
Managing stress and anger effectively

Stress is unavoidable in life. Too high and too low a stress level is damaging. Too high a stress level over a period of time can result with physiological problems such as headaches, ulcers, and muscle pain. But boredom can make us just as sick as high distress. We need a certain mid-level amount of stress to maintain a balance in our lives.

Emotions are always involved in stressful situations, and one of the most common emotions in interpersonal situations is anger. Anger both causes and accompanies distress. How anger is expressed can be either constructive or destructive. There are three *major components* involved in human anger: 1) Anger is usually a defense against something; 2) Anger occurs when we are not getting something we want or would like; and 3) Anger has in it a sense of righteousness and a belief that one's personal rights have been violated, i.e., a defensive reaction to frustration and aggression.

There are at least eight major functions of anger:

1. Anger provides energy and increases the vigor with which we act.
2. Anger disrupts ongoing behavior by agitation, impulsivity, and interference with attention and information processing.
3. Anger facilitates the expression of negative feelings and negative feedback, which might not be expressed if we were not angry.
4. Anger is a defense against vulnerability.
5. Anger initiates or strengthens antagonism as an internal, learned stimulus for aggression.
6. Anger can be a signal that an event is a provocation or that something frustrating or unpleasant is taking place.
7. Anger helps us maintain a sense of virtue and righteousness in the face of opposition.
8. Anger can intimidate other people and is therefore a source of interpersonal power and influence.

Three general points to remember in managing angry feelings are:

1. When two people avoid discussing an issue, the issue will reappear in a different form. You cannot avoid conflicts. Open discussion of conflicts is the best way.
2. Being angry and upset, refusing to listen, and being defensive, while often justified, do not help resolve conflicts. They do not help the relationship continue and get stronger.
3. Feelings that are ignored or denied will come out later in one way or another. You must build healthy habits of managing your feelings.