

August 2020 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Emotional Intelligence: Antidotes to Reduce Anger

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. It is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, even the negativity of frustration and sadness. It is being able to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously. "It is generally said to include at least three skills: emotional awareness, or the ability to identify and name one's own emotions; the ability to harness those emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving; and the ability to manage emotions, which includes both regulating one's own emotions when necessary and helping others to do the same." As for assessing one's emotional intelligence, researchers suggest that the "lack of a scientifically valid scale makes it difficult to truly measure or predict someone's emotional intelligence on the job or in the home."

Writing in the Washington Post, Elizabeth Chang reports the country has "erupted into the worst civil unrest in decades after the death of George Floyd, and anger about police violence and the country's legacy of racism is still running high. At the same time, we're dealing with anger provoked by the coronavirus pandemic: anger at public officials because they've shut down parts of society, or anger because they aren't doing enough to curb the virus. Anger about being required to wear a mask, or anger toward people who refuse to wear a mask. Anger at anyone who doesn't see things the "right" way." "We're living, in effect, in a big anger incubator." Anger is an understandable reaction to the uncertainty inherent in the pandemic and protests. "By being angry about something, you get to leave your feelings of uncertainty for a while and occupy a space and a sensibility of certainty and clarity and confidence." Anger is one way to resolve uncertainty. Surveys over the past few years suggest that anger had risen in the country before the 2020 crises. A 2018 Gallup poll concluded that Americans' stress, worry and anger had intensified that year. Twenty-two percent of Americans had felt anger the previous day, up from 17 percent a year earlier. The second week of June 2020, anger level stood at 27%.

Although some anger is inevitable, it becomes a problem when it is sustained or repetitive without the use of positive coping tools. Unmanaged anger can erupt into aggressive behavior against others. Professionals working in the field of anger management are concerned about domestic violence and violence against children by abusive parents during the present pandemic crisis. Personal health wise, anger negatively affects an individual's cardiovascular, neurological, and endocrine systems.

Three Antidotes to Prevent Anger from Taking Hold: appreciation, affiliation, and aspiration. "Appreciation means paying attention not to what angers you but to things that contribute to positivity in your life. Affiliation means nurturing our relationships. Aspiration means striving to accomplish things that are bigger than yourself or that serve other people." It is suggested that by employing these antidotes, "we're doing things that insulate us from getting angry about stuff."

Additional suggestions for controlling anger:

- insulate and distract yourself from anger and stop ruminating about what made you angry.
- limit or take media breaks (take a time out, go for walk, or chat with a friend or neighbor).
- self-monitor by watching for signs of how you physically feel (flushed face, racing heart, tight muscles).
- feed your brain nutritional foods, engage in exercise, and monitor use of drugs and alcohol.
- admit feeling anxious or angry rather than suppressing/denying the feelings and address the feelings in a constructive way. Screaming, swearing, shouting, and hitting keep the arousal hormones working overtime, so to speak. Consider practicing deep breathing and other relaxation techniques to lower arousal feelings.
- use anger in positive ways and realize the most important lesson concerning anger control is not to get angry in the first place.
- employ a sense of humor about yourself and the world! Humor can undermine anger!

Sources: *Psychology Today* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/emotional-intelligence>

Antidotes to anger article in *Washington Post*, June 30, 2020

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/anger-control-protests-masks-coronavirus/2020/06/29/a1e882d0-b279-11ea-8758-bfd1d045525a_story.html

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ethics-everyone/201101/anger-and-its-antidotes>