

# Anger Management: The Key to Relapse Prevention How to Control Your Anger Before it Controls You

by Steve Cutler | RELAPSE PREVENTION |

*Unresolved anger is probably the number one relapse trigger for people recovering from addiction — and the most insidious. Anger can seem like an uncontrollable force when we're in its grip. But by putting our minds to it and utilizing anger management techniques and tools, we can control angry feelings and thoughts before they control us.*

Anger and substance abuse are often tightly intertwined. Addicts use drugs and alcohol to cope with anger (and the uncomfortable feelings anger masks). Those same substances can exacerbate the anger, making the temptation to abuse even greater. It's a vicious cycle. That's why anger management is a prerequisite to getting and staying clean and sober — and vice versa.

## It's not the anger, it's what you do with it.

Disconcerting as it is when it flairs up, anger is just one in the range of emotions we experience, along with joy, sadness and fear. It would run through and out of the body on its own in five minutes or so once the triggering event passes. It's when anger escalates and we lose control of it that it becomes toxic.



## Your Anger Management Plan

The first step to gaining control of anger is to acknowledge you have a problem with it. How do you know if you do? Your anger is a real problem, and a serious relapse trigger, if:

- you get angry more than once or twice a day
- your anger is intense and long-lasting
- you flair up at the slightest provocation
- you are constantly irritable
- you act aggressively, saying or doing things you regret later

There are myriad of effective measures for getting control of your anger. Here are some the experts recommend.

**Take time out.** When you feel anger welling up, remove yourself from the situation before you speak or act — literally, by excusing yourself and stepping away, or by remaining quiet long enough to gain some emotional distance.

**Calm yourself down.** Do whatever works for you to dispel the adrenalin before you act out in anger: count to ten; take deep breaths; or visualize a relaxing or pleasant experience.

**Access the situation.** Look at why you got angry. Ask yourself whether the intensity of your anger is an overreaction to the circumstances. Chances are you'll find the situation might justify irritation or annoyance, but not rage.

**Focus on finding a resolution.** Change the subject in a charged conversation or argument, or excuse yourself for a moment, take a walk and come back to discuss how to resolve the conflict.

Intensive outpatient treatment services provided with respect and dignity.

Highly trained licensed and credentialed professional staff experienced in the field of addiction recovery.

# A Long Term Action Plan

Some actions you might want to make in your daily life to change your relationship with anger include:

**Stop ruminating.** People with anger issues tend to ruminate on situations that make them angry, intensifying the anger in the process. If you act soon enough you can short-circuit angry thoughts. One way is to simply say to yourself, "stop," and shift your attention to something else.

**Be Assertive.** Anger management is not about stuffing your feelings. It's about expressing feelings and opinions in a balanced, responsible way. Setting boundaries and communicating your expectations to people rather than acting out in anger builds self-respect and confidence.

**Seek help.** Work with a therapist specializing in anger management or join an anger management class or group.

**Use cognitive behavioral therapy techniques.** Cognitive therapy is one of the most effective methods for changing patterns of thinking and behavior. There are enumerable books on the subject, including the groundbreaking self-help guidebook, [The Feeling Good Handbook](#) by Dr. David Burns.

**Be careful with the company you keep.** Just as you limit your contact with individuals who abuse substances, avoid highly-charged people and situations you know are likely to trigger anger.

**Take it to your recovery support group.** Getting support for your efforts in managing your anger is essential and recovery groups are a safe place to find it.

**Read up on it.** Hundreds of books are available on Anger Management, including the comprehensive [Anger Management for Dummies](#), by psychologist Doyle Gentry, director of the Institute for Anger-Free Living in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Your anger is, yes, another "f\*\*king growth opportunity." The changes you need to make to turn uncontrolled, damaging "reactions" to situations that get you angry to reasoned, productive "responses" will not only support you in maintaining sobriety but help you to become more positive and productive and build healthy, nourishing relationships.



## About Steve Cutler

A freelance writer based in New York City and South Florida, Steve Cutler writes extensively on substance abuse, recovery and family systems.

[More Posts \(7\)](#)

Share this:



## Recovery Blog:

- [EMPLOYMENT & RECOVERY](#)
- [MOTIVATION & HOPE](#)
- [RELAPSE PREVENTION](#)
- [SUCCESS STORIES](#)
- [SUPPORT COMMUNITY](#)
- [WOMEN IN RECOVERY](#)

[Recovery Blog Home Page](#)

## Recent Articles:

- [H.A.L.T.  
Hungry, Angry, Lonely & Tired  
A recipe for success in recovery](#)
- [Fuzzy Thinking in Early Addiction  
Recovery](#)
- [Employment and Recovery  
Getting Back into the Workforce](#)
- [Avoiding Relapse Over the  
Holidays](#)



**Delray Beach  
Intensive  
Outpatient  
Program**

1200 N.W. 17th Ave., Suite 8

- Addiction Recovery.  
A Journey from the Head to the  
Heart