



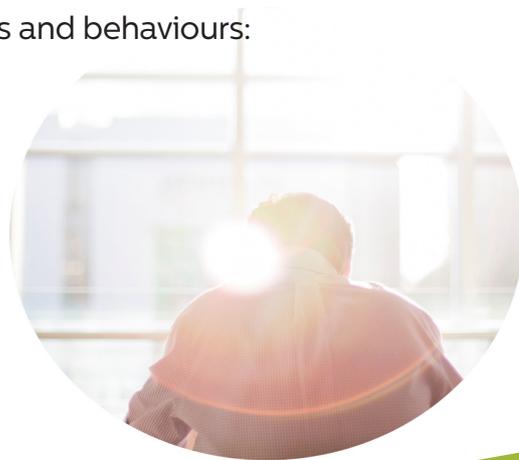
Anger & Thinking Patterns

Anger is a normal and basic human emotion. Depending on how it is managed and expressed, anger can have positive or negative consequences. Awareness of angry feelings can be helpful as it can signal when our rights are being violated or our needs are being ignored by others. There are situations in which anger is the most normal, natural and 'right' response and makes perfect sense, i.e. seeing a child being brutally beaten, injustice, cruelty toward animals or humans, etc.

The problem is not the emotion of anger, but the way in which it is expressed.

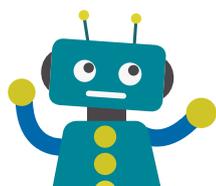
Some people seem as if they are angry all the time and about everything. Even when nothing really provokes them, they feel incited, taken advantage of, belittled, or abused in some way. Sometimes their perception is accurate, other times it is distorted. Anger changes thinking. People who are prone to anger tend to have a defensive pattern of beliefs, attitudes, expectations and behaviours:

- An insatiable need to be right
- A deep fear of being wrong
- A high need to control others
- A difficulty in saying, 'I don't know' and 'I was wrong'
- Fear of hearing new information that threatens your beliefs
- Fear of letting go
- Preoccupation with winning approval from others
- The need to be seen as tough, powerful and strong
- Pride at always being rational and logical
- Uncomfortable with expressing feelings
- Fear of being vulnerable
- Fear and severe discomfort about having bad feelings



Angry Thinking

We all have irrational thoughts, which keep us caught in anger. These errors in thinking are defence mechanisms that we have learned. They generally cause us to avoid responsibility for our own actions. Here are the most common errors in thinking. As you read through the types of 'angry thinking', try to identify which ones most apply to you.



Over-generalised thinking – Over-generalised statements are exaggerations. For example, ‘He never considers my opinion’. ‘You always interrupt me.’ ‘I have to do all the work.’ ‘Everybody picks on me’. Watch your language for ‘never, always, should, everybody’.

Making an assumption and running with it – What you assume is only what you assume. Assumptions may or may not be true. There may be other reasons why things happen. Generate multiple reasons why you think something has happened. Check out your assumption with others to get to the facts of the issue.

Fortune telling – Fortune telling is projecting your assumption on future events based on what happened in the past. It is assuming that what happened in the past will happen in the future. When you say, ‘I bet that this will happen,’ you are predicting the future. You may or you may not be right.

Focusing on the other person’s behaviour in the past not the present – Some people live so much in the hurts of the past that they do not realise that another person has changed or is trying to change. They keep an old version of the person in their mind. Sometimes people do change, so do an update in your mind about them.

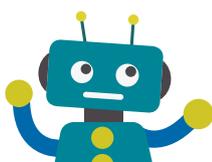
Piggybacking is bringing up old issues from the past during an argument, which diverts the argument into old unresolved hurts and pain while avoiding the current issue. ‘You have been doing this to me for years. Last year, you did this to hurt me... I must bring it up again and again.’ Piggybacking diverts the argument to accusations, so that the main thing you are fighting about does not get solved.

Closed-mind thinking – ‘Don’t tell me anything.’ ‘I know best for me’ kind of thinking. Stubborn insistence on one’s own opinion without taking in information from others can become problematic.

Black or white thinking – There is no middle ground or grey area in black or white thinking. Certain people are seen as either totally bad or good. Situations are either/or. There is no understanding of where the other person is coming from, only judgment. ‘I’m right and you are wrong’ always leads to a ‘lose-lose’ situation.

Preoccupation with right and wrong and perceived injustice – Blaming others is a way of life for some people. If you hear yourself continually saying, ‘It’s not fair!’ then you are focusing on the negative instead of going into problem solving. Much of life really isn’t fair. Keeping score of slights from others and dwelling on them creates a climate of hurt and suspicion. Focusing on unfairness keeps us caught in anger, resentment and grudges.

Grudge holding is a difficult habit to break. People who harbour grudges have deeper issues of mistrust. This is a learned behaviour that is prevalent in some families. It appears to be a way to attempt to control negative situations by retaining the angry feelings. Grudges are a habit of feeling self-righteous and avoid dealing with the real problem.





Entitlement thinking – This way of viewing the world is to believe ‘You must agree with me and do things my way or have the right (I’m entitled) to get angry’. Empathy, which is missing here, is the ability to see things from the perspective of another person and feel compassion.

Always putting the blame on others – For some people, the first reaction to a problem is to find someone to blame. Blaming is a defence mechanism to avoid taking personal responsibility for the situation. The blamer rapidly finds fault in the other person and criticises them. Trying to find a solution to the problem is more effective than looking for someone to blame.

What you say to yourself about the event determines your anger response:

Turn the anger on the other person

- I’ll show him
- It’s not fair
- I hate him
- I’ll show him

Turn anger on self

- I’m exposed
- He doesn’t care I’m wrong
- I’m guilty (bad)

Withdrawal

- I can’t deal with this
- This is dangerous
- Let me out of here

Divert

- Let’s joke
- I’ll divert attention
- I feel sick

Deal with it

- I’m in charge here
- I’ll breathe and deal with this
- We can talk about this

- I can handle this
- Let’s take time out to cool down and come back
- I’m safe. It’s okay
- Yes, I’m angry and I’ll just watch what I’m thinking

These statements remind you that you are in charge, not your anger

