

GM HEALTH HUB

MANAGING ANGER AND IRRITABILITY

Background

What 'reason' do you use when you fly off the handle? Did someone else say something, do something or forget to do something? Maybe you had too much to drink, or you got into an argument and the other people wouldn't listen? Did a family member or a neighbour make too much noise? Was it a teacher or parent that pushed your buttons? Whatever your reason, and however much you felt like lashing out at the time, the truth is, getting angry gets you nowhere. Except into trouble, into hospital, out of relationships and out of a job. Lose your temper all the time and you'll probably lose everything, eventually. Everyone gets irritable sometimes, but if you find yourself flying off the handle too often, here's a system that really works. It's all about understanding your anger triggers that change what you do in tense situations. We call it the 1,2,3, Breathe! method. It will help you become a calmer, stronger person and you may find you use it every day, for years to come!

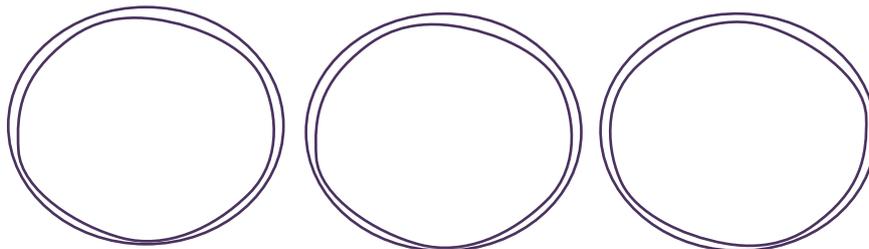
How can I apply this to my life?

As easy as 1,2,3, Breathe:

Step 1: Know your buttons.

What always gets you going? Something your girlfriend or wife always says? Or your boyfriend/ husband? What about screaming kids? Other people at school? Is it teachers, the government, the police? Do you suffer from road rage? What about when you drink? Is it worse then? And when you're having a night out, does just being with your friends make you feel like arguing or fighting? Think about what makes you angry. The people or places that always seem to get you going. When you know your buttons, you can keep them from being pressed. Think about your buttons and write down the things that make you lose your temper. Why? Because when you know your buttons, you can keep them from being pushed. Go to different places. Drink less. Spend time with different friends. Ignore other people's comments.

Write in
your buttons.

Three empty circles arranged horizontally, intended for writing down personal triggers or 'buttons' that cause anger or irritability.

Step 2: Know your early warning system.

You feel different just before you snap. Can you remember what happened, physically or mentally? With some people it's heavy breathing. Others feel the heat of blood pounding. Or maybe your early warnings are in your mind - you don't think much of their appearance, their voice, their clothes, their opinions. Maybe you feel ignored or that people are looking down on you. All these signs are really useful, because they warn you that you're getting near to losing it. They're like a road sign that says, 'Slippery corner ahead'. Think about the early warning signs that apply to you and write down all the things you think and feel, just before you lose it. Learn to spot these signs so you can move to Step 3 before they turn into trouble.

Write down your early warning signs:

Step 3: Know where the escape hatches are.

Here's where you choose to respond differently next time. Some people pause and count to 10, or change the subject, or sit down and relax their shoulders and breathe deeply, or just decide to walk away. Others have phrases that they say, that defuse a situation. You need to have a choice of escape hatches and be ready to use one whenever you get an early warning sign. When you have a few of these up your sleeve, you'll be able to stay in control whatever happens.

So, choose to respond differently.

Rather than something that makes the situation worse like shouting or lashing out, how about:

Smile - When your face or fists are tensing up, make yourself smile and feel the aggravation go away. Don't just bare your teeth, give out a big smile that lights up your face. Others will notice, and things will calm down.

Relax your shoulders and breathe slowly - Often, your shoulders are up and around your ears when tension builds. If you notice this in time and make a point of relaxing and letting them drop, you'll calm yourself and others too. Breathe slowly and think about slippery corners while you do it.

Say "You may be right about that" - This works best when you really disagree with someone. Instead of arguing and getting angry, just say "You may be right about that". You don't have to mean it, it's an escape hatch from getting angry. Often, the other person will be so surprised that all the tension will drain away.

Sit down - When we're about to burst, we need to be standing, so we can fight, or run, or seem bigger than we are. It's a lot harder to get into trouble when you're sitting down though, so when you get an early warning, stay in your seat, or go find one.

Hum - We're serious. You can't easily shout or punch when you're humming. What's your favourite song? Get into the habit of quietly humming it to yourself when you get an early warning. This works even better with slow, calming tunes. But no aggressive humming in the person's face!

and Breathe.....

Further Content

Are You Strong Enough to Keep Your Temper book and module.
1,2 3 Breathe worksheet.
Tension Control Training Resources (relaxation).
All available at www.llttf.com.