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TOOLS FOR

Putting the Brakes On: Tips for Controlling Your Anger

Feeling angry is the way your body prepares for a fight. When you get angry, adrenaline and other hormones are released into the blood stream, so your blood pressure rises and you are ready for “fight or flight.”

Hostility is the state of being ready for a fight all the time. Feeling hostile keeps your blood pressure high and may increase your risk for heart attack and other illnesses. Being hostile also isolates you from other people.

The way you express your anger can affect many areas of your life. Your anger can help you make positive changes in your life - or it can get you into trouble. Your anger and hostility don't have to cause you problems. There are ways you can keep these feelings from controlling you.

Notice when you are getting angry. Many people deny or ignore the fact they are angry. Ignoring anger doesn't make it go away. Instead, unexpressed anger shows up as physical problems such as headaches and stomach aches, or emotional problems such as depression and anxiety.

Don't let anger and hostility build up. Some people notice when they're angry, but choose not to do anything about it. Unfortunately, the anger doesn't go away. It builds until

a person “blows up,” often over something minor.

Pinpoint the cause of the anger. Try to understand what is making you angry and make that your focus. If you're angry at your boss, don't take it out on your family.

Forgive and forget. Disagreements are a normal part of relationships, but holding a grudge doesn't help anyone. Once you've let go of your anger, forget about it and move on to more positive feelings. Forgiving the other person helps lower blood pressure and ease muscle tension, so you can feel more relaxed.

Read books on anger and how to handle it. Much has been written about anger. Many books offer tips and exercises to help you identify your anger and express it appropriately. Your library or community mental health center can provide you with resources.

Understand the real feelings behind the anger. Some people turn other feelings into anger. Guilt, insecurity and sadness may show as anger. Unless you recognize the feelings behind your anger, you can't deal with the real issues.

Learn healthy ways to express anger. It usually isn't the anger that gets us into trouble, but rather, the

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way we express it. Here are some suggestions for expressing anger appropriately:

- Before you blow-up, count to ten. It gives your body and emotions a chance to calm down.
- If you need to scream, try to do it in a private place not at other people.
- Go for a short walk or jog. Exercise helps you release some of the excess energy you get from the adrenaline.
- Talk about it with a friend. Friends can give you a fresh perspective.
- Do something artistic to release the anger. Write, draw, work on your crafts or in your garden. Use the energy to accomplish something.
- Write in a daily journal. This is a great way to express your feelings and can also help you with other kinds of problems.

Recognize the Positive Side of Anger.

Anger can have positive effects. Our angry feelings tell us something is wrong needs to be changed. It gives us the emotional energy it takes to make changes in our lives. Anger can also help us get closer to people, because when we learn to express our anger honestly and appropriately, our friends and family understand us and our needs better.

Some people may have problems handling their anger, even when they use these techniques. If so, call your community mental health center, therapist or contact a support group in your area. For more information call the:

Customer Service Line
1-888-251-7511



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ValueOptions New Mexico believes that people can and do recovery from mental illness. That is why we created *Tools for Recovery*. *Tools for Recovery* is a series of tip sheets that are written by and for consumers about issues, opportunities and obstacles people face in their recovery from mental illness. Other tip sheets in the series "*Managing Mania*" "*Dealing with Depression*," and *Handling Anxiety*. These tip sheets are available through your mental health center or by calling the ValueOptions New Mexico Customer Service Line at 1-888-251-7511.