



STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR

Anger

Anger is common with PTSD and anger is an understandable response to trauma. Anger is an emotion that can range from mild annoyance to intense rage. People may become angry when they feel threatened, harmed, or powerless. When faced with extreme threat, people often respond with anger. Anger can help a person survive by shifting his or her focus. The person focuses all of his or her attention, thought, and action toward survival. In a survival situation, we need a certain amount of anger, and it is a natural response to threats. However, uncontrolled anger can result in many problems—causing emotional distance between you and your loved ones, leading to violence and reckless behavior, and making it more difficult to recover from a traumatic event. You may not be aware of how your thoughts and beliefs have been affected by trauma. For instance, since the trauma you may feel a greater need to control your surroundings. This may lead you to act inflexibly toward others. Your actions then provoke others into becoming hostile towards you. Their hostile behavior then feeds into and reinforces your beliefs about others. It can be a vicious cycle.

There are three main approaches to how people deal with their anger. Expressing, calming, and suppressing.

- Expressing in a non-threatening assertive way is the healthiest. This way, you clearly state what you need in a non-aggressive way and get your needs met without hurting others.
- Calming is where you are able to calm yourself both inside and outside. You take control by calming your breathing, your reactions, and letting the feeling subside. While this is good for you personally in the moment, it may not help you express your feelings or resolve the situation that made you angry in the first place, leaving you open to become angry again for the same reason.
- Suppressing is a dangerous way to deal because anger has to have an outlet. Some will try to not think about it, think about positive things, or holding in your anger. This can lead to anger turning inward on you personally. People who suppress anger can become passive aggressive, depressed, and/or hostile personally.

*A word of caution here, while it's not good to suppress your anger, neither is just getting it out. Going all hulked out, 0-60 in a nanosecond, actually escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to help you (or the person you're angry with) resolve the situation. It is best to figure out what sets your anger off and work on strategies to deal with them or to keep you from going over the edge.

Learning how to deal with anger is an important part of PTSD treatment.

Ways of Interacting with other People

"The trauma we endured caused physical changes in our brain. The amygdala which controls flight or fight is now always on. We can go from 0-60 in a nanosecond. It is what kept us alive. Every situation is an emergency." – A Navy Veteran

Aggressive/Explosive Fight

- Yelling, barking orders, talking down
- Not caring about others views, thoughts, or opinions, imposing your will on them, my way or the highway.
- Respecting self and disrespecting others.

Passive/Avoidant Flight

- Giving in or giving up, isolating, not caring about self wants or needs.
- Respecting others and disrespecting self.

Assertive

- Standing up for yourself without attacking others, being firm and polite
- Respecting self and respecting others.

Use these behavior inventories to assess yourself. Check any you have done in the past week.

AGGRESSIVE:

___ Talked down (i.e insults, cursing, put downs, made someone feel less than)

___ Issued verbal threats

___ Used physical aggression to scare or control

___ Approached problem as "Drill Sargent"

___ Yelled or used a sarcastic/demeaning tone

___ Glared at or "stared down" the other person

___ Add your own: _____

PASSIVE:

- ___ Did not communicate your thoughts and feelings
- ___ Felt paralyzed or “froze up” with anger or fear
- ___ Withdrew or walked away in an attempt to avoid addressing problem
- ___ Used a form of negative distraction (risky behaviors, substance abuse)
- ___ Add your own: _____

ASSERTIVE:

- ___ Asked clarifying questions instead of making accusations
- ___ Communicated your needs w/o demeaning the other person
- ___ Took a time-out
- ___ Used polite language (e.g., no swearing or insults)
- ___ Approached problem with a constructive attitude and tone
- ___ Controlled your display of anger despite the other person’s reaction
- ___ Add your own: _____

Dealing with Anger

Veterans normally deal with anger by either exploding or avoiding the situation. So let’s look at how you deal with anger.

Do you explode or avoid things when you are angry? _____

How do you explode when angry? _____

How does exploding in anger make you feel? _____

How does exploding in anger make the other person feel? _____

How do you avoid anger or conflict? _____

What is the result when you avoid anger and conflicts? _____

How does avoiding anger and conflicts make you feel? _____

How do you want to feel after a conflict? _____

Who do you have the most anger or conflict with? _____

What do you want to be the outcome of conflict with that person? _____

How do you want that person to view you after a conflict? _____

What do you fear most when your angry? _____

What changes do you think you can make to get what you need out of the relationship?

Is there anything you need to tell the person who makes you angry to work together to come up with a solution? _____

Anything else? _____

Anger Cues

Anger cues are warning signs telling you that you're becoming angry. They can be a physical or bodily response, a behavior, a feeling, or a thought.

- Physical Cues are felt in your body. They include feeling warm, or sweating, or even feeling a rush of energy. Rapid breathing and an increased heart rate are also physical cues that you may be becoming angry as well as tightened muscles..
- Behavioral Cues are things that you do. Behavioral cues include yelling, clenching your teeth or fist, slamming doors, etc.
- Emotional Cues are things that you feel. Feelings of being frustrated or jealous may be cues that you're becoming angry.
- Thought Cues are things that you think or that you "say" to yourself. The way you think about or interpret an event can increase your anger level and lead to angry behavior.

What are your body's physical warning signs for anger?

___ Breathing

___ Muscle Tightness

___ Temperature

___ Sweating

Other _____

What are your body's behavioral warning signs for anger?

___ Clenched Fist

___ Yelling

___ Slamming Doors

___ Clenching Teeth

Other _____

What are your body's emotional warning signs for anger?

Feeling frustrated

Becoming jealous

Not trusting people

Other _____

What are your body's thought warning signs for anger?

Suspecting others of being against you

Feeling every situation is all or nothing

Perceiving an attack

Closing your mind to the idea the other person might have a point

Other _____