



# *Mountains Into Molehills*

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*Mountains Into Molehills* is a free internet book which aims to build understanding of self and others. It integrates relevant theory with practical step by step guides to coping with stressful situations, and handling difficult situations assertively.

## *Chapter Nine – Managing Anger*

1. *The Stages In Learning To Control Your Angry Response*
2. *Understanding The Nature Of Anger And The Need For It To Be Released*
3. *The Three Levels In Tackling Anger*
4. *Releasing Your Anger In Safe Ways*
5. *Become Familiar With Your Internal Process*
6. *Take Responsibility For Your Angry Response*
7. *Identify Your Last Second ‘Red Alert’*
8. *Plan In Advance What To Do When You Are On The Verge Of ‘Losing It’*
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10. *Release Your Anger In Safe Ways*
11. *Avoid The Build Up Of Anger*
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## *The Stages In Learning To Control Your Angry Actions And Responses*

- 1. Understand the nature of anger and the need for it to be released*
- 2. Become familiar with your process: the process which leads to angry impulses*
- 3. Take responsibility for your angry actions and reactions*
- 4. Learn to identify your last second 'Red Alert' and choose not to 'lose it'*
- 5. Plan in advance what to do whenever you are on the verge of 'losing it'*
- 6. Identify all your red zone situations and decide in advance not to 'lose it' in those situations'.*
- 7. Learn to release your anger in safe ways without hurting yourself and others.*
- 8. Learn to avoid the build up of anger by getting your needs met assertively*
- 9. Work with a therapist to resolve anger rooted in past events or to identify unknown causes of anger.*
- 10. How I work with clients with anger problems*
- 11. Other reading*

*1. Understand the nature of anger and the need for it to be released.*

*Anger is a perfectly natural response to threat, hurt, violation, frustration, and injustice. No human being is exempt from the capacity for anger.*

*Anger Management is about releasing anger safely without harm to self or others. My clients are often surprised when I share with them the need to continue to release anger but to do so in safe ways. If anger is bottled up inside us [suppressed] it has serious consequences in terms of stress and behaviours towards others. Suppressed anger is like a kind of poison inside us – it damages us physically, it interferes with our emotional health, it gets in the way of personal relationships. What is needed is to use ways of releasing anger without harming ourselves, or anyone else, emotionally or physically.*

*Anger is often expressed in passive aggressive ways. Passive aggressive behaviour is so called because it does nothing to solve the problem. Shouting, storming out of a room, slamming doors, waiting to get even, planning revenge, are all passive aggressive behaviours because these behaviours do nothing to solve the problem. Keeping silent and sulking when it would be more helpful to speak out is a common form of passive aggressive behaviour.*

*Sometimes passive aggressive behaviour is subconscious, outside the awareness of the angry person. The subconscious passive aggressive behaviours appear unintentional, accidental, but amount to acts of aggression. Examples are 'forgetting' and offering a diabetic food he would like which he cannot have because of the sugar content, 'forgetting' to pass on an important message, or 'accidentally' breaking someone's treasured possession.*

*Another unhealthy feature of anger release is called negative displacement. This is when our anger is switched to an innocent person or object, in other words 'kicking the cat'.*

***If you would describe yourself as 'an angry person' or 'always having had a short temper' the assistance of a therapist will almost certainly be required to help you deal with the underlying causes of your anger.***

### *Anger may be tackled at three levels*

- *Level One* is learning to control your temper and release your anger in safe ways
- *Level Two* is about dealing with obvious causes of anger e.g. some remembered or current injustice, loss, or frustration
- *Level Three* is about identifying and dealing with 'unfinished business' from your past. Sometimes this 'unfinished business' is not be within conscious recall and needs to be recovered and dealt with in therapy.

The self help work described in this article should be wholly or partially effective in dealing with *Level One* anger. Should the techniques described prove unsuccessful in giving you much improved control of your temper you should consult a therapist.

*Level Two and Level Three* anger is largely outside the scope of this book and needs professional help.

### *Controlling your temper and releasing your anger in safe ways*

It's OK to feel angry – anger is a natural emotion from which no human being is exempt. However It's important to manage the release of anger in an appropriate way.

- The right person
- The right place
- The right reason
- The right time
- The right length of time
- Not harming self
- Not harming others

*2. Become familiar with your process: the internal process which leads to angry impulses and loss of control*

*3. Take responsibility for your angry actions and reactions*

You need to accept that *self control is possible*. Nobody can make you 'lose it' without your permission [unless they have a magic wand!] People and events may cause an angry impulse but we can decide not to 'lose it'. Clients often say to me at first, 'He winds me up' or 'She winds me up'. I know they believe it, but it's simply not true. The fact is nobody and nothing can 'wind you up' without your permission. *You need to take responsibility for controlling your temper.*

*4. Learn to identify your last second 'Red Alert' choose not to lose it.*

You may think that your angry response is uncontrollable, that it just happens before you know it. This is not true. Every human being gets a warning signal when they are about to 'lose it', a 'Red Alert' that they are about to explode in anger. *You need to recognise your warning signal and control the explosion.*

Your warning signal is a sensation in your head or body you get just before you 'lose it'. It may only occur a fraction of a second before you explode. You need to learn to notice it. Right now you may be saying 'that's not true, I just explode without warning'. This is not true – you are kidding yourself. Next time you start to feel like 'losing it' pay particular attention to what is happening around your head and body. You will find your 'Red Alert' sensation for certain.

The warning signal may be a feeling in the pit of your stomach, in your chest, in the back of your neck. Maybe you hold your breath. Maybe it's some physical sign visible to others, some movement such as rubbing the back of your head, gritting your teeth, or unconsciously clenching your fists. Until now you may not have been aware of it. Ask your partner or a friend how they know when you are about to lose your temper.

#### *5. Plan in advance what to do whenever you are on the verge of 'losing it.'*

What do you do when you get your 'Red Alert' that an explosion is imminent?

Quite simply, you need to make the decision not to 'lose it'. Things people do and events can result in angry feelings but nobody and nothing can make you 'lose it' unless you decide to. You need to make the decision to hold your anger in check until it subsides or can be released at a more appropriate time and in a more appropriate way. Listed below are some of the most commonly used alternatives to 'losing it'.

- If you feel that you are in danger of 'losing it' walk away even if it's only for a short time. I find that going to the toilet or for a short walk works well.
- Have a thought, an affirmation, you always use to remind yourself of your power over your temper e.g. 'No-one can make me lose my temper – I will not give you that power over me'. Or make up your own affirmation, something that works for you.
- It is helpful to learn relaxation breathing so that when you feel angry you can calm yourself down.
- Another anger management skill is learning how handle someone who is angry with you and saying things which may provoke you.
- If it's your partner you get into conflict with coach him or her in these techniques so they don't 'lose it' with you. A good idea is to have a 'Time Out' agreement so that either of you can call for a cooling off period even if it's

only for a few minutes. [ Warning: If you take a time out without having agreed its an option you may find your partner becoming even angrier]

### *6. Identify all your 'red zone' situations and decide in advance not to 'lose it' in those situations*

Another key to controlling your angry reaction is to identify in advance those situations which trigger your anger. When you are in these situations you enter what may be thought of as a 'Red Zone'. The 'Red Zone' contains the triggers of your anger. Having listed your Red Zone situations you should then take a decision, one by one, that in future you will not 'lose it' in these situations.

For example, it is surprisingly easy to cure road rage by simply making the decision in advance 'I don't do road rage any more'

### *7. Learn to release your anger in safe ways without hurting yourself or others*

If you want to get rid of stored up anger and stop collecting fresh stores of anger you simply MUST use anger release techniques to dissipate the anger. All of these ideas are well proven and widely practiced. They result in the release of anger and the lowering of the internal stress that anger and frustration build.

- Let your anger out physically. e.g. go for long walks, knock seven bells out of a squash ball, buy a punch bag, and exercise regularly.
- Find yourself a big open space, or a room where you cannot be seen or heard. Go ballistic. Shout. Rant. Use obscenities. Do all the things you would not dream of doing with people around.
- Put a pillow in your lap and beat it with your fists until you feel tired and calmer.
- If your anger is directed at a particular person or several people you can still use the physical releases described above, but another way is to fantasise revenge. Stick a photograph or a drawing of someone you are angry with on the wall and throw darts at it until you feel less angry. Or tear their photograph into a thousand fragments and throw it down the toilet, then use the toilet. *Fantatising is OK, go ahead, enjoy it, but if you find yourself planning to act out your fantasy for real get counselling right away.*
- Let your anger out by fantasising telling the person at the centre of your anger exactly what you think, no holds barred. Pretend the person is in the room with you. Put a cushion on an otherwise empty chair and pretend it's them. Talk, shout, rant, rave. Get it off your chest; say what you would really like to say to them if it was safe and sensible to do so.
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- Alternatively you could write them an angry letter. DON'T POST IT! Write exactly how you feel. Let it all hang out, no holds barred. Include some

really choice obscenities. Then tear the letter up into a thousand shreds and burn it or flush it down the toilet imagining that it is your anger that is being flushed down the toilet.

#### *8. Learn to avoid the build up of anger by getting your needs met assertively*

'Anger Stamps' are collected when you store up anger and resentment instead of releasing your anger and frustration in an assertive way. The most effective way to avoid collecting anger stamps is to express your feeling in an assertive way to the other person/s involved [including learning how to say 'NO']. See Chapter Seven.

#### *9. Anger rooted deep in past events*

When your anger is directed towards a specific person or event there is a good chance you will find the advice given in this chapter effective. However, if your anger is directed at a number of people, or events, or is deep rooted in the past, or if you don't know why you are angry, you will need the help of a therapist...

#### *10. Further Reading*

*Managing Anger* by Gael Lindenfield

*The Feeling Good Handbook* by Dr David Burns

*Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone and others [the Harvard Negotiation Project]

*Getting To Yes* Roger Fisher & William Ury

*Counselling Couples In Relationships* An Introduction To The RELATE Approach