

ANGER

Everyone gets angry, feels - to one degree or another - the arousal of resentment, the turmoil of rage, the heart-thumping seething of fury. We feel irked, exasperated, irritated, vexed, annoyed, and enraged. We don't always like to admit it, but all of us get angry at one time or another.

Anger is a normal human emotion. To never feel anger is to never be fully human. Yet intense, uncontrolled anger can hurt or destroy, wreaking havoc and pain. Anger - angry people - can kill.

A cruel blow, once delivered, can never be taken back. All the tearful apologies and gifts given as peace offerings can't erase the pain of physical and verbal punches delivered in anger. Uncontrolled anger can leave permanent marks.

What to do then? Swallow our anger? Put on a brave, smiling face? Deny the anger exists and hope it will go away?

When pushed down and hidden, anger can be like a slow-acting acid splashed on our self-esteem. It gnaws, eats, burns, corrodes until nothing is left but a raw-edged hole, an empty pit of despair. Sometimes, suicide looks like the only way out. So what does any of this have to do with you?

This is about anger and the process of recovery from alcoholism and other forms of chemical dependency. We're not going to find an angrier person than an alcoholic, unless we look at the spouse and children of an alcoholic. And getting sober doesn't make all that anger magically disappear.

Sometimes sobriety makes anger worse. When an addict is drinking or drugging, we have something to blame the anger on. The booze. The drugs. The drunkenness. We can hate the *alcohol*, we can detest the *alcoholism*, and somehow still manage to love the alcoholic. Take away the drinking or other drug use and what do we have left? All that anger with nothing to blame it on! And that doesn't feel good.

We end up confused.

When an alcoholic first sobers up or an addict becomes clean, there isn't much of a change in family dynamics. The situation - and the anger - in the family are still far from normal, far from healthy.

We're supposed to be happy now, but the pain and anger don't magically disappear. We still have work to do. Sobriety, in and of itself, is no guarantee for happiness. It is the starting point, the single most important thing necessary to begin the *process* of recovery.

The *process*.

Remember that. *Recovery is a process.* Sometimes dramatic changes happen in a blinding flash of insight, a sudden and surprising awakening in our minds. Most of the time, it's a slow and painstaking thing, a snail-like crawl to growth, maturity, and happiness.

And the process takes work.

Learning to deal effectively with anger is part of the process. Each of us must go through our own recovery process.

We have special problems with anger. In alcoholic and addict families, anger is often expressed in extreme ways, through violence, emotional abuse, and neglect, or through abandonment. We become afraid of anger; when we express it, we may be overwhelmed with feelings of guilt. Fear, anger, guilt; for us these emotions are all tied together in a negative way.

Because we're afraid of anger, we say, "Well, the drinking or drugging has stopped, so let's put all the bad things away and forget they ever happened." We try to ignore our angry feelings, hoping all the time they'll go away. But they don't. They usually get worse. Then we feel guilty because we're thinking such venomous thoughts and feeling so vicious. And when that happens, we end up behaving in ways that can hurt us and the people we care about.

We have special problems with fear, anger, and guilt.

Our goal is learning to accept angry feelings as normal. We want to learn to deal with anger without fear and guilt. Most importantly, we don't want our anger to hurt us or other people.

An important note: First, we have to get sober and/or clean.

RULE #1 FOR ALCOHOLICS AND OTHER ADDICTS **Sobriety first, then emotional fine-tuning**

Learning to deal with our anger and resentments, learning to forgive people who have hurt us, and learning to forgive ourselves for the wrongs we have committed can be very important in our own recovery.

Anger is a normal emotion. Normal emotions don't have to be eliminated. If we've dulled our emotions with alcohol or other drugs for years, feeling of anger during recovery can frighten us. Unresolved anger, whether it is openly discussed or not, can hinder the recovery process.

Some anger is fragmented and white-hot, loud, explosive, frightening. We recognise that kind of anger. We can see it and hear it and feel it. But there's another kind of rage: controlled, quiet, polite, ice-cold.

For positive recovery, this anger needs to be acknowledged, dealt with and resolved. We need to know there are healthy ways to express anger; that

the management of anger can contribute a great deal to the *process* of recovery, making it less stressful and reducing the chance of relapse.

There is no "quick fix" for any problem with human emotions. And there is no drug that will make anger go away and leave us alert, fully-functioning human beings.

We must be willing to look closely at the sensitive areas of our lives, to learn, and to risk and be open to change. We must be willing to work.

We have a natural aversion to dealing with these problems. Why? Because it can be painful! But chemical dependency is painful. It would be a great mistake to ignore where we have come from in our attempt to determine where we are going. The pain of recovery is nothing compared to the pain of addiction.

Before we decide to take the risks and do the work needed, we have to decide if we want the things that learning to deal with our anger will help us discover. Do we want:

- To love and be loved?
- To like ourselves?
- To reduce *much* of our anxiety?
- To enjoy sex?
- To become more healthy physically and mentally?
- To enjoy our work more?
- To have more caring friendships?
- To be less depressed?
- To learn to forgive those who have injured us and to earn forgiveness for the wrongs we have committed?

Find out if anger is interfering with your recovery process. Answer true or false to the following statements. Please, be honest. Fearlessly and searchingly honest. Fourth Step honest.

1. I don't show my anger about everything that makes me mad but, when I do - look out!
2. I still get angry when I think about the bad things people did to me in the past.
3. Waiting in line or waiting for other people really annoys me.
4. I fly off the handle easily.
5. I often find myself having heated arguments with the people who are closest to me.
6. I sometimes lie awake at night and think about the things that upset me during the day.

7. When someone says or does something that upsets me, I don't usually say something at the time, but later I spend a lot of time thinking up cutting replies I could and should have made.
8. I find it very hard to forgive someone who has done me wrong.
9. I get angry with myself when I lose control of my emotions.
10. People really irritate me when they don't behave the way they should, or when they act like they don't have the good sense God gave lettuce.
11. If I get really upset about something, I have a tendency to feel sick later, either with a weak spell, headache, upset stomach ache or diarrhoea.
12. People I have trusted have often let me down, leaving me feeling angry or betrayed.
13. When things don't go my way, I get depressed.
14. I am apt to take frustration so badly that I can't put it out of my mind.
15. I've been so angry at times I couldn't remember things I said or did.
16. After arguing with someone, I hate myself.
17. I've had trouble on the job because of my temper.
18. When riled up, I often blurt out things I later regret saying.
19. Some people are afraid of my bad temper.
20. When I get angry, frustrated, or hurt, I comfort myself by eating or using alcohol or other drugs.
21. When someone hurts or frustrates me, I want to get even.
22. I've gotten so angry at times, that I've become physically violent, hitting other people or breaking things.
23. At times, I've felt angry enough to kill.
24. Sometimes I feel so hurt and alone I feel like committing suicide.
25. I'm a really angry person, and I know I need help learning to control my temper and angry feelings because it's already caused me a lot of problems.

The more questions you answered yes to, the more you are prone to anger problems.

If you answered true to even one of the last four questions, your anger has reached a danger level!

From *Of Course you're Angry: A guide to dealing with the emotions of chemical dependence.* by G. Rosellini & M. Worden; Hazelden. 1985. USA.

UNRESOLVED ANGER

If we don't get back in touch with the hurt and pain - and deal with it - unresolved anger will continue to "press our buttons" and influence our life.

Unresolved anger fixates us at the point of pain. Learn to accept; learn to forgive; or else we won't be able to leave that point.

Unresolved anger and true intimacy cannot co-exist.

We obsess about unresolved anger. It consumes us. We cannot think straight.

Hurt people hurt people.

Anger is the emotional response to perceived injustice.

injustice

justify

punish

We punish ourselves most.

Emotional healing comes from dealing with the injustice with our hearts (not just our heads).

Ongoing quality sobriety cannot happen if we are loaded with unresolved anger.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is unresolved anger an important issue in recovery?
2. How does anger express itself in you?
3. What is the injustice causing the anger in your life?
4. How do you punish yourself?
5. How do you punish other people?
6. What are effective ways of dealing with your anger?