

Coping With Anger

Learn about possible signs of anger and ways to cope after disasters as well as signs that you may need professional behavioral health help.

Many people experience anger after a disaster. They may feel angry about the damage the disaster has caused, changes to their short- or long-term plans, the long recovery process, financial worries and problems, and their reactions to the disaster that are hard to deal with. Survivors of disasters may feel angry at individuals and organizations they consider to be partly (or entirely, in an incident of mass violence or terrorist attack) responsible for the disaster.

Anger is something people in all societies around the world experience. When people get angry, they may experience these changes:

- Their heart may beat faster.
- Their blood pressure may increase.
- Their muscles may tighten.
- They may release adrenaline, which gives them energy.
- They may breathe faster or not as deeply.
- They may experience digestive issues.
- They may have difficulty sleeping.

Anger has many benefits, including helping people identify and begin to address problems in their lives and giving them energy to react to threats. It also has its downfalls. It has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, trouble sleeping, problems with digestion, headaches, depression, and anxiety. Anger may lead people to engage in behavior that involves risk, such as use of alcohol and other substances.

Tips for Calming Yourself

Many people find they anger more easily than usual following a disaster or other trauma. The following sections describe ways for you to manage and talk with others about your anger.

Self-management. Pay attention to cues that you are getting very angry, and when you notice them, take a break. You may want to count to 10, take a quick walk, or try some of the relaxation techniques listed below.

Assertive Communication. If you are angry with a person, it may make sense to talk with him or her directly about it when your anger is at a manageable level to do this. When you're ready, try to use "I" statements and avoid the words "always," "never," and "should."

Problem-solving Approach. If you find you are often becoming angry in a specific situation, you may want to consider ways you can change the situation. If changes are not possible, it may help to focus on areas of life you can control.

Forgiveness. Use forgiveness as you can and as it makes sense. Forgiveness may take time, but if you can experience it, it may enhance your relationship with the person you forgive.

Tips for Boosting Resilience

Connection to Community

Finding ways to connect with the people around you may help you get through your anger. You can connect with your community in several ways, including:

- Talking to someone you trust about your anger.
- Seeking out a support group through community centers or disaster recovery programs.
- Continuing to participate in groups and connecting with your community in ways that don't have anything to do with the disaster.

Harnessing Anger for Disaster Recovery

The energy of anger and other feelings you experience after a disaster may help you get community activities back up and running, contribute to cleanup efforts, volunteer in other ways to help your community as it recovers, and eventually help develop memorials and plan and run anniversary events.

Relaxation Techniques

These techniques can lower your overall stress level, which in turn can help you manage your anger and use it in productive ways. Try the following techniques to help you relax:

- Deep breathing. Try to breathe from your abdominal area instead of from your chest.
- Visualization. Imagine that you are in a place that is peaceful and calming to you.
- Progressive muscle relaxation. Tighten and then relax each muscle group in your body.
- Gentle stretching, yoga, or tai chi.

Habits of Health

It may be hard to keep up with healthy habits after a disaster when your access to resources may be limited, and you may not be living at home. Do your best, and give yourself credit for all you do. Here are a few tips:

- Be physically active.
- Get enough sleep.
- Eat healthy.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.

When To Seek Professional Support

People can experience anger at any time throughout their lives, no matter their stress level. In the first 2 to 4 weeks after a disaster, you may notice more anger in yourself.

Some signs that you may need professional support include the following:

- Your anger seems out of control.
- You do things because of your anger that you regret.
- You have hurt yourself or people around you physically or emotionally as a result of your anger.
- Your friends and family members have said that they think you have a problem with anger, or they have spent less time with you because of things that happened when you were angry.
- Your anger lasts longer than one month.
- You have arguments with coworkers.
- You are no longer welcome in certain businesses because of past behavior there.
- You have caused property damage when you were angry, or you have thought about causing property damage when you were angry.