

## UNDERSTANDING THE ANGER

### What is Anger?

Anger is an emotion that surfaces when we perceive a threat or danger directed towards ourselves. While having this emotion is crucial for dealing with threats and dangers, it can pose the greatest harm when it becomes intense and uncontrollable. Our proverbs often emphasize the harm of intense anger, stating that 'sharp vinegar harms the jug.'

Anger is sometimes the most easily noticeable emotion and has a 'masking' feature for our other feelings. For instance, some individuals might find it easier to say, 'I am angry with you' instead of expressing, 'I am upset with you' when offended by someone. However, anger is intricately connected with other emotions. Hence, when feeling angry, we can ask ourselves, 'What other emotions am I feeling right now; resentment/sadness/helplessness/disappointment?' and articulate these feelings to others.

### How Does the Feeling of Anger Arise?

When an individual perceives a threat signal directed towards themselves, they experience physiological and cognitive changes along with the emotion of anger. Physiological changes are observed through arousal in the sympathetic nervous system, triggering the 'fight or flight' response. Anger is typically associated with a fighting response to the perceived threat. Fear, often accompanied by the same arousal, leads to a flight response. Physiological signs accompanying anger include a feeling of warmth, dilation of pupils, increased salivation, heightened heart rate, increased blood pressure, and sweating.

### The Cognitive Dimension of Anger

The thought structure involving the perception of threat and danger varies from person to person. When people get angry, what they perceive as a threat to themselves can be threats to their physical and mental integrity. For example, physical harm by someone using physical violence towards you may cause anger, and disrespectful behavior towards you may also cause anger. The intensity of anger varies from person to person based on the perceived threat dimension. Studies have shown that the times when people experience anger the most in their daily lives are when they feel they have been treated unfairly, when something they want to do is blocked, and when they perceive threats to their values and respect.

### Expression of Anger

With the emotion of anger, some changes occur in a person's behavior. These changes are primarily reflected in facial expression, body posture, tone of voice, and speech style.

**Outward-directed anger:** The first reaction that comes to mind with anger is aggression. Aggression is an action aimed at harming someone due to the felt anger. Along with aggression, the person may feel hostility and hatred towards the person they intend to harm. Some people are prone to interpreting stimuli around them as a threat. Such individuals quickly get angry, struggle to control their anger, and express their anger through verbal or behavioral outbursts. In these cases, aggressive and hostile reactions are frequently observed. The target of aggression may sometimes be the person causing the anger, and at other times, it can be any adult, child, or animal around the person.

**Inward-directed anger:** Some people find it difficult to externalize their anger when they feel the emotion and direct their anger towards themselves. Guilt feelings are often observed in these individuals along with anger. Even if the other person has harmed them in the aftermath of an event, the person tends to blame themselves. When this happens repeatedly, depressive feelings may be observed along with self-blaming emotions. Instead of engaging in harmful behavior towards others, the person may engage in self-harming behaviors consciously or unconsciously.

### **How to Deal with Anger?**

- If you often feel angry or if a situation has caused you intense anger, you can ask yourself the following questions to have a more realistic perspective on the situation:
  - Is the situation I am facing a disaster, or does it seem like a disaster to me just because I am currently angry?
  - Do I have evidence supporting the thought structure that causes me to feel angry, or am I making assumptions?
  - Is there a possibility for me to look at the situation more flexibly?
  - Am I making a generalization about my life based on a single event?
  - Am I sure that the other person's behavior causing my anger is intentional and directed only towards me?
  - Am I focusing on a negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture?
  - Is this last event that made me angry really what is making me feel this way, or are there general difficulties in my life?
  - How can I organize my life/relationships to feel better?
- Questioning what other emotions (sadness, disappointment, helplessness, resentment, etc.) you feel along with anger can make it easier for you to understand yourself.
- After calming down when angry, you will evaluate the situation more realistically, so instead of taking action immediately when feeling angry, taking action after calming down will be beneficial.
- Discovering a method to calm yourself when angry (e.g., taking deep breaths, going for a walk, exercising, etc.) can help you cope with anger.
- Adding relaxing activities and hobbies to your daily life helps reduce stress and chronic anger.
- If, despite trying many methods, you often find yourself feeling angry, you can apply to our Psychological Support Unit for assistance."

**Gizem Bodur Atalay  
Clinical Psychologist**