



SESSION 2.

Managing Emotions

Emotions are what make us human, and everyone has a full range of them. Emotions are not good or bad, but we need to be mindful of how we express them. Expressing emotions in healthy ways is key to building and maintaining strong relationships.

Ignoring Emotions Hurts Your Body

We may ignore or avoid our emotions because they feel so uncomfortable. For instance, when Peter's father died, he felt like the sadness might eat him up inside, so he stayed busy. He went out every night to distract himself. When people offered their sympathy or asked him about it, he said he was fine and changed the subject. After a while, he forgot he was sad, but his body knew it. He became really depressed. He cried easily, sometimes it was hard for him to breathe, and he had trouble getting out of bed in the morning. Avoiding emotions can:

Make the emotion stronger



**Increase physical stress and increase
the risk of developing certain illnesses,
such as high blood pressure and heart disease**



**Result in poor memory and
more misunderstandings in conversations**



Create anxiety or depression

Recognizing Emotions

People often bury or ignore feelings that are uncomfortable, such as fear or sadness. One of the emotions people find most difficult to manage is anger. Some people let anger control them and use it to control other people. Some people have learned so thoroughly to ignore their anger that they don't even know when they are feeling it. Being aware of what is going on in our bodies can help us know what we are feeling.

Anger gives us physical signals. Below is an exercise to help you recognize your anger. Put a check mark in front of the emotions or feelings that apply to you when you feel angry.

- Feel tense all over
- Have tense muscles in my face
- Grind my teeth
- Tighten my fists
- Get red or feel hot in the face
- Get goose bumps
- Have chills
- Have a racing heart
- Feel sick to my stomach
- Feel a tightening in my neck
- Sweat a lot
- Have hot or cold flashes

- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

There are several unhealthy ways that people manage anger. They may *stuff* it. They pretend, to themselves and others, that something doesn't bother them, but ultimately the anger builds up into resentment.

They may try to *delay* anger. They may think if they ignore their angry feelings, those feelings will go away. But if the cause of the anger is an ongoing problem, the anger won't go away. Delaying it will have the same effect as ignoring it. The anger will build and may become explosive.

Shifting anger is another unhealthy way to manage this emotion. This is when people take their anger out on somebody with whom they are not really angry. For example, a person might be angry with a boss but show the anger at home toward his or her spouse.

Do you use any of these unhealthy ways of managing anger?

Put a check mark in front of the following questions if the answer is yes.

- Have you ever told someone that you weren't angry, but that person told you that you looked angry?
- Have you ever felt angry and used a mood-altering drug to feel temporarily better?
- Have you ever tried to ignore your angry feelings?
- Do you sometimes believe that it will be "safer" to experience your anger later?
- Have you ever expressed anger at one person even though you were actually angry with someone else?

Expressing Emotions

While emotions are neither good nor bad, it is important to express your feelings in healthy ways. Have you ever expressed anger in these unhealthy ways?

Put a check mark in front of examples that apply to you.

- Blaming and attacking someone (“It’s your fault.”)
- Using sarcasm (“Sure, I’d love to wash your dishes forever.”)
- Exaggerating the issue (“You always mess up our plans.”)
- Yelling, screaming, and using abusive language (“You’re stupid.”)
- Withdrawal and pouting (“No, nothing’s wrong.”)
- Projecting guilt (“If you only tried harder.”)
- “You” statements (“You make me feel so worthless.”)
- Physical violence (hitting, throwing objects, making threats)

Think back to a time when you were angry and used one or more of these ways of expressing anger.

■ What were you trying to accomplish?

■ How did you want the other person to feel?

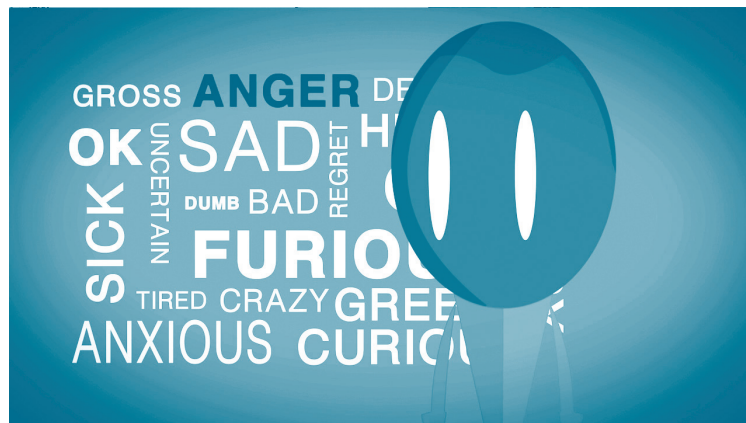
■ What were the results?

Positive Ways to Express Anger

Anger can be expressed in healthy ways. It shouldn't be used to punish or intimidate or control others. However, it is appropriate to be assertive in setting boundaries for yourself and deciding what you will do in response to what you are angry about. Assertiveness, being self-assured and confident without being aggressive, can help people protect themselves, improve communication, and build healthier, stronger relationships.

Here are some tips for healthy ways to express or deal with anger.

- Don't respond while you are feeling angry. Wait until you are calm, but don't put it off indefinitely.
- Exercise self-control. Use deep, slow breaths to calm down.
- Listen and accept that other people may have a point of view different from your own.
- Don't repeat your reasons for being angry over and over again.
- Notice what you are feeling and then let it go.
- Step back and look at the situation. Is this really that big a deal?
- Learn from your anger. Is there something that needs to be changed?
- Find a positive way to say why you are angry without exploding or blaming.



■ Write an example of a time when you have used one or more of these tips to deal with your anger.

■ Imagine yourself using one or more of these tips in the future to express your anger in a positive way. Then write out the scene. What would it look like?

SUMMARY

- Expressing emotions in a healthy way helps build strong relationships.
- Ignoring emotions can make the emotions stronger, increase risk of illness, result in poor memory, and cause anxiety or depression.
- Recognizing negative emotions prevents unhealthy ways of managing them.
- Expressing negative emotions in a healthy way improves communication, makes you feel better, and builds healthier relationships.

CHALLENGE

Identify people you know well who seem to express their emotions in healthy ways. Ask these people what they do to manage their emotions.