

Managing Anger After a Breakup

Objective

To manage your anger following the end of a romantic relationship.

What to Know

Going through a divorce or breakup is never easy, and one of the emotions you might be experiencing is anger. Anger is a normal emotion, but perhaps it is more intense for you, and it has started to impact your daily life. If you continue to feel intense anger, it might increase stress, leaving you drained and exhausted. What can you do?

Suppressing or denying your anger is not a good idea and exploring your feelings with a counselor or coach can be helpful. In addition to this type of support, you can also identify ways to minimize the anger you feel toward your ex.

Here are eleven tips to manage your anger following a breakup.

- 1. Awareness.** Start by acknowledging how you feel. If you are denying how you feel, you cannot change it. It is important to be honest with yourself. Awareness helps you own your feelings and let them go. In addition, be honest with yourself if you are avoiding your anger. Are you turning to alcohol, overeating, or drugs? Are you overworking, shopping, or overexercising to avoid how you feel? Perhaps you are angry with yourself, or maybe you are judging how you feel. What might happen if you accept you are angry, and show yourself some compassion?
- 2. Acknowledge and accept your anger.** This can be as simple as stating out loud that you are angry and why, or you might write about your feelings in a journal. You can write a letter to your ex that you do not send.
- 3. Forgive your ex.** If you continue to dwell on your anger, it will be difficult for you to move forward. Instead, forgive your ex – for your own wellbeing.
- 4. Identify and avoid your triggers.** Make a list of everything that sets off your anger and identify ways you can avoid those triggers. For example, if you get angry when you see your ex's social media posts, unfollow or block them.
- 5. Practice self-care.** This includes practicing good hygiene habits, getting enough rest, and eating nutritious food. Allow yourself time to rest, reflect, get angry, cry, and grieve the loss of the relationship.
- 6. Exercise for 30 minutes, 5 days per week.** Getting regular exercise can help you release anger and improve your mood. You might even try a form of exercise that helps you release aggression, like kickboxing, hitting baseballs, or learning karate. Conversely, you can walk in nature to calm down.

7. Use relaxation techniques. Set aside at least 15 minutes every day to meditate, practice yoga, breathe deeply, take a bubble bath, listen to calming music, or engage in other relaxing and soothing activities.

8. Ask questions to stop cognitive distortions. When you mindfully listen to your thoughts, you might be surprised to find that sometimes your own thoughts trigger your anger – rather than anything your ex did in the past. Sometimes your anger is an interpretation of what you *think* happened. If you get stuck in negative or unhelpful thought loops, ask yourself questions about the thoughts. Are they true? What evidence do you have to support or refute them? What are more realistic thoughts you can replace them with?

9. Talk about your feelings. Choose someone who you trust like a good friend, family member, relationship coach, or therapist. A supportive person will listen carefully to what you have to say, and will not share your comments with your ex.

10. Use “I” statements if you talk to your ex. If you must talk to your ex (such as if you have children together), practice using “I” statements, which place the focus on what you are feeling. “I” statements prevent you from making accusations and putting your ex on the defensive.

11. Join a support group or online forum. You can talk with others who have experienced a breakup and learn how they deal with anger.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to manage your anger following a breakup.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

How big is your anger? When did you last feel so angry?

Is this anger triggering older upsets?

What do you think is behind your anger (for example, fear, sadness, or despair)?

Are you turning to unhealthy coping methods to deal with your anger? If so, describe.

Are you angry with yourself? If so, why?

What might happen if you accept you are angry, and show yourself some compassion?

What can you do to acknowledge and accept your anger?

Is it possible for you to forgive your ex? Why or why not?

Who can you talk to? List two or three people.

Are there online resources or support groups you might be interested in to deal with your anger? Write down some ideas.

Over the next two weeks, use the following chart to note how you managed your anger each day. Choose one of the eleven techniques from the list above or come up with your own ideas. Note the date and the level of your anger, where 1 = very minimal, to 10 = the angriest you have ever felt. Write down the technique you used to reduce your anger, or an action you took to manage how you felt. Then describe how you felt after. Make copies of the chart if you need additional space.

Date	Anger level 1-10	Technique use or action taken	How did you feel after?

Date	Anger level 1-10	Technique use or action taken	How did you feel after?

Did this activity help you better manage your anger? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?
