



# IN SIGHT

for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

503-226-1057  
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## MANAGING YOUR ANGER

Anger isn't merely an uncomfortable emotion. It can also have a destructive physical impact on the person who is angry. During an angry response, the body releases hormones that generate a rush of energy lasting for at least several minutes. Next, an adrenaline spike occurs that can make a person feel edgy for hours, even days. This explains why people sometimes overreact over what seems to be a trivial incident; the explosive reaction was actually triggered by something that happened earlier. For example, the anger a parent expresses over a child leaving clothes on the floor in the evening may, in fact, be a response to being treated badly by the boss that morning.

The physical effect of anger is most apparent in people who respond to an angry feeling in a hostile way. The angry person will experience an increase in blood pressure, adrenaline, and heart rate. Responding with hostility often makes the angry person feel even angrier. As the physical responses escalate, so do the physical dangers – with coronary heart disease and sudden death being some of the most serious consequences. The sooner a person can calm down, the better he or she will feel. However, repressing anger also has physical effects, including headaches, dizziness, and muscle tension that can cause chronic neck and back pain. The task is to identify healthy and appropriate ways of dealing with anger.

Appropriate anger management can mitigate the physical effects described above and improve well-being. Effective anger coping strategies can also produce more enjoyable social interaction and rewarding relationships. Healthy and rewarding relationships are associated with better physical and mental health.

## COPING STRATEGIES

- Learn your anger triggers and develop a plan to deal with them.
- Notice your bodily sensations when your anger is triggered. Do you tense your muscles? Do you hold your breath? Does your heart race out of control? When you identify your pattern, stop the cycle of fight-or-flight response – count to 10 and breathe, take a time out, or go for a walk. Do whatever you can to reverse the escalation in the physical symptoms.
- Pause when you are agitated. Take a break before responding to the people involved. A pause of a few minutes may prevent an escalation of your feelings, physical response, and the situation in general.
- Try to relax. Address the physical response through deep breathing, getting some fresh air, and relaxing your muscles.
- Use humor to de-escalate the situation when possible and appropriate.
- Distract yourself. Listen to music or read a book.
- Engage in long-term stress and anger management. Regular exercise, yoga, massage therapy, hobbies, art, social support, and connecting with nature are helpful tools.
- Notice the negative or unrealistic thoughts that underlie the trigger. For example: "My boss does not appreciate what I do and is trying to get rid of me. I am powerless, I am helpless, and the world is unfair." Entertain other possibilities. Create alternative or more bal-

anced statements, such as: “I know my boss values my work,” or, “I may not be able to change my boss, but I can change my responses.”

- Journal your thoughts and feelings. Sometimes just putting your feelings in writing helps you to de-escalate feelings. While writing, you may also come up with some conclusions or strategies.
- Explore the possibility that other feelings may underlie the anger, such as humiliation, frustration, and/or resentment, and address them in a nonaggressive manner. Anger is often the result of a person’s inability to express feelings appropriately and assertively. What should be an assertive stance becomes either a passive or an aggressive response.
- Write an “unsent letter” to the person or situation you are upset with. Let it all out, and then read it to someone you are comfortable with – a friend, loved one, or therapist. Having a witness or someone to validate your feelings can be helpful. Do not send the letter. The purpose is to help you identify what you need to address.
- Don’t be afraid of conflict. Some people shy away from potential conflict and don’t assert themselves or their needs until they can’t “take it” anymore. Others are afraid of losing control and tend to “fill up the pot until the lid blows.” Disagreements and conflict are a normal part of life.
- How we respond to conflict is shaped to a great extent by how it was modeled to us as children; it is a conditioned response. However, even a conditioned response can be changed. If your conflict style is ineffective, examine alternatives. View conflict as an opportunity to resolve issues. Effective conflict management can prevent anger and resentment, clear the air, improve your relationships, and lead to potential solutions for existing problems.

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*If you need help managing your anger, or know someone who does, call the OAAP at 503-226-1057 or 800-321-6227. The attorney counselors can assist you and provide referrals to resources.*