Learn to Think Before You Act

Your best friend is busy with his new girl friend and never has time to hang out with you. Your boyfriend is talking with that flirty girl in his math class. A school rivalry gets out of hand, and guys insult you in the parking lot after a game. Another driver cuts you off, nearly causing an accident. Someone bumps into you in the hallway and doesn't apologize. Someone looks at you the wrong way.

Everyone feels angry sometimes. We often get angry when we feel hurt, afraid, disrespected, misunderstood, or when we feel like someone is treating us unfairly. It's a completely normal and healthy emotion.

But when some of us get angry, we tend to "lose it"—we might yell, call someone names, or even throw things or hit somebody. Anger itself is normal and healthy, but some of the ways people show anger can be harmful. It is never okay to hurt someone else, physically or with words, because we're angry with them.

think

Instead of letting our anger get the best of us, we need to learn to control it. Sometimes this is called "anger management," but it can be as simple as learning to keep your cool.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't express our feelings. Bottled up anger can cause problems too. For one thing, it can lead to a major explosion later on. Anger shouldn't be ignored. It can be a sign that we need to stand up for ourselves, speak up for what we think is right, or make an important change in our lives.

We can't totally avoid anger. So it's very important that we learn how to deal with it and express our feelings in a healthy way. If we're not careful, anger can cause us to do or say things we regret. It can destroy friendships, relationships, and even lives. And when that happens, we hurt ourselves most of all.

Go to **www.intheknowzone.com** for more information about anger management, with citations and links. Test your understanding with a quick quiz.

**Don't stay in the dark.
Get In the Know!**

in the know

Managing Anger

don't let it control you

What is Anger?

Anger has been around for as long as people have. It causes changes in the body that helped early humans respond to danger. Anger prepares our bodies for self-defense and if necessary, to attack. These are some of the changes we may notice when we start feeling angry:

- Our heartbeats and breathing get faster.
- We feel warm, because more blood flows to our heads.
- Our muscles tense.
- We clench our fists or jaws.
- We get knots in our stomachs.
- In general, we feel ready for a fight.

These physical changes were important in a world where people might face life-threatening danger everyday. Now that most of us don't need to fight wild animals regularly in order to survive, we need to learn to keep our anger under control.

Cooling Off to Avoid a Meltdown

Since we're all different, one of the first steps is noticing what happens in your body when you get angry. Maybe you can't sit still, or your face tenses up into an expression of annoyance.

Whatever it is, take it as a sign that you need to calm down before you fly off the handle. Here are a few good ways to do that:

- Exercise. Running, going for a walk or bike ride, or even dancing around your room to loud music are all great ways to let off steam. Just about any kind of physical activity will help. You'll be amazed at how much better you feel.
- Take deep breaths.
- Count slowly to 10.
- Close your eyes and think about something that makes you feel calm and happy.
- Draw or write in a journal about how you feel.
- Distract yourself for a while by reading a book or going to a movie. You'll probably feel calmer after getting your mind off what's bothering you.
- Talk about how you're feeling with a close friend or an adult you trust.

More About Cooling Off
www.intheknowzone.com/manageanger/cooloff

Identify the Problem

Once you've calmed down, you'll be able to see the situation more clearly. This will help you with the next step: figuring out what made you angry in the first place.

Once you understand exactly what upset you, you have several options:

- If there's no way to prevent the situation that made you angry—a traffic jam, or a group of guys who hang out in the hallway and hassle you when you walk by, for example—you can try to avoid it altogether.
- Change your attitude. Sometimes if we think about it, we realize that anger is coming from negative or unrealistic thoughts. Instead of thinking, "Things never go my way," think, "I can't always expect to get exactly what I want. Life doesn't always go the way I'd like it to." Which is true, by the way.
- Try to resolve the conflict by talking things out with the person you're upset with.

Conflict Resolution

You may want to set up a specific time to talk about the problem. Agree that you both want to resolve things peacefully and avoid a fight. When you get together, here are some steps to take:

- From your point of view, calmly explain to the other person what they did and how it made you feel. Ask them to hear you out. Try not to blame or attack—this will usually make things worse. Starting sentences with "I feel . . ." will help.
- Clearly explain what you want to see happen and why. For example, maybe you want an apology, or a promise that the person won't do it again.
- Allow them to tell their side of the story. Hear them out—don't interrupt. Hopefully they can also say what they'd like to see happen.
- Even if you don't want the same thing, try to find some common ground, such as wanting to avoid a fight, or save your friendship.
- Brainstorm solutions that offer something for both sides. It's easy to think that when there is a disagreement, one person wins and the other loses. That's not true. By compromising, you can usually come up with a solution that offers something for everybody.
- Both parties should say honestly what they like and don't like about each potential solution.
- Agree to stand by the solution that comes closest to meeting everyone's needs.

If all else fails, you may need to agree to disagree, and/or walk away from the person or situation. You can feel good knowing that you expressed your feelings and tried to resolve the problem.

Whatever you do, don't give in to violence. Some people think that avoiding fights is a sign of weakness. It's exactly the opposite. It takes guts to do what's right and not care what other people think. Walking away from a fight is the right thing to do.

We often can't change other people or situations that make us angry. But we can learn to control our reactions to them. What's in it for us? A lot of self-respect.

More About Conflict Resolution
www.intheknowzone.com/manageanger/resolve