

## **Coping with College Series**

### **Anger: A Healthy Emotion**

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Have you ever felt bad about being angry? Many people see anger as a negative emotion. Yet, anger can be an energizing and healthy emotion, if dealt with in an appropriate manner.

For many people, especially women, anger is a difficult emotion to express. Society teaches women to be nice, compliant, and generally happy. Hence the expression about little girls being "sugar and spice, and everything nice." Because of this, many women do not think it is acceptable for them to be angry. Societal expectations for men are somewhat different. Men are encouraged to express anger, sometimes in a physical, or aggressive manner. Of course, this does not mean that all men express anger this way.

Sometimes people have such difficulty expressing anger, that they ignore their body's way of reacting to anger. If we pay attention to our bodies, we will notice that as soon as something triggers an anger response in us, our body will begin to tense up. The adrenaline begins to flow and our blood pressure, respiration, and heartbeat accelerate.

Not recognizing anger or bottling up this emotion can have many negative consequences. If unexpressed for a long time, anger can produce physical illnesses, such as gastrointestinal disturbances, as well as psychological disturbances, such as depression.

It is common for people to mislabel or minimize their anger. Sometimes people express their anger in an indirect manner. Consider the example of Kristi, who tells her roommate that she is not angry with her, but disappointed in her for betraying her trust. The feelings of disappointment and hurt are much more acceptable than anger. Thus, many prefer to describe their feelings in this way. Others might not talk about their feelings at all, but might do something to another person in an attempt to "get back at them" and then deny any intent.

How can you appropriately express anger? First of all, determine what you are angry about and decide for yourself if the situation warrants your anger. If you decide that it does, speak about your feelings directly to the person that triggered your anger, and see if they will agree to do something differently next time. If there is no direct person to confront (e.g. you are angry at a particular procedure/policy at school or work), try doing something proactive that might change the way things are done. If your attempts fail and the person/institution is not willing to make changes, consider bringing in a mediator, removing yourself from the unhealthy situation, or decreasing your contact with the person. After you have done all that you can, refocus your energy into something more productive.

Remember that anger is a normal and healthy emotion.