



## ANGER IN A MARRIAGE

**IF HANDLED PROPERLY, IT CAN BE HEALTHY**

Anger is a feeling, a natural emotion, a human response to perceived threats to your safety, well-being, and happiness. Though anger is one of the most common emotions, many people wish they and their loved ones had better ways to respond effectively when they feel angry.

Those who have studied anger indicate that more anger develops in marriage relationships than in any other relationship. Unresolved anger is the principal cause of violence toward another person. Successful anger management can mean the difference between marital joy and absolute misery. The success or failure of a marriage may depend on the way a couple copes with anger.

### Misconceptions of Anger

Many of us hold misconceptions of anger and these misconceptions can lead people to cover up their anger in different ways. Five common misconceptions are:

- If you don't look angry on the outside, you don't have a problem with anger.
- If you ignore hurt and anger, they will go away.
- Venting feelings and anger will make them go away.
- Playing the martyr (being nice all the time) and not expressing anger will not damage you.
- Your relationships will suffer if you express anger.

### Anger Can Be Healthy in a Relationship

David and Vera Mace, pioneers in the Marriage Enrichment movement, indicate that anger is healthy and normal and is present at different times in all marital relationships. Couples should give each other the right to be angry. The Maces have outlined a way of coping with feelings of anger that surface in almost every marriage.

When a spouse notices angry feelings coming on, those angry feelings should be expressed in words, but said calmly and with love. These feelings should be expressed in much the same tone as they would say, "I'm tired." Couples who effectively manage their anger agree that it is necessary to express and acknowledge it. They agree never to attack in anger even though they share angry feelings.

They should agree with each other that they won't yell at one another unless there is extreme danger. If a firm, non-yelling policy is developed, it will remove the need for a spouse to feel defensive or to develop any type of retaliatory anger. If both partners can express their anger calmly, they will be better able to find out how and why the anger is present in the marriage.

### Resolving Anger

The Maces developed an acronym (AREA) to help couples remember a better way of resolving anger:

- A** stands for admitting your anger to your spouse
- R** stands for restraining your anger and not letting it get out of hand by blaming or belittling
- E** stands for explaining calmly why you are angry
- A** stands for action planning or doing something about the cause of the anger

If anger is handled in this way, using a calm approach to identify the cause of the anger and what can be done about it, couples usually find that the anger was based on a misunderstanding or misinterpreted words or deeds. Couples may also find out that one partner was pushed beyond his or her level of tolerance. Many issues can be resolved if approached calmly.

### References

Fetsch, R.J. Managing anger effectively. Family and Youth Research Focus. (1991, March-April). Jenson, G.O. Anger in a marriage. Utah State University, December, 1996.

Source: Recker, N. (1997). Dealing with anger in a marriage. Retrieved January, 29, 2008, from the Ohio State University Extension, Family and Consumer Sciences website: <http://ohioline.osu.edu>

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## WE HAVE ANSWERS

### A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

At some point in our lives, we all run into problems that seem too big or too persistent to handle alone. Making the decision to find help is a sign of strength and courage. Having taken that crucial first step to seek help, you may wonder, "What is the best way to go about finding the right therapist?"

See your primary care physician to rule out a medical cause of your problems. If your thyroid is "sluggish," for example, your symptoms—such as loss of appetite and fatigue—could be mistaken for depression. After you know your problems are not caused by a medical condition, find out what the mental health coverage is under your insurance policy or through Medicaid/Medicare.

Get two or three referrals before making an appointment. EAP staff members can provide referrals that may be helpful. Specify age, sex, race, or religious background if those characteristics are important to you. Your primary care physician and/or your faith leader probably knows mental health care workers in your area. Also, ask friends, colleagues, neighbors, and family members for referrals. Chances are you will find that several people in your circle of acquaintances have been, or are, in therapy and can refer you to a competent therapist.

Call to find out about appointment availability, location, and fees. Many mental health professionals schedule evening appointments so you do not have to miss work. Selecting a therapist whose office is easy to get to—either from work or home—also can make a difference in your progress toward improved mental health. Ask the receptionist

- Is a sliding-scale fee offered?
- Does he or she accept your health insurance or Medicaid/Medicare?

Make sure the therapist has experience helping people whose problems are similar to yours. You may want to ask the receptionist about the therapist's expertise, education, and number of years in practice.

If you are satisfied with the answers, make an appointment. During your first visit, describe those feelings and problems

that led you to seek help. Find out:

- What kind of therapy/treatment he or she recommends
- If it has proven effective for dealing with problems such as yours
- What the benefits and side effects are
- How much therapy the mental health professional recommends

Different psychotherapies and medications are tailored to meet specific needs. Be sure the psychotherapist does not take a "cookie cutter" approach to your treatment. The best therapists will work with you to create a treatment program—perhaps using a single approach, perhaps incorporating several different ones—that works for you.

Although the role of a therapist is not to be a friend, rapport is a critical element of successful therapy. After your initial visit, take some time to explore how you felt about the therapist. For example:

- Was he or she someone you felt comfortable with?
- Did he or she seem to understand your concerns and address them?
- Is this a person you feel you can trust?
- Did he or she seem knowledgeable and suggest a therapy/treatment program that suits you?
- Was the "chemistry" right?

If the answers to these questions and others you may come up with are "yes," schedule another appointment to begin the process of working together. If the answers are "no," call another mental health professional from your referral list and schedule another appointment.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2003, April). Choosing the right mental health therapist (SAMHSA Pub. No. KEN98-0046). Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

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## May is Better Sleep Month



### Paybacks for Lost Sleep

Are you getting enough sleep? Do you have sleep debt? Lack of sleep, or "sleep debt," can leave you feeling tired, listless and sleepy on a daily basis.

Until your body starts getting the sleep it needs every night - most people need 8 hours, say the experts - it won't function as efficiently, your health will be at risk and even your job may be in jeopardy.

We've been searching for what Shakespeare called "sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care" for centuries. As time passes, though, we get less and less. Over the last hundred years, our average nightly sleep has dropped from 9 to 7.5 hours, with a third of adults now getting an hour less than that. And, says the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), almost half of adults admit they sleep less so they can work or play more.

### What's wrong with that?

Everything. Sleep is not simply a passive activity. It's one of the most important elements in a healthy lifestyle, as important as good nutrition and exercise, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).

Researchers know that a lack of deep sleep - as opposed to irregular or fragmented sleeps - undermines the body's ability to fight off disease. Sleepiness also reduces the quality and quantity of people's work by a third, according to the NSF. Nearly one in four of people younger than 30 say they're sometimes late to work because they're sleepy.

### Sleep debt

And where you find sleepiness, you find "sleep debt." Researchers have found that people who are deprived

of sleep have higher concentrations of sugar in their blood than those fully rested. That could contribute to development of a pre-diabetic condition.

While three out of five Americans told the NSF they have trouble sleeping several nights each week, fewer than half were asked about the quality of their sleep by a physician, and less than 20 percent initiated such a discussion.

### A prescription for better sleep

- Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
- Get regular daily exercise.
- Don't eat within 4 hours of going to bed.
- Establish a pre-bedtime routine - brushing your teeth or reading - that lets your body know it's time for sleep.
- Avoid caffeine six hours before bedtime. Avoid alcohol and tobacco two hours before bedtime.
- Get up at the same time every day, no matter when you went to sleep.
- Unwind from daily activities early so your mind is clear at bedtime.
- Sleep in a dark, cool, quiet room on a comfortable mattress.

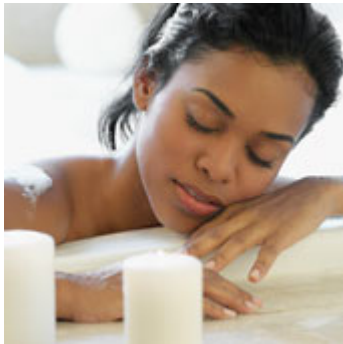
For more information: <http://www.bettersleep.org>

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## Relaxing Ways to De-Stress



We live in tense and stressful times. "But you can easily avoid adding to the turbulence," says Mike George, meditation teacher and author of *1,001 Ways to Relax*. "In fact, you can become one of those people for whom the world has a great need: those

who can stay calm in a crisis, cool in the midst of chaos and focused on the positive when everyone around you is inclined to reinforce the negative. If you can stay relaxed and calm, it helps others do the same."

Having spent 20 years researching stress and teaching meditation and stress management techniques, Mr. George is uniquely suited to suggest the following ways to avoid and deal with the stresses in your life.

### Slow it down

- Forget yesterday's mistakes. Today is a new day. Your mind has been refreshed by sleep, and there's no need to believe that yesterday's misjudgments or misfortunes will repeat themselves.
- Decide to be happy today, no matter what happens or who does what. It's within your power to make this choice. "Happiness is the true condition of the self-aware, and its source lies within ourselves," says Mr. George. "To decide to be happy is a positive, self-fulfilling action, comparable to saying 'I do' in a marriage ceremony."
- Create a personal affirmation and declare it 20 times to yourself each morning. "Affirmations are simple, positive 'I am...' statements such as 'I am at peace,' 'I am a tower of strength' - that build self-esteem and a strong sense of self," says Mr. George. "They counter the negative messages we often give ourselves by reminding us of our intrinsic value."
- Press the center of your palm with the thumb of your other hand to relieve nervousness in stressful situations, such as interviews. Increase the pressure steadily as you breathe out. Hold for three to seven seconds. Release the pressure as you breathe in. Repeat three times or until you feel your anxiety slip away.

- Don't just do something, sit there! Contrary to the usual phrase, this is sometimes the best approach when emotions are running high, your problems seem overwhelming or your internal compass isn't giving you a clear direction to follow. Simply take a few moments to sit in stillness, gathering your strength. Give your mind and body permission to relax.
- Act "as if." Your mind is very suggestible. If you act as if you're calm, happy and free of stress, eventually you'll find it becomes a reality.
- Really listen to people. By paying close attention to others, you stay in balance with them. Actively listen to what other people are saying.
- Bring an open mind to new people, places and experiences. "Your way is only one of many ways," says Mr. George. "Open-minded people tend to find more to enjoy and less to be disappointed or stressed by."
- Unravel a problem. Most problems have a number of strands tangled together, often in complicated ways. If it seems impossible to unravel the knot, make a start by trying to name each of the different strands. Draw them on paper, with a word or two alongside each separate line to label it. You may find that identifying the pieces of the problem in this way leads to a breakthrough in working out a solution.
- Think of reasons why you can do something, rather than why you can't --- all it takes is a shift in attitude. Once you've broken the negative logic of your thinking, you create space in which positive approaches can appear.

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