

## Information Sheet

### Managing Anger

Anger is a normal human emotion that everybody experiences at times in their life. Mild anger can sometimes be useful to express strong feelings and, when managed appropriately, is not an issue. However, if anger is expressed in a harmful or negative way and persists for an extended period of time, it can interfere with relationships and affect overall quality of life.

**What is anger?** Anger is an emotion that can range from mild annoyance to intense rage and is often accompanied by physical changes within the body. Heart rate and blood pressure may increase and stress hormones can be released, resulting in feelings of:

- Heat/sweatiness;
- Feeling out of control;
- Tightness in chest/muscles;
- Pounding/racing heart.

**Why do we get angry?** Anger is often linked to feelings of frustration. It can be triggered when we believe things do not happen the way we plan or desire. Other emotions such as disappointment, hurt, fear and worry may also be expressed as anger. Alternatively, anger can be triggered by drug and alcohol consumption or head injuries.

**When is anger an issue?** Anger is an issue when others around you are feeling frightened or hurt. It is a problem when other people do not feel they can approach you, talk to you or disagree with you for fear of you becoming angry.

#### Tips to help manage anger:

**1) Identify triggers and warning signs** – when you notice feelings of anger developing, stop and ask yourself what is angering you. It is important to identify triggers in order to make sure that your response is proportionate and that it is directed appropriately (e.g., not expressing anger at family for events that occurred at work). Anger is often triggered repeatedly

in similar situations, and being aware of these is crucial in better managing your anger.

- 2) Be aware of your thinking** – often anger results from unhelpful thoughts about the situation or others involved. Unhelpful thinking styles which commonly fuel anger include:
- **'Mindreading'** (e.g., "They think I'm stupid!"),
  - **Overgeneralising** (e.g., "She always does this!"),
  - **Blaming** (e.g., "He's ruined my life!").
- 3) Take a time out** – before reacting to a tense situation, take a few moments to stop, breathe and consider the triggers and your thoughts. Stepping back and slowing down can help reduce your anger.
- 4) Distraction** – if you cannot change or think differently about the situation, it can be helpful to turn your attention to other situations that calm you, e.g., talking to a friend, listening to music or simply counting.
- 5) Think before you speak** - in the heat of the moment it is easy to say or do things that you may later regret. Pause for a moment and remind yourself that anger will only exacerbate the issue.
- 6) Use 'I' statements** - to describe the problem and avoid criticizing or blaming others, as this may only escalate the situation (as well as your anger).
- 7) Humour** – Lightening up about a situation can help to reduce frustration.
- 8) Don't hold a grudge** – Holding onto negative feelings and thoughts can cause them to grow into a bigger problem, as you may find yourself becoming consumed by bitterness or hurt. In addition, our memory of events is often biased. It is important for your own wellbeing to accept that others will not always behave as you desire.

#### Know when to seek help

Managing anger is challenging for many people. However, if your anger seems out of control, causes you to hurt others or do things you regret, seeking professional help is recommended.