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Anger Management

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- Adopt a new outlook on difficult situations
- Manage your daily stresses and strains
- Balance the effects of your temper

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Anger Management

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DUMMIES®

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By Gill Bloxham and W. Doyle Gentry, PhD



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W. Doyle Gentry, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and Director of the Institute for Anger-Free Living in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is a Fellow in the American Psychological Association and was the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. In Dr Gentry's four-decade career as a scientist-practitioner, he has authored over 100 publications, including eight books, and is a pioneer in the fields of health psychology, behavioural medicine and anger management. He has previously served on the faculty of Duke University Medical Center and the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston. Gentry has conducted training seminars for lay and professional audiences throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. He has also served as a consultant to major industry, where he specialises in conflict management, team building and health promotion.

Dedication

From Gill: This book is for Nige Coles, warrior and true friend. Anger is an energy.

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Basically, we are all dummies when it comes to anger management – a field that remains a work in progress. I learn more every day about ways to harness this complicated and, at times, troublesome emotion, and being able to share this education with my readers is a pleasure. If this book changes the life of a single person for the better, then I am satisfied that the hard work that went into it was worthwhile.

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Introduction

Anger is a natural part of life – one of the rainbow of emotions all humans feel and recognise. Anger is also a reaction that’s built into your nervous system – a survival mechanism intended to keep you safe. No one chooses to be angry. In fact, anger is one of the first emotions mothers recognise in their newborn infants. So, it’s never too early to start anger management.

On the other hand, the way you manage anger is down to you – your responsibility and your choice. You don’t have to be a victim of your own anger – you can choose how you respond when the world doesn’t treat you the way you want it to. You have just as much choice about how you express your anger as you do about what colour shirt you wear, what you eat for breakfast, or who you choose to be friends with. You also have a choice about how much of yesterday’s anger you carry into the future and how you react to anger you may feel tomorrow. If we didn’t believe that, we wouldn’t have spent so many years of our professional lives working with people making those choices!

No one is exempt from problematic anger. Anger is a very democratic emotion – it causes problems for men and women, kids and the elderly, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, people of all cultures and ethnic backgrounds, believers and nonbelievers. Tens of millions of human beings needlessly suffer from what we call *unhealthy anger* – anger that literally destroys happiness in life – each and every day of their lives.

Anger isn’t something that can – or should be – cured. But you have to *manage* it well – at home, at work, and in your most intimate relationships – if you want to benefit from it. *Anger Management For Dummies* tells you how to manage your anger by focusing on the positive – how to get a good night’s sleep, how to change your perspective on life, why owning up is better for you than ranting, how to turn conflicts into challenges, and much more. Anger management has moved far beyond the simplistic (if well-intentioned) advice of years ago to ‘count to ten’ or take a couple of deep breaths every time you get angry – and that’s good news!

About This Book

How do you know when you have too much anger? Do you determine that for yourself, or do you let other people make that call? If you’re not physically aggressive – physically hurting other people or punching holes in

walls – does that mean you’re not angry? Does it really help to rant, to get things off your chest, or are you better off keeping your mouth shut in order to keep the peace? Can angry people really change, or do they have to go through life suffering because that’s just the way they are? And what should you do if you’re on the wrong end of someone else’s anger? These are all important questions that *Anger Management For Dummies* answers for you.

When we wrote *Anger Management For Dummies*, we had four basic goals in mind:

- ✔ **We wanted to show you that anger is more than a four-letter word – it’s an extremely complex emotion that has meaning well beyond the crude and hurtful words people use to express it.** Understanding all about anger is the foundation of anger management.
- ✔ **We wanted to illustrate all the various ways that anger can – and does – negatively affect your life when it occurs too frequently, is too intense and lasts too long.**
- ✔ **We wanted to explain that anger management occurs in three distinct time frames – yesterday, today and tomorrow.** The strategies we propose to manage anger will, of course, differ depending on whether you’re trying to let go of some old anger, deal with the anger you face today, or prevent anger that you’re otherwise likely to experience tomorrow.
- ✔ **We wanted to show you that managing anger is something that is entirely within your power – and not something you have to seek professional help for – if you’re willing to make the necessary lifestyle changes outlined in this book.** It doesn’t matter how old you are or how long anger has been a part of your life – it’s never too late to manage your anger better.

Anger Management For Dummies isn’t one of those 12-step books where you have to read (and follow the advice) of Step 1 before you can proceed to Step 2, and so on. It’s a resource book containing all the information we have at our disposal after our combined experience of six decades of combined clinical practice with clients and scientific research on anger management. You don’t have to start with Chapter 1 and read straight through to the end of the book. You can look at the Table of Contents, find something that interests you, and start there. You may want to focus on the area in which you’re having the most trouble controlling your temper – with family, for example. Or you may want to head straight for a chapter on managing stress (one of the most common causes of anger). We’re not even suggesting that you read the whole book – that’s up to you.

Conventions Used in This Book

We didn't want *Anger Management For Dummies* to be yet another book written by psychologists for psychologists. This book is for everyone who wants to lead their life without anger interfering, so we've eliminated all the professional jargon, and used terms and ideas that we know work with the many different people we've met.

We've also tried to make reading *Anger Management For Dummies* an enjoyable experience. Just because anger is a serious topic doesn't mean that you need to approach it with a deadly serious attitude. If you can enjoy learning something new, you're more likely to remember it, and to follow it through!

Most important, *Anger Management For Dummies* is full of stories about people just like you, who have successfully overcome their difficulties with anger – even a lifetime of anger. The people you'll read about are combinations of many relatives, friends and clients we've known over the years, who've taught us what truly works for healthy anger management. The quotations and dialogues included in these stories are based on our memories of conversations we have had.

You don't have to know psychology to understand this book. But we do use a couple of conventions:

- ✔ When we introduce a new term, we put the word in *italics* and define it shortly thereafter (usually in parentheses).
- ✔ When we list an email or web address, we use a special font called `monofont` so you know exactly what to type.

And that's it!

Foolish Assumptions

We made a few assumptions about you when writing this book:

- ✔ **You may or may not have a problem with anger – but if you don't have a problem with anger yourself, you know or love someone who does.** If you didn't buy this book for yourself, you bought it for your husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter, father, mother, friend or work colleague. Or one of those people bought it for you.
- ✔ **You don't want to know everything there is to know about anger – you just want to know what you need to know to manage anger effectively.** Scientists have studied anger for years, but you won't find a list of scientific jargon in these pages. We focus on proven strategies to help you manage your anger, and that's it.

✔ You're probably looking for useful information and hints about how to change. We've laid this book out to make it simple to find what you're interested in, using the understanding we've developed through working with people facing exactly the same challenges. All of the information and examples you see have already worked for others – we hope you'll find in the following chapters those that work for you.

How This Book Is Organised

We've organised *Anger Management For Dummies* into six parts and 23 chapters. You can also find an online Cheat Sheet for quick prompts to deal with focused problems (see inside the front cover for the web address). Here's what you can find in each part.

Part I: The Basics of Anger

In the first three chapters, we acquaint you with some basic facts about anger as a natural human emotion, the role that emotions like anger play in your life, and help you decide whether anger is poisoning your health, work or relationships. Chapter 2 shows you how to measure your anger and distinguish between *healthy* and *unhealthy or destructive* anger. We want you to be free to decide how to respond to anger (and situations that trigger it) instead of just reacting in a knee-jerk way that almost always takes you somewhere you really don't want to go.

Part II: Dealing with Past and Present Anger

In this part, we help you tackle the challenge of managing anger *in the moment*. Most people get into trouble simply because they don't know what to else to do – apart from what they already know – when they begin to feel anger build up. In effect, it's what you don't know (for example, that all emotions are temporary) and don't do (for example, let the other person have the last word) that leads to anger mismanagement. Chapter 6 offers you a structured, multistep, *effective* method you can use to keep your cool.

If you're like either of us, you have found yourself getting much angrier than the situation you're in requires. You're left with the question: 'What on earth got into me?' Chances are you were influenced by some old anger you were unaware of at that moment that was just waiting for an opportunity to express itself. In Chapter 7 we offer some tips on how not to let today's

anger become tomorrow's anger – strategies such as 'time's up!' and the ten-minute rant. In Chapter 8 we get into the details of achieving forgiveness as applied to anger management. We're not looking at forgiveness in a spiritual sense here, but rather as a tool for letting go of anger from the past that is no longer helpful and is long past its sell by date.

Part III: Preventing Future Anger

Chapters 9 to 12 show you ways to deal with anger *before it happens*. Stepping in early is a new approach – most anger-management strategies are designed to work after the situation has started to get out of hand. We believe it's more difficult (and sometimes feels impossible) to use the techniques and ideas for healthy anger management when you're in the middle of a rage! Preventing anger can be the most exciting aspect of anger management. In this part, we also talk about mental outlook (attitudes you learn and carry with you in your life), which influence what you expect and will tolerate from the world around you, why it's essential to stop disguising your anger and just say what you feel (but politely!), how to own up to yourself about your anger, how to become the type of person who doesn't trigger so much anger, and – perhaps most important – how you can use your anger positively. If you can make anger a positive influence, you no longer have to attempt to avoid it.

Part IV: Lifestyle Changes That Improve Your Anger and Health

We both believe that living a healthy lifestyle enormously improves your chances of not getting angry. Why? Because many hundreds of people that we've met and worked with, and tens of thousands of others, know through experience that treating your body well helps to steady body-based emotions like anger. In this part, we show you how unhealthy anger is a by-product of an unhealthy lifestyle. If you're on the verge of stress burnout, if your daily diet consists mainly of caffeine and alcohol (with some nicotine thrown in for good measure!), if your life is all out of balance (too much work, too little play), if you never get a good night's sleep, if you carry the whole world on your shoulders (unsupported by others or by spiritual faith), and if you're utterly depressed or feel hopeless, why on earth *wouldn't* you be angry? Change those things and you'll see some major changes in how angry you are.

Part V: Managing Anger in Relationships

Most of us sort our day-to-day lives into areas where we spend the most time – work, home and in intimate relationships. These two chapters are designed to address anger-management issues that are situation specific – what works at work doesn't necessarily work at home. The benefit of having an honest and personal discussion with family in an effort to reduce conflict may not be useful in a meeting with your bosses. Both chapters in this section offer a set of strategies aimed at turning hostility into harmony.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

If you're looking for quick ideas about how to raise a child with healthy anger balance, or you want some easy-to-remember anger-freeing thoughts or actions, you can find them here.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are those little pictures in the margins throughout this book, and they're there to draw your attention to certain kinds of information:



We highlight case studies with this icon, as personal stories are often really useful for illustrating a point. (We don't use real names (apart from our own) to protect our patients' identities.)



This icon alerts you to important ideas and concepts that you might want to remember and that you can use even when you don't have *Anger Management For Dummies* to hand.



Every once in a while, we talk about scientific research, as a lot of very useful knowledge about anger and human behaviour comes from psychological and biological research scientists. When we do, we mark the paragraph with this icon. You can read these paragraphs if you want, but the information they contain isn't essential to your understanding of the topic.



The Tip icon suggests practical how-to strategies for managing anger. You can even transfer the ones you find useful to a card to keep with you.



This icon appears when we have words of caution for you, or when we suggest you may need to seek professional help.

Where to Go from Here

Each part and chapter in this book is meant to stand alone in its discussion of anger management. Just choose a topic that interests you, and dive in.

If you do read *Anger Management For Dummies* thoroughly and you still find that you're struggling with anger, we suggest you seriously consider getting the help of a professional. There's no shame in this – seeking help for habits that cause difficulties is the most common reason to talk to someone independent. Anger management is a specialist field and you need to find someone who has qualifications and expertise in this area. If you're interested in a medical remedy for abnormal anger – one that focuses on prescribed medication – you need to find a psychiatrist (a qualified doctor who specialises in mental health) who specialises in this area. If you're more open to *psychotherapeutic strategies* (where change results from an interpersonal relationship between you and a therapist), look for a chartered clinical psychologist, cognitive therapist or mental health professional. Either way, be sure to get the help you need. A book like this wouldn't exist if you were the only person who feels this way!

