

Coping With Angry People

Trying to communicate with people who are angry is extremely challenging. Your natural response to other people's anger may be to respond in kind. They raise their voices, and you match their levels of agitation. But if you return hostility with hostility, the cycle will only continue, creating more anger.

Anger has a tendency to breed anger. If you express anger at an angry person, that person is likely to become even more hostile.

Having to defend ourselves from someone else's anger can produce anger in us as well, especially if the attack is personal or extremely hostile.

If you can remain calm, the verbal attack will usually eventually subside. Don't let others push your hot buttons.

The key to managing another person's anger lies in breaking the cycle and establishing a mutual understanding.

1. Stay calm.

Letting loose your emotions only adds fuel to fury. Talk quietly and slowly. Let the person know you understand that he/she is angry.

2. Inquire.

Concentrate fully on the other person's issues and concerns. The goal is to let people talk. Trying to interrupt them is counterproductive and will delay resolving the conflict.

3. Restate.

Repeat the problem out loud. Restating the problem:

- Simplifies the situation so you both understand what the problem is.
- Tells the other person what he/she is saying is worth listening to.

4. Empathize.

To empathize means to connect with someone on his/her emotional level or to try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and give him/her the benefit of the doubt.

- I to you.

This conversational structure says to the speaker I relate to how you feel. To do this effectively, name the emotion you think the person is feeling. For example:

Relate to the person:

“I appreciate”
“I understand”
“I share”

Name the emotion:

“your frustration”
“your doubt”
“your concern”

- I, too.

The second step is to let the person know that you also feel or have felt in the past the same way he/she does. A key phrase might be, “I felt like you do about...”

Establishing empathy with people who are angry can take time. They may at first reject what you say as lip service. Only when you have shown that you understand their emotions sincerely can you move to conflict resolution.

5. Ask permission.

Ask if the person would like additional information to give him/her control and lessen the tension.

- What information can I provide you?
- Would it be helpful to you if we...?

If your listener says no, ask:

- What would be helpful?

Permission questions demonstrate that you are a reasonable person doing your best to reach a common understanding. Once your listener says yes, you can proceed to the next step.

6. Explain and offer choices.

When you have permission to explain, keep your statement short and simple. You can also ask questions to confirm understanding.

If an explanation isn't appropriate, you might offer some choices.

- Do you want to see our analysis of the situation next Tuesday or next Thursday?
- Would seeing the plans or the figures help you?

As you begin brainstorming ideas, the person's sense of control will grow. When he/she is in a more neutral state, you can start to resolve the problem together.

7. Offer an apology if one is needed.**Additional Guidelines for Coping With Angry People****1. Don't argue.**

Don't try to persuade angry people to change their feelings. First of all, they might be angry even without the problem. Even if their anger is directed at the problem, they are expressing it incorrectly. Instead of confronting the anger, deal with the problem.

2. Avoid creating more anger.

Don't tell angry people that they are angry or that they have no reason to be angry. Avoid using "anger words" yourself. Stay away from blaming.

3. Avoid being the expert.

Statements that express that you "know it all" can only fuel the anger situation. Be careful offering your opinion and the way you offer help.

4. Watch your words.

Avoid "red flag" words when you are dealing with angry people. Examples of expressions that are likely to inflame an angry person further include:

- You should.....
- You're wrong.....
- I demand.....
- We can't.....

- We won't.....
- We never.....
- You don't understand.
- That's stupid.
- You must be confused.
- I'm too busy for this.
- You have to.....

People resent being judged and labeled negatively and being given no choice. These words and phrases result in lack of cooperation and motivation.

5. Listen, listen, listen.

First, listen to what the angry person is saying before you comment, question, or decide how to respond.

Guidelines for Listening:

- Be attentive as long as you are not being abused or battered personally.
- Be interested in the other person's needs or problems.
- Let the other person express himself/herself without being judgmental.
- Don't get hooked and jump into anger.
- Show you are listening with acknowledgment such as eye contact, head nodding, etc.
- Decide what action you need to take to resolve the conflict.

6. Resist the impulse to have the last word.

Even after the problem has been successfully solved, the need to have the last word can spoil it all, because it shows you may still be holding a grudge and that you haven't really resolved your anger.

Calming Yourself After the Conflict Is Over

1. Forget about it. Think about something else.
2. Get busy on a project.
3. Do something for yourself that makes you happy.
4. Reward yourself for keeping your cool.
5. Relax.
6. Call a friend to talk about good things and laugh.
7. Don't take it personally or put yourself down in any manner.

Although it is never pleasant to face someone's anger, learning and practicing those steps can help make the process easier and help you achieve productive solutions.