

After the Storm: Anger Management



After the winds calm, the rains stop, and the waters recede, the human loss from a natural disaster is obvious. Homes can be damaged, crops destroyed, and lives lost. All the stress created by the storm results in frustration, irritability, and anger. We usually consider anger to be negative, but it is actually a natural emotion that is evoked by threats to your safety and happiness.

Everyone feels anger. However, some people respond to anger more intensely than others. You need to express your anger in appropriate methods and learn to control it because you can reason more rationally with a “cool head.” Controlling your anger will allow you to accomplish more and rebuild faster. If you let your temper rule your life, you will have more difficulty in all your relationships.

There are three parts to anger:

- The physiological component is the way your body reacts to anger.
- The cognitive component is the thoughts you have when you are angry.
- The behavioral component is the way you act when you are angry.

Your anger could simply be a reaction to the frustration of having to wait in line for assistance at a shelter or relief agency, but you take it out on your innocent loved ones. You might yell at your spouse or scream at your children because those are some of the behaviors and actions of an angry person. But if you rethink the situation, you might be able to better manage your anger and spare the feelings of your family members.

Here are some anger management techniques:

Recognize anger. There are ways to recognize anger in yourself and others. Notice your body’s reaction to anger. There might be a noticeable change in your voice and gestures.

Breathe. When you are angry, your body will tense up. You may hold your breath. If you stop for a minute and take a few deep breaths and relax your shoulders, the anger will not feel as intense. If someone is becoming angry, you might want to back off and give him or her space. This technique works even when you are the one who is angry.

Empathize. It helps to empathize with the other person by trying to place yourself in the same situation. Only then can you understand that the source of their anger is their experiences with the disaster and its aftermath. The person is not mad at you, and you are not mad at the person. The anger comes from the frustration of the disaster and the stress the disaster created.

Change your outlook. Try to think about the situation from a different perspective. For example, I was in a traffic jam and noticed people around me blowing horns, beating on steering wheels, and screaming. I, however, was reading the newspaper. We were in the same traffic jam, but I simply chose to look at the situation differently. A lot of how you react to the situation is your perception of the situation.



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Listen. Hear and understand what is being said. A lot of times what you think you hear and what the person thinks they have said are two entirely different things. To clarify the situation, you might ask some probing questions. For example: "Did I hear you say that you thought _____?" Then you are sure that you have understood exactly what the person meant. This method can stop problems before they start.

Focus. Keep your attention on the present problem. Don't go backward and bring up things from other fights or disagreements.

Use coping mechanisms. One way to handle your emotions is to write them down. If you keep a journal, you can express your emotions without hurting other people. This journal can help you document your actions and give you a history of your experience. Other positive coping techniques are exercise, meditation, prayer, and inspirational readings. You do not want to slip into negative coping techniques such as drugs or alcohol.

Realize that your anger comes from the stress of the disaster. Make certain you stay focused on your problem. You need to try to understand what the other person meant to say. Rethink your situation, and you will be able to manage your anger better during times of distress and disaster.

Adapted from the following publications: *Dealing with Stress After a Disaster*, *The Rethink Method of Managing Anger*, *A Flood of Emotions*, and *When Crisis Becomes Chronic*, all by North Dakota State University Extension Service; *Triumph Over Tragedy: A Community Response to Managing Trauma in Times of Disaster and Terrorism* (Second Edition), edited by Garret D. Evans and Brenda A. Wiens and prepared by the University of Florida National Rural Behavioral Health Center; *Marriages & Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths* (Fifth Edition) by David H. Olson of the University of Minnesota and John DeFrain of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and *Establishment and operation of shelters serving socially vulnerable populations: A socio-spatial analysis* by Lynn Pike, Ph.D., Mississippi State University



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Information Sheet 1795

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director

(POD-12-12)