormone treatments can markedly reduce volatility that can happen during episodes of depression, agitation, or PMS.
- Stimulants that help hyperactive people focus can reduce impulsive outbursts of anger.
- Antidepressants that increase levels of serotonin often reduce irritability in people who are highly reactive to their surroundings or compulsively preoccupied with rules, details, order, ethics, and cleanliness.
- The herb Saint-John's-wort can be used by people who are reluctant to take medication (if they are not overly sensitive to sun exposure or at risk for cataracts). However, some people may not find it as effective as prescription medication.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Counseling is very important when anger interferes with work or personal relationships. When physical abuse has occurred, the treatment of choice is group therapy in a domestic violence program. Couples should not be seen in counseling together until batterers have begun to manage destructive urges.