

Anger and Aggression

The current influenza pandemic is putting our patience and tolerance to a harsh test. Our daily life is disrupted and we face a great many problems and unforeseen situations. We face stress and fatigue. These are all factors that can lead to occasional outbursts of anger. Anger is a perfectly normal emotion, and being able to express it is essential to our well-being – as long as it can be expressed in a way that respects others.

What Are Anger and Aggression?

Anger is an emotion that is part of life, just like happiness, sadness, anxiety, and so on. It is an alarm signal that indicates that something is disturbing you or that a need is not being met.

There are several ways to express anger: 1) a positive, respectful way; 2) a passive way, such as repressing it or bottling it up without talking about it; 3) an aggressive way. Aggression happens when anger is poorly managed. Expressing aggression, as opposed to anger, can lead to acts of violence, with devastating results on others and oneself.

It is not easy to manage anger. Each individual has his or her own temperament and tolerance for frustration, as well as his or her own way to express dissatisfaction.



Signs of Anger

- Mood swings
- Speaking loudly, interrupting others
- Tightening the eyebrows, clenching the teeth, tapping the foot, crying
- Brooding, isolating oneself, refusing to talk
- Aggressive actions
- Resentment
- Irritation or stress (“Why can’t you leave me alone?!”)
- Feeling mistrustful
- Fatigue, nervousness
- A heavy feeling in the chest or stomach
- Rapid, shallow breathing, a feeling of heat, rapid pulse
- Muscle tension, headaches, etc.
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty concentrating or reasoning
- Feeling thwarted, hurt, discontent
- Feeling unheard or misunderstood: “Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this?”
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling afraid
- Arguing

These are normal reactions to anger. However, it is important to express your anger positively and respectfully, without letting yourself be controlled by your emotions or aggression. To do this, it’s important to recognize the signs of rising anger.

For a simple, fast way to recognize these signs and lower the tension level, remember to **STOP**:

- **S** for **SAFETY**: Make sure you take whatever steps are necessary to reduce your level of aggressiveness and keep your emotions running away with you.
- **T** for **TIME**: Give yourself time to let the overflow of emotions and stress subside.
- **O** for **OXYGEN**: Learn to breathe through your nose. A person who is angry often inhales harshly and shallowly, and may forget to exhale. Force yourself to breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly three or four times.
- **P** for **PONDERING**: After your anger subsides, ask yourself if you are calm enough to discuss the situation that is bothering you. Ask yourself if you need someone else to take over for you.

STOP

From
anger to
aggression

BEING CONTROLLED BY YOUR EMOTIONS

Guilt, shame, regret, low self-esteem

DESTRUCTION ZONE: violence

- You explode and yell.
- You want to control the other person.
- You are boiling mad; you feel persecuted, at the end of your rope; you clench your fists and grit your teeth.
- You are no longer able to control your emotions; you cannot be objective; you are at risk of saying or doing something you will regret.

STOP!**DANGER ZONE: poorly managed aggression and anger**

- You feel a range of emotions: you feel exasperated, impatient, discouraged, touchy, etc.
- You start to raise your voice, store up anger, or boil inside: "He needs to understand that I'm fed up. If this keeps up I won't be responsible for what happens!"
- You feel tense, your heart beats faster, etc.

CAREFUL!

Your emotions are starting to take over from your reason. You are starting to have trouble controlling the situation. Take steps to calm yourself down right away.

DISCOMFORT ZONE: anger

- You feel bothered and annoyed by the situation.
- You can control your emotions at this stage. Correct the situation before it turns ugly.

TRIGGERS

Various situations can stress and anger you: maybe you are tired, your children are fighting and crying, your bedridden relative wet the bed again, etc.

MANAGING THE SITUATION

You are proud of yourself because you are able to control yourself.

- Leave the room, take a shower, take a walk. Wait at least 45 minutes for your calm to come back.
- Never leave without letting the children or adults with you know where you are going. Tell them you will come back when you're feeling calmer. Let them know when you come back.
- If you are caring for young children, make sure they are safe. Put them to bed and do not leave them unattended. Leave the room or call someone you trust to come and give you a break.
- Get moving – jump, dance, run, do something you enjoy to blow off steam. Anger can make you feel like yelling; go outside and scream a few times.
- If you're with your family, blow off steam with a pillow fight.
- Tear up paper. It might not be very constructive, but it will help you calm down.
- Count to 100. Repeat if necessary.
- Call someone you trust – a sibling, a friend, etc. Let yourself go and ask them – or allow them – to take over for you.
- Breathe through your nose. Take slow, deep breaths and don't forget to breathe out.
- Step back and think. What makes you feel like this? Are you more tired than usual? Are you missing information you need to care for a sick person? Are you afraid your children are sick? Do you need help and respite?
- Find realistic solutions to improve the situation.
- Reuse methods or strategies you've already used to reduce tensions. Use stress prevention methods.

After the Storm

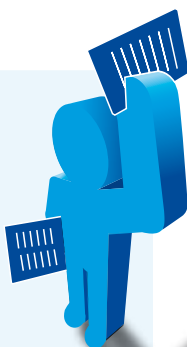
- Check your tension and aggression level. Sometimes it's better to put off a discussion or ask for help to let the tension cool off.
- Recognize anything you did wrong and apologize. Promise the other person that you'll express your problems differently in the future. Apply yourself, use "I" language, and use the STOP method and other prevention methods.

- Say what you didn't like. Blame the behaviour, not the person. For example, say "I'm angry because the house isn't clean," not "You're such a slob." Say what you need: "I need some calm," "I need some help," etc.
- Listen to the other person's point of view.
- Ask yourself again: "What makes me feel like this? Am I more tired than usual? Am I missing information I need to care for a sick person? Am I afraid my children are sick?"

Ways of Preventing and Defusing an Angry Situation

Get Informed

- Use the **STOP** method to recognize your state and take a step back from your emotions.
- Ask your loved ones to let you know when they see you're getting impatient.
- Identify the things that set you off.
- Read the other psychosocial information sheets available on the Government of Québec pandemic website:
www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca
- Talk with your loved ones about things you can do to keep the situation from getting tense.
- Learn to tell your emotions apart: are you feeling powerless, tired, sad, angry...?



Take Care of Yourself

- Blow off steam by getting some exercise such as dancing or walking.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle, with a proper diet, enough sleep, and time to relax. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Stay alert for signs of fatigue and burn-out.
- Respect your limits.
- Learn to express your frustrations, dissatisfactions, and needs as they arise, rather than bottling them up until you explode. Use "I" language to help you express yourself respectfully: "I think... I'm angry because... I have the impression that... I'd like..." Apply yourself and ask the rest of your family to use "I" language too. Using "you" language assigns blame and doesn't do anything to solve the problem.
- Make sure you express your feelings to the right person. For example, if you've had a bad day at work and you're tired, don't take it out on your children because they're laughing and playing.



Get Organized

- Identify one or more friends you can count on when you need them to take care of children or a dependent person and allow you to have a break.
- Confide in someone you trust.
- Set clear rules, limits, and consequences with your children.
- Look for realistic solutions, since yelling, blaming, and brooding don't solve anything.



Things Are Getting Better When...

- You feel less tense.
- You are aware of your moods and you step back before you take it out on others.
- You are aware of it when you are blaming others for your state of mind, when you have control over your own emotions.
- You feel rested.

Use the STOP method frequently to determine where you are. The lower you are on the scale, the better you are doing.

When to Seek Help

- You feel overwhelmed by the situation.
- You insult, criticize, or demean the other person.
- Your attitude and gestures are threatening: you shake your fist or hit or throw objects.
- You deprive a person of food, hygiene care, etc.
- You abuse alcohol, drugs, or medication.

Be aware of how you express your anger. It can lead to violence and leave physical and emotional scars. Don't hesitate to seek help. If you ever witness an abusive situation, don't hesitate to report it.

Available Resources

Telephone

- Your local health and social services centre
- Info-Santé: 8-1-1
- Services Québec toll-free line: 1-877-644-4545
- Tel-jeunes: 1-800-263-2266
- Ligne Parents: 1-800-361-5085
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter: 514-849-3291

Internet

- Government of Québec pandemic website: www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca
- Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter: www.acsm-ca.qc.ca/questionnaires
- Tel-jeunes: www.teljeunes.com

Read the other psychosocial information sheets dealing with various topics related to influenza pandemics. They can be downloaded from the Government of Québec's pandemic website.

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Checklist

If necessary, contact:
