

ANGER INVENTORY

Many people assume that anger is always displayed in shouting, slamming doors, speaking harshly, etc. While those **behaviors** certainly indicate anger, this **emotion** is displayed in many other forms. Take a look at the following list of statements that would indicate a form of anger. How many can you relate to?

Yes	No	Statement
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Impatience comes over me more often than I would like
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I nurture critical thoughts too easily
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tension mounts within me as I tackle a difficult circumstance
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes I will walk in a different direction to avoid seeing someone I do not want to talk to
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When discussing a controversial topic, my tone of voice can become elevated
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When talking about my frustrations, I don't really want to hear an opposing point of view
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When someone confronts me from a misinformed position, I am thinking of my rebuttal as he or she speaks
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes my discouragement makes me want to quit
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can really struggle emotionally with things in life that are not fair
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I may sometimes blame others for my problems
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have been known to speak rudely or insensitively
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can take an "I don't care attitude" toward the needs of others

Looking back over this list of statements, you will notice that anger includes many traits that go beyond the stereotype of the shouting person. As you determine to get a grip on your use of this emotion, the first step is to be aware of the many ways it is expressed, learning to separate the unhealthy forms of anger from the healthy.

WHAT IS ANGER?

Think of the times you are most prone to feeling anger (frustration, irritability, annoyance, etc.). It is not experienced when people are kind, cooperative, friendly, or encouraging. Anger appears when the opposite of these traits are present, when people are rude, condescending, uncooperative, invalidating, uncaring. What is triggering the anger?

Think carefully what your anger is wishing to convey. Your anger is connected to your sense of **self-preservation**. Specifically you are wishing to **preserve** one of three things:

- **Your worth as a human** (“Would you please show me some respect?”)
- **Your legitimate needs** (“Would you recognize that I have needs that should be tended to?”)
- **Your deepest convictions** (“I have certain beliefs I will not back down from.”)

Think about the legitimacy of this self-preservation. Can you recognize that anger can have a valid function?

There are plenty of circumstances when anger can be quite **appropriate**. But as is the case with many human qualities that can be good, anger can quickly get out of hand and lead to **negative expressions**. To get an idea if your anger is appropriate or not, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ **Am I respectful toward others when I communicate anger?**
- ✓ **Do I choose to expend my angry energy on issues that really matter?**
- ✓ **Is my manner of communication constructive?**
- ✓ **Do I allow others the time to carefully think about the matters I am addressing?**
- ✓ **When communicating my anger, do I make room for the fact that others have different perspectives?**
- ✓ **Do I know when to cease when it is clear that I have expressed myself fully?**
- ✓ **Is the goal of my anger enlightenment as opposed to control?**

Your anger can be managed in constructive ways, but first you need to be certain that it is being handled with maturity and dignity.

SUPPRESSED ANGER

Many people hesitate to admit or expose their own anger. Usually they have witnessed ill effects of this emotion so they have resolved not to be lowered to crude or abrupt expressions of any kind. When an anger producing circumstance occurs, these people stoically put on a good front and pretend to have no anger at all. "Who me? Angry? Not me! No really, everything is fine."

To get an idea if this practice is common to you, see how many of the following statements might apply to you fairly frequently.

- I can be image conscious. I don't like to let others know my problems
- Even when I feel flustered, I try to present myself as having it all together
- I am rather reserved about sharing my problems or frustrations
- If a family member or friend upsets me I can let days pass without discussing it
- I have a tendency to be depressed or moody
- Resentful thinking is common for me, although many people would never suspect it
- I have suffered from physical complaints (for example: headaches, stomach ailments, sleep irregularities)
- There are times when I doubt the validity of my own opinions or preferences
- Sometimes I feel paralyzed when confronted with an unwanted situation
- I'm not inclined to initiate conversations about sensitive or troublesome topics

The more of these statements that you can check, the more inclined you are to suppress your anger. Be aware, though that this does not mean your problems with anger are solved. In fact, they are only heightened. Think of your kitchen garbage can. When you place garbage in and no one takes it out at the end of the day, you can probably get away with it. But let's suppose several more days go by and it still has not been taken out. It gets overflowing and smelly! The same can be said about the suppression of anger. If you do not let it out, at first it would seem that you have avoided a problem, but over time be prepared to live with the effects of many emotional issues that have "piled up" in your personality. The result will be depression, bitterness, disillusionment, and the like.

OPENLY AGGRESSIVE ANGER

When most people think of anger it is open aggression that comes to mind. Aggressive anger involves the preservation of personal worth, needs, and convictions at someone else's expense. This is the category of anger that includes explosiveness, rage, intimidation, and blame. It is not limited to these extreme forms of expression. It can also include bickering, criticizing, griping, and sarcasm. Foul play is usually always guaranteed.

To get an idea of the nature of openly aggressive anger, look over the following statements:

- I can be blunt and forceful when someone does something to frustrate me
- As I speak my convictions, my voice becomes increasingly louder
- When someone confronts me about a problem, I am likely to offer a ready rebuttal
- No one has to guess my opinion; I'm known for having unwavering viewpoints
- When something goes wrong, I focus so sharply on fixing the problem that I overlook other's feelings
- I have a history of getting caught in bickering matches with family members
- During verbal disagreements with someone, I am likely to repeat myself several times
- I find it hard to keep my thoughts to myself when it is obvious that someone else is wrong
- I have a reputation for being strong-willed
- I tend to give advice, even when others have not asked for it

The more of these statements you can relate to, the more likely you will have an aggressive form of managing anger. Predictably, you will have more than your share of ongoing struggles with relatives and close associates. You probably have emotional insecurities that will need to be addressed so that you can have more rewarding relationships. Life is certain to have frustrations and imperfections, so unless you determine to handle anger more constructively, you can expect many hurts.

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE ANGER

Some people are determined not to succumb to the temptation to be rageful with anger, but that doesn't mean they are without anger. Rightly recognizing that open aggression creates an atmosphere of great disrespect, they refuse to explode loudly or get caught in games of verbal abuse. These people, however, can develop too strong of a determination to avoid ugly anger and in doing so, they become susceptible to passive aggression. True to the definition of aggressive anger, passive aggression involves preserving personal worth, needs, and convictions at someone else's expense, but it differs in that it is accomplished in a more quiet manner, causing less personal vulnerability.

To get an idea of the nature of passive aggressive anger, look over the following statements. Do any of them seem familiar?

- When I am frustrated I become silent, knowing it bothers other people
- I am prone to sulk or pout
- When I don't want to do a project I will procrastinate. I can be lazy.
- I do things in my own timing and, if I am too slow or if I do things in a different manner, then others are just going to have to adjust to my way. If they don't like it, that's too bad
- There are times when I am deliberately evasive so others won't bother me
- I sometimes approach work projects half-heartedly
- When someone talks to me about my problems, I'll say what they want to hear then do what I want to do
- I complain about people behind their backs, but resist the opportunity to be open with them face to face
- Sometimes I become involved in hidden misbehaviors
- I may not follow through on the favours people want me to do as a way of letting them know I didn't want to do them in the first place

Passive aggression is usually caused by a need to have control with the least amount of accountability. This form of anger is different from suppressed anger because the person is deliberately doing something, knowing it will agitate the other person involved. Also, when people use this form of anger, it represents a fear-based manner of handling conflicts. Healthy relationships welcome openness but passive-aggressives fear that openness will be accompanied by too high of an emotional price.

ASSERTIVE ANGER

Many people ask: “Do I have the right to be angry?” My response is to throw out the word “right” and replace it with the “responsibility,” then have the question restated: “Do I have the responsibility to be angry?” Most people do not readily think of anger as responsibility, but it can be. If you are in a relationship that you want to succeed, there inevitably will be moments of conflict, creating frustration and irritability. The way you handle the emotions associated with that conflict will have a great bearing on the success of the relationship. In many incidences it would be irresponsible not to communicate your anger. The key is to learn to communicate anger constructively, which means you would be standing firmly for your worth, needs, and convictions while also treating the other person with dignity.

Look over the following statements to get an idea if you have a good handle on assertiveness:

- When I am in disagreement with others, my voice can be firm while also calm
- Even in frustration, I treat people with dignity
- I have a reputation of speaking to the point, being clear about my needs or feelings
- Once I have made my point in a discussion I will give others the time to think about what was said, as opposed to pushing the issue too far
- I am able to say “no” or to set stipulations when necessary
- I’ll use fair consequences instead of harsh arguing when I need to stand my ground
- I have a good handle on what is right and wrong yet I am not known as harsh or dogmatic
- I pick my battles carefully, making sure I am not just being finicky or critical
- I will let others know when I need help or when I need space to gather my thoughts

The key to true assertiveness is that even as you are standing up for your needs or convictions, you are also thinking of the needs of others. Self-centeredness is out, while a sense of community is in.

Perhaps the most common mistake made by people trying to be assertive is when they say what needs to be said, when they do not get the desired response, they shift gears and become persuasive. At that point it seems their goal no longer is to speak the truth, but to force the other person to think “right.” In appropriate assertiveness, you can stand firmly for your beliefs and even if others do not agree, you can still stand upon your convictions without coercion, condescension, or defensiveness.

RELEASING ANGER

Let's suppose you have done all you know to do to communicate your anger appropriately, yet you have not been received the way you would like. What do you do? At this point, some will resort to unhealthy forms of anger as they suppress their emotions or become openly aggressive or act in passive aggressive ways. Those forms of managing anger are options (although poor ones) so be prepared to have your anger linger.

When assertiveness has been tried, but has not been fully successful, you still have one more option to consider, releasing your anger. When you release your anger, you accept the reality that you cannot fully control circumstance. You know you are limited and that is something you can live with. To get an idea what releasing anger looks like, note the following examples:

-  A wife recognizes her husband will always have traits she does not like. She may draw her boundaries so she is true to her own priorities, yet she can also show a willingness to accept him for what he is
-  An adult son recognizes that his father will never be able to love him. Because he does not want to remain bitter over this, he chooses to forgive him even as he also determines to be a much different father to his own children
-  An employee does not like some of his company's policies yet he also determines that he is not ready to move on to another work place. He recognizes that no place of work is perfect and will give his best effort in spite of his differences in preferences
-  A family man recognizes that he has been too inclined to be critical or cynical in relating to his relatives. He determines to give higher priority to kindness and encouragement, not because he must, but because it seems like a better way of life
-  A friend feels she has been wronged greatly by someone who has been very close to her. She speaks firmly to that person about her feelings and determines not to expose herself to repetitions of the same disappointment, but she also wisely chooses not to obsess about wrongdoing and she chooses not to speak ill of that person behind her back

Let's keep in mind that releasing anger is much different than suppressing anger. When anger is suppressed, phoniness and pretense become prominent in your relating style. However when you release anger, you are enacting true convictions based on the fact that you have weighed your priorities and have determined that better things besides anger deserve your emotional energy. Anger communication has its place in any relationship, but love and kindness, and honor and forgiveness can be give greater emphasis.