

Counselling Service

# Anger Management

**Student Counselling Service**

Bell 1, 20 Laurie Grove

**T 020 7919 7472**

**Email [mcs01cs@gold.ac.uk](mailto:mcs01cs@gold.ac.uk)**

Goldsmiths, University of London  
New Cross London SE14 6NW

**T 020 7919 7774**

**[www.gold.ac.uk/counselling](http://www.gold.ac.uk/counselling)**

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

# Anger

## Understanding Anger

Anger is an emotion we experience when we feel our rights or personal boundaries have been infringed. Behind it will lie other feelings such as fear (because we feel threatened), or emotional pain, (because we have been hurt in some way).

## We can use the energy of anger in a helpful and creative way:

- It may be used in an act of self-assertion when our needs have been ignored, unseen, or trampled on.
- It may give us the impetus to say “no” to what does not feel right to us, and to thereby take responsibility for what we need.
- It can help us to confirm our individuality, especially as children.
- It may help assert difference and differentiation, so that you can live your own life rather than adjusting to other peoples’ lives.
- It can provide us with the ‘fuel’ to move through certain fears, and create positive change in our lives.

It contains within it our own unique ‘spark’ of vital life energy. People who repress or are unable to feel anger, are likely to suffer from depression, low self-esteem and victimisation. They may be valuing other peoples’ needs above their own.

## When Anger is Unhelpful

Underneath anger is a sense of helplessness. The energy of anger is an attempt to mobilise a sense of strength. As we have seen, this can be very helpful when the energy mobilises us to take responsibility for ourselves, and to assert ourselves in a creative and productive way. The danger is when people get stuck in the helplessness behind the anger, because this will always lead to an uncontrolled state, where they perceive the need to attack something/someone outside of themselves. A key factor with the experience of anger, is that this emotion activates the 'primitive' part of the brain, which prepares the body for flight or fight, and people can lose their ability to think creatively and with perspective. They start to think in black/white all or nothing terms.

## Unresolved Anger & Negative Beliefs

- You will get a clue this is happening if you have a knee-jerk reaction, rather than a considered response, which is uncontained, out of control and unfocused. Your reaction will be out of proportion to the situation in hand.
- When you use your anger to blame/put down or attack another person.

## Why Manage Anger?

- In standing up for your rights, it is important to respect the rights of those you may be in conflict with. If you blame another, they are very likely to close down to you, and become defensive themselves. From this position you will not be heard.
- In using anger against another as a cover-up for more vulnerable feelings, you may push away the very need for emotional connection that you would like with another person.

## Managing Your Anger

- Understand the triggers to your anger, and the pay-offs.
- Learn to contain and move through difficult feelings of anger, and find a perspective beyond the fight/flight mechanism of reactive knee-jerk emotions.

## Understanding the Triggers

It is very useful to become conscious of the types of situation or exchanges between people that evoke your anger. The more conscious you become of these triggers, the less power they will hold over you. You will have space for a more considered response.

## The Pay-Offs

People do get short-term benefits from reacting in anger.

- They might feel better immediately afterwards
- It might make them feel more powerful
- It forces people to notice them

These benefits do not move people forward in a real way, but ultimately create repetitive cycles. A knee-jerk reaction of anger will cover your sense of helplessness but will not move you forward.

In the short-term it is important to realise that you may experience some discomfort as you let go of these immediate gains.

## Containing and Moving Through Feelings of Anger

- Feel the sensations evoked in your body without following the thoughts. (Become interested in the sensory experience -this will help you not to get hooked in to reactive thoughts, and will literally allow you more breathing space)
- Become aware of your breathing, and start to visualise breathing through the feelings/sensations in a gentle rhythm. Visualise your breath gently dissolving the tightness in the sensations.
- Bring your focus to your feet, and now bring your focus to your spine. Feel the strength of your backbone supporting you.
- Imagery work: You might want to visualise yourself standing by a well. One by one you drop ten white balls down the well, and watch them drop down in the darkness and splash into the water.

## Books

*Overcoming Anger*, Dr Windy Dryden

*Letting Go of Anger*, Ron Potter-Efron & Pat Potter-Efron

*The Dance of Anger*, Harriet Lerner Ph.D

*Managing Anger*, Gael Lindenfield

*Overcoming Anger & Irritability*, William Davies (ú7.99)

*The Anger Control Workbook*, Matthew McKay & Peter Rogers