

# TAKING DANGER OUT OF ANGER

Who is in charge—you or your anger? You may not even be aware that you have become a slave to rage and that it is no longer working for you. If you answer no to any of the following questions, it's time to get a new boss—yourself!

- Does your anger help you feel better about yourself?
- Does it help you achieve your long-term goals?
- Do any good feelings you get from anger last?
- Does your anger keep you safe from danger?

A brief release of anger can be energizing and direct you toward action that will resolve conflicts. However, prolonged agitation creates mental, relationship, and physical problems. Even people who are (biochemically) reactive to their surroundings can learn to reduce the duration of flare-ups to minutes instead of hours or days. To lay the groundwork for taking charge of your temper, identify people and situations that trigger reactions and the early warning signs that your buttons are being pushed.

Anger's Warning Signs			
External Triggers →	Sensations	Feelings	Outer Expression
People	Tension in:	Used	Grit teeth, grimace
Boss, coworkers	Head	Betrayed	Glare or stare
Spouse or children	Eyes	Jealous	Make a fist
Relatives or friends	Jaw	Envious	Walk fast or pace
Other drivers	Neck	Disrespected	Talk fast or loudly
Salespeople	Chest	Victimized	Gossip
Complaints or criticism	Stomach	Powerless	Curse
Laziness and incompetence	Back	Helpless	Grunt or grumble
Lying, injustice, tardiness	Hands	Unimportant	Tap foot
Arrogance or rudeness	Shoulder	Neglected	Jiggle leg
Politics or prejudice	Sweat	Ashamed	Drum fingers
Disagreements	Feel hot	Defective	Point finger
Boredom or waiting	“See red”	Like a saint	Throw things
Other:	Other:	Other:	Other:

## STEPS THAT REDUCE ANGER

Once you are on the alert for anger triggers and recognize your internal reactions, you can rate your distress. Use colors or numbers. Zero or green would mean no distress and 10 or red would be a major explosion. Each person has a different “point of no return.” People with some control might deal with a situation until they are in the orange range or over six “units” of anger. If your feelings take over in a flash, start to reduce your anger when you have yellow or three units of frustration.

Distress Units							Distress Units			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Green (Calm Zone)			Yellow			Orange			Red (Danger Zone)	

With practice, you can streamline the following release-reduce-reexamine-request steps into a unique package that will help you wage peace, not war: <sup>1</sup>

1. Physically release anger in private. Remove yourself from the trigger situation or person. Tell significant others that you need a short break so you can think more clearly. Go to the restroom, for a walk, swing your arms, scrub the floor, smash aluminum cans, yell (into a pillow), growl, or hit a punching bag. Beware of exercise that makes you more agitated. You only need five minutes.
2. Reduce anger by noticing where tension “lives” in your body and using the following to detach from it. Learn which technique(s) works best for you:
  - Create a symbol that represents your anger (not the target): a firecracker, a volcano, a barking dog, or boiling water. Focus on the symbol and watch it change. If necessary, add another element to help: see the lava cool, hear the firecracker fizzle, drop ice cubes into the boiling water, or feed the dog a steak.
  - Tap acupuncture points that reduce anger “by removing an imbalance in the body’s electrical flow.”<sup>2</sup> While focusing on anger sensations, tap (about 7 times each) the outside of the little fingernail (lf) and an inch under the collarbone (cb) just to the side of the sternum. After noticing some calming, further reduce anger by moving your eyes in a horizontal figure 8 while tapping the outside points of your eyebrows, humming a few notes, counting to three, and humming again. Then, repeat the lf and cb taps.
  - Pair relaxation with arousal to decondition it. Look down until your lids are almost shut. Slowly roll your eyes up as if you were trying to see your eyebrows. When it is too tiring to look up anymore, allow your lids to flutter closed. Take three deep, full breaths. Count to three as you breathe in and to six as you breathe out. Fully expand your lungs by pushing out your stomach.
  - Temporarily distract yourself. Listen to music, read, watch TV, play with your pet, shoot baskets, or take a warm bath. Let the back part of your mind tackle the problem while you do something that you enjoy.
3. Reexamine the event that triggered your anger after detaching from it. Rule out anything that might have fed your distress by asking yourself:
  - “Did this incident bring up any of my own insecurities?”
  - “If I did not get angry, would I have felt exposed, powerless, rejected, inadequate, unimportant, guilty, ashamed, empty, bored, hungry, or tired?”
  - “Was I trying to control others, make things perfect, look tough, distance, avoid painful feelings, or get an adrenaline rush?”
  - “Were any of my rights taken away?” “How important is this battle?”
4. Turn resentment into specific requests or action that you can take if you were truly violated. When you are ready, state your feelings, requests and solutions calmly—“I feel . . . when you . . . .” “Would you . . . , . . . , or . . . ?” “I will (not) . . . .”

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<sup>1</sup> Steps adapted from *Mastering Your Moods* by Melvyn Kinder (Simon & Schuster, 1994) and *Letting Go of Anger* by Ron and Pat Potter-Efron (New Harbinger, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> For further information contact Callahan Techniques at 760-345-4737, [www.tfrx.com](http://www.tfrx.com); or [fgallo@energypsych.com](mailto:fgallo@energypsych.com); or see *Energy Psychology* by Fred P. Gallo (CRC Press, 1998).