

15 Simple Ways to Overcome Anger

Can you recall the last time you were really angry at someone? So much so that you were physically shaken just at the thought of them? Rarely does this feeling of anger help us in getting what we want. Often, it will work against us, resulting in more pain, unnecessarily. Even the most gentle of personalities can temporarily turn into a vindictive rascal, if pushed far enough.

A friend of mine is going through a divorce with a spouse who is unreasonably prolonging the process. He's sad, hurt, upset, frustrated and very, very angry. Words of anger and hatred spout out of his – otherwise polite and thoughtful – mouth. He was no longer his authentic and peaceful self. And he didn't like who he was becoming. Through helping him come to a place of understanding and forgiveness of his ex-spouse with love, compassion and humility (we had to dig deep), I realized that the same tools can be used in dealing with other negative emotions.

For sake of simplicity, we will use anger as the target emotion to overcome. Keep in mind that it can be applied to overcome other non-conductive and intense emotions such as jealousy, guilt, hatred, regret and fear.

Why Do We Feel Like Crap?

*“It's amazing how much emotion
a little mental concept like 'my' can generate.”*

- Eckhart Tolle

Anger doesn't feel very good. It's pretty gross, actually. Our stomach tightens-up, we become sweaty, we react – instead of act – in survival mode. And anger clouds our judgment causing us to respond wildly out of emotion. We've all been there. Sometimes, it can get so intense that we tremble passionately while feeling strong hate towards other people. And when we cool down, we would wonder how we allowed ourselves to get in such a messed up state in the first place. The answer is: Very easily. Allow me to explain.

Emotion is our body's response to a thought, which could be triggered by an external situation. But this situation is seen through the lens of our own interpretation. Our lens is colored by the mental concepts unique to each of us; concepts like good and bad, mine and yours, like and dislike, right and wrong. Keep in mind we all have different lenses, thus interpretation conflicts are inevitable. For example, we feel very little emotion when someone else loses their wallet. But when it is our own money, we suddenly feel pain and the desire to hoard it back to us. The moment we've labeled something as “mine”, we will experience mental distress when we've interpreted that we have ‘lost’ it or are at the risk of losing it. Whether it is my wallet, my pride, my money, my house, my car, my job, my child, my stocks, my feelings or my dog, as long as we feel that it is lost or threatened, we will experience pain in the form of anger or other strong negative emotions.

We experience pain, because we have been trained since children to believe that the things which we have labeled as ‘mine’, are something that define who we are. We've identified with it and falsely believed that if we lost it, or face losing it, we lose ourselves. Suddenly, our ego has nothing to identify itself by. Who are we? This hurts our ego tremendously. In our minds, we feel entitled to more, whether it is more money, or more respect, or a better job, or a larger house. Amongst it all, we fail to see that our mind will always want more. Greed is a highly addictive state of mind, always growing, blinding us of reality, while convincing us that we're doing a reasonable thing.

Common Ingredients of Anger:

- **Unfairness** – We believe we have been treated unfairly. We tell ourselves we deserve more, and we buy into this story that someone has wronged us.
- **Lost** – We feel we have lost something we have identified ourselves with. Feelings, pride, money, car, job.
- **Blame** – We blame other people or external situations for having caused our loss, for taking advantage of us unfairly. The blame often only resides in our heads and is a product of our imagination. We fail to see things from other people's perspectives. We become deeply selfish.
- **Pain** – We experience pain, mental distress, and anxiety. The pain causes physical responses in our body, which disturbs our natural energy flow and state of wellbeing.
- **Focus** – We focus on the thing we don't want, and energize it by complaining about it passionately, and repeating it to as many people who will listen. This creates a downward spiral of anger. "What we focus on expands", this is true regardless of the emotion.

It is interesting that if there are two angry people unhappy with each other, both people feel a sense of loss, unfairness, pain and the need to blame the other person. Who is right? The answer is: both are right and both are wrong.

Why Should We Bother with Overcoming Anger?

Negative emotions like anger kick us into survival mode, as if saying to our body, "we are in danger". There is a physiological change that takes place in our body to prepare us for fight or flight. These physical responses disrupt the natural flow of energy in our body – affecting our heart, immune system, digestion and hormone production. A negative emotion is therefore toxic to the body and interferes with its harmonious functioning and balance. Prolonged anger, stress and holding grudges will hurt our adrenal gland and immune system. For women, stress on the adrenal gland can affect the reproductive organs (uterus, ovaries) causing them to exhibit abnormal behaviors, potentially resulting in sterility.

Aren't your physical and mental health worth more than the mental pressure you are voluntarily piling onto yourself? Is it worth it to react out of spiteful emotions and hurt feelings, so that we might temporarily satisfy our pride? Anger also clouds our judgment and we become consumed with problems and pain. Instead of cutting ourselves loose, free from the self-inflicted pain; we make irrational, unreasonable, regretful and hurtful decisions. In the case of divorces, the legal fees alone can drain one's savings, unnecessarily leaving both parties unhappy and poor. Nobody wins!

The Fundamentals of Change

Notice how quickly we can fall into a negative state of being? A split second, maybe. By the same reasoning it should take us the same amount of time to shift into a resourceful state of being. The challenge here is that we have been conditioned from a very young age to remain in an un-resourceful state. Nobody gave us the tools to shift our state into a positive one. Often, our parents didn't know how, and still do not know how.

When negative feelings arise, we have two choices,

1. To follow the habitual pattern we've learned since we were young, to react and allow the negativity to consume us.
2. Or, to interrupt the pattern we have been conditioned to follow, and in doing so build new neural pathways that allows for alternative possibilities.

There are essentially three ways to interrupt a behavioral pattern:

- **Visual** – Change your thoughts.
- **Verbal** – Change your language.
- **Kinesthetic** – Change your physical position.

Okay, let's dive into the practical stuff...

15 Ways to Overcome Anger

Some of these tools might be more effective for some of us than others. For me, "Look Up!!" has been the most effective (thus, I'm listing it first). I've also seen good results where several of these are used in combination.

1. Look Up!!!

The fastest way to change negative feelings is by changing our physical position right away. The easiest way to physically change is by moving our eye position. When we are in a negative state, we are likely looking down. Suddenly looking up (into our visual plane) will interrupt the negative patterns of sinking into the quick sand of bad feelings.

Any sudden physical change will do the trick:

- Stand up and stretch while letting out an audible sigh.
- Exaggerate and change your facial expressions.
- Walk over to a window where there is sunlight.
- Do 10 jumping jacks.
- Do a ridiculous dance that pokes fun at you.
- Massage the back of your neck with one hand while singing happy birthday.

Try this next time you feel a negative or unpleasant thought come up.

2. "What Do You Want?"

Sit down and write down exactly what it is that you want out of the current situation. Your job is to describe the end result you would like to see. Be clear, realistic and fair. Be specific with your description. Including dates of when you would like to see the results. Once you have this clearly mapped out, and when you find yourself drifting into negative thoughts of what you don't want, you can shift your focus on this list instead. Also, when we do this exercise consciously, we'll come to find that the arbitrary and materialistic things that we thought we wanted, aren't what we want, after all. Clarity is a beautiful thing.

3. Eliminate: Don't, Not, No

[Words such as Don't, Not, No, Can't](#) get us focused on the things we don't want. Language is powerful and can influence our subconscious mind, and ultimately our feelings. When you catch yourself using a negative word, see if you can replace it with another word of opposing meaning. Example: instead of saying "I don't want war," say "I want peace".

4. Finding the Light

Darkness can only be eliminated when there is light (like a lamp, or sunlight). In the same way, negative things can only be replaced by positive things. Remember that regardless of what is happening to us

externally, or how bad things appear in our mind, we always have the choice to speak and see things positively. I know this is harder to do when you're in midst of heated emotions, but I'm a big believer that there is something to be learned from every situation we encounter. Look for the lesson. Find something about the situation that you've gained, whether it's a material possession or an understanding or a personal growth. Find the light so you can uncover the darkness of your mind.

5. Surrender

Surrender to our ego's need to be right, to blame, to be spiteful, and to be revengeful. Surrender to the moment. Surrender to the pull to become worked-up by the situation. Become mindful. Watch your thoughts and learn to separate your thoughts from your own identity. Your thoughts are not you. Things will play out regardless of whether we become emotional or not. Trust that the universe will work its course and do its job. By not surrendering, we get worked up for nothing, and our body will suffer as a result of it.

6. Circle of Influence

When we are feeling down, it's easy to be sucked into the downward spiral of bad feelings. It really doesn't help to be around others complaining about the same issues. It's counter-productive to getting well. Instead, find a group of people with a positive outlook. When we are around such a group of people, they will remind us of things we already know deep within us, we can start to recognize the good, and the positives. When we are down, we can draw energy from them in order to rise above the problem and negative state. In the same way that being around negative people can affect you in a negative way, being around happy and optimistic people can raise our awareness, and help us move out of the un-resourceful state.

7. Gratitude Exercise

Find an uninterrupted space, and bring a notepad and pen with you. List (in detail) everything you are grateful for in your life, either in the past, or present; either experiences, relationships, friendships, opportunities or material possessions. Fill up the page, and use as many pages as you have things to be thankful for. Be sure to thank your heart and your body. This is a simple, yet underestimated tool to help us focus our attention on what matters. This exercise can also shift our state of mind from one of a lower frequency to that of a higher frequency. It also helps us to gain clarity and to remind ourselves that we have much to be thankful for. No matter how bad things get, we always, always have things to be grateful for. If anything, we have the opportunity of life, in which we have the freedom to grow, to learn, to help others, to create, to experience, to love. I've also found it particularly effective to add silent [meditation](#) for 5-10 minutes prior, and visualizing everything on your gratitude list after the gratitude exercise. Try it for yourself!

8. Meditation

[Meditation](#) is training for the mind; to calm the noise in our mental space, to lower our thought count, to draw out inner wisdom, and mostly it helps us to recognize and remain anchored in our divine state. Regardless of what is happening external to us, we have the capacity to remain centered, in a state of acceptance, of flow, of peace, and of love. When we are in this state, we are rational and have the clarity we need to handle any situation with grace, and with minimal stress on our body.

9. Breathing Relaxation Techniques

Most of us are shallow breathers, and air only stays in the top of our lungs. Deep breathing exercises will get more oxygen into our brains, and into the rest of our body. Try this:

- Sit up straight in your chair, or stand up.
- Loosen up clothing, especially if your stomach feels tight.
- Inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth.
- Put one hand on your abdominal area (over your belly button).
- When you inhale, feel your hand expanding as air is filled up in your diaphragm.
- When you exhale, feel your hand retracting to the initial placement.
- Count in your mind the number of inhales and exhales, and gradually level them off such that both take equal counts.
- Slowly, add a count to your exhale.
- Keep adding a count to your exhale until the count for exhales doubles that of the count for inhales.
- Repeat this breathing rhythm for 5 to 10 times.
- Keep your eyes closed in silence for a few minutes afterwards.

10. Laughter!

We cannot laugh and be upset at the same time. When we make the physical movement required to laugh or smile, we instantly feel light-hearted and joyful. Try it now: give me that beautiful smile of yours. I want a genuine and large smile now! How do you feel? Do you feel an instant jolt of joy? Did you temporarily forget about your problems? List out a series of movies that make you laugh and stock them up at home. Or meet up with a humorous friend who can really get you laughing. For my friend going through the divorce, I prescribed Episode 10 of “Survivor Gabon.” He laughed until his stomach hurt and told me the next day that he slept very well, without once thinking about the negativity that would otherwise trigger anger.

11. Forgiveness

For my little vindictive rascals out there, I know the idea [to forgive](#) your ‘enemy’ sounds counter-intuitive. The longer you hold on to the grudge, the more painful emotions you will experience, the more turbulence you are putting on your body, the more damage you are inflicting on your long-term health and wellness. Unable to [forgive](#) someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. And there’s no way around it.

12. Snap a Rubber Band

Wear an elastic/rubber band around your wrist, at all times. Every time you find yourself having a thought that would lead to a downward negative cycle, snap the rubber band. It might sting a little. But this actually trains our mind to avoid triggering those thoughts. Pain is an amazing motivator.

13. Identify and Eliminate Your Triggers

Sit down and brainstorm a list of reminders and activities that will trigger this negative emotion in us. It might be hearing the word ‘divorce,’ or someone’s name, or going to a particular restaurant. Commit to yourself to eliminate the mentioning of these triggers from your life. If we know something will upset us, why would we bother triggering it?

14. Identify What Anger Brings

List all the things you’ve gained as a result of being angry. When you’re done, go down this list and count the number of positive things that are actually conducive to your wellbeing. By the way, “making the other person suffer and feel pain” does not count as “conductive to your wellbeing.” This exercise helps us bring more awareness, rationality and clarity into the situation.

15. Seek Closure. Solve the Problem

To the best of your ability, do not drag anything on for the sake of “winning” or “being right”; it’s not healthy for anyone involved. Just because we surrender to the external events and choose not to give them any more attention, does not mean that we sit back passively to let others step all over us. Take action that will help you move onto the next step, and closer to resolution. Be proactive and thoughtful. The faster you can get the problem resolved, the quicker you can set yourself free, mentally.