

## *Coping with Anger*

Anger is probably the most poorly handled emotion in our society. From time to time we all experience this very powerful feeling. Some of the common causes of anger include frustration, hurt, annoyance, disappointment, harassment and threats. It is helpful to realize that anger can be our friend or foe, depending on how we express it. Knowing how to recognize and express it appropriately can help us to reach goals, handle emergencies, solve problems and even protect our health. However, failure to recognize and understand our anger may lead to a variety of problems.

Some experts believe that suppressed anger is an underlying cause of both anxiety and depression. Anger that is not expressed can disrupt relationships, affect thinking and behavior patterns, and create a variety of physical problems, such as high blood pressure, heart problems, headaches, skin disorders, and digestive problems. What's even worse is the correlation between the dangers of uncontrolled anger and crime, emotional and physical abuse, and other violent behavior. Redford Williams, an internist and behavioral specialist at Duke University Medical Center has developed a 12-step program that can help people learn to deal with their angry emotions:

1. Williams suggests monitoring your cynical thoughts by maintaining a "hostility log." This will teach you about the frequency and kinds of situations that provoke you.
2. Acknowledge any problems in coping with anger.
3. Seek the support of important people in your life in coping with your feelings and in changing your behavior patterns.
4. By keeping your hostility log you are able to realize when and where you are having aggressive thoughts, so that when you find yourself in these situations, you can utilize such techniques as deep breathing, positive self-talk, or thought stopping, which can help you interrupt the anger cycle.
5. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. This will help you gain a different perspective. Keep in mind that we are all humans, subject to making mistakes.
6. Learn how to laugh at yourself and see humor in situations.
7. Learn how to relax. Although you may have heard that expressing anger is better than keeping it in, remember that frequent outbursts of anger are often counterproductive and may alienate others.
8. It is also important that you practice trusting other people. It's usually easier to be angry than to trust, so by learning how to trust others you are less likely to direct your anger at them.
9. Good listening skills improve communication and can facilitate trusting feelings between people. This trust can help you deal with potentially hostile emotions; reducing and possibly eliminating them.
10. Learn how to assert yourself. This is a constructive alternative to aggression. When you find yourself angry at another person, try to explain to them what is bothering you about their behavior and why. It takes more words and work to be assertive than it does to let your anger show, but the rewards are worth it.
11. If you live each day as if it were your last, you will realize that life is too short to get angry over everything.
12. The final step requires forgiving those who have angered you. By letting go of the resentment and relinquishing the goal of retribution, you'll find the weight of anger lifted from your shoulders.

To learn more about how to deal with anger, call the **Counseling Center, 974-2831**.

*For more information or assistance:*

*USF students may call 974-2831;*

*Faculty and staff may call 974-5469*