



Anger is a feeling or **emotion** that can range from mild irritation to intense upset to rage. It may be a natural response when possible harm is anticipated or when another person has done something wrong or harmful.

Myths about Anger

Myth #1: Anger is Inherited

One myth about anger is that the way individuals express anger is inherited and can't be changed. John had this to say: ***"I inherited my anger from my father; that's just the way I am."*** John is saying that he can't change how he acts when he is angry, that he has to respond like his father did when his father was angry. However, research indicates that the way John behaves when he is angry is **learned behavior**. That means that John can *learn* to express his anger in healthier ways, even later in life, without resorting to aggression or violence. So it is possible to teach an old dog new tricks! How did John **learn** to be angry?

John learned by observing other people, especially the important people in his life. In fact, this is true of much of how people learn to behave. The important people that John learned from included his parents, grandparents, family members, friends, teachers, and military leaders. For example, when, as a child, John saw his parents yelling, or acting violently, John learned that anger should be expressed through yelling or aggression and that anger is an appropriate response to a stressful situation.

Myth #2: Anger Automatically Leads to Aggression

Another myth is that anger automatically leads to aggressive behavior. It is commonly believed that anger is something that builds and escalates to the point where it has to be released in an aggressive outburst. However, ***being angry does not have to lead to aggressive behavior***. In fact, effective anger management involves controlling the escalation of anger by:

- Learning assertiveness skills.
- Using a variety of anger control strategies that can help you change your behavior.
- Challenging irrational beliefs.
- Changing negative and hostile self-talk.

Myth #3: People Must Be Aggressive to Get What They Want

Many people confuse assertiveness with aggression.

- The goal of aggression is to win at any cost. It can include dominating, intimidating, harming, or injuring other people. With aggression, the message is “Me first, you’re not important.”
- The goal of assertiveness is to get your own needs and wants realized **while** respecting the needs and wants of others. Assertiveness does not harm, threaten, or abuse others. To the contrary, assertive behavior’s message is: “We’re **both** important.”



For example, Brenda gets upset with her friend Mary because whenever they make plans Mary shows up late. Brenda can choose to deal with her anger by shouting at Mary or by insulting her. But this kind of aggressive behavior would most likely cause more problems and could possibly damage Brenda’s friendship. It’s not likely to change Mary’s behavior. On the other hand, Brenda could handle her anger assertively.

For example, she could say, “Mary, **when you are late I get really frustrated... I wish that you would be on time more often.**”

Saying it this way, Brenda has let Mary know how she would like Mary to change her behavior. Without becoming angry or using harsh language, she has been respectful, and has clearly identified how she would like Mary’s behavior to change. Mary will not feel blamed or threatened, and the friendship will not be damaged.

Myth #4: Venting Anger Helps

For many years, we thought that explosive behavior and expressing anger aggressively, such as screaming or beating on pillows, was a healthy way for individuals to release their tension. But research shows that people who express their anger aggressively simply **get better at being angry**. This is because **behaviors that are repeated become habits**. In other words, venting anger in an aggressive manner only increases later aggressive behavior. A better way to release tension is to exercise when things seem to be getting out of hand (*walking, jogging, bicycling, gardening, etc.*).