



## Tips for Survivors:

### COPING WITH ANGER AFTER A DISASTER OR OTHER TRAUMATIC EVENT

Many people experience anger after a disaster or other traumatic event. They may feel angry about the damage the disaster has caused, changes to their short- or long-term plans, the long recovery process, financial worries and problems, and their reactions to the disaster that are hard to deal with. They may also feel angry in general about the ways in which the disaster or other trauma has changed their lives.

#### Anger After Disasters

Many researchers think anger is universal—something people in all societies around the world experience. When people are dealing with lots of stress in their lives, anger may be more constant and harder to control. Survivors of disasters may feel angry at individuals and organizations they consider to be responsible for

the disaster. When people get angry, they may experience these changes:

- Their heart may beat faster.
- Their blood pressure may increase.
- Their muscles may tighten.
- They may release adrenaline, which gives them energy.
- They may breathe faster or not as deeply.

Anger has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, trouble sleeping, problems with digestion, and headaches. Long-term, unresolved anger has also been linked to depression and anxiety. Anger may lead people to engage in behavior that involves risk, such as use of alcohol and other substances.





## Tips for Calming Yourself

Many people find they become angry more easily than usual following a disaster or other trauma. The following sections describe ways for you to manage and talk with others about your anger that may help improve situations and strengthen relationships in your life.

### Self-management

Anger can become very intense very quickly. It is hard to make good choices and communicate well with others when you feel very angry. When you notice you are angry, take a break. You may want to count to 10, take a quick walk, or try some of the tips below. When you are calmer, you can deal with the anger in a way that is better for you and those around you.

### Communication

If you are angry with a person, it may make sense to talk with him or her directly about it. You may need to wait until your anger is at a manageable level to do this. Here are a few steps you can take to improve communication.

- When you're ready, use "I" statements such as "I feel angry that you haven't filled out the paperwork for us to get assistance."
- Avoid placing blame and acknowledge that the person may provide you with information

that changes how you think and feel about the situation.

- Avoid the words "always," "never," and "should." "Always" and "never" are rarely true, and all three words often involve blaming. They can put the person you're talking to on the defensive, making him or her less open to working with you on finding a way to improve the situation.

### Problem Solving

If you find you are often becoming angry in a specific situation, you may want to consider ways you can change the situation. If you are frustrated by a slower commute to work because of damages and rebuilding along the route you take, try a different route or public transportation if available.

If changes to a situation are not possible, it may help to focus on areas of life you can control. While your commute to work may be frustrating, you may be able to develop relaxation skills or keep up with other healthy habits.

### Forgiveness

Practice forgiveness as much as possible. Forgiveness may take time, but it may also enhance your relationship with the person you forgive.





## Positive Actions Can Help

### Connection to Community

For some people, it may be helpful to talk to someone you trust about your anger. Try these tips to connect with your community.

- **Seek out a support group.** Sometimes these can be found through community centers and disaster recovery programs. It can be very helpful to talk with others who have gone through a similar traumatic experience.
- **Join other groups.** Continue participating in groups and connecting with others in ways that don't have anything to do with the disaster. Attend services at your place of worship and meetings of social or volunteer groups you are part of.

### Relaxation Techniques

These techniques can lower your overall stress level, which in turn can help you manage your anger and use it in productive ways. It's a good idea to practice at least once each day, so you can build your skills in calming down. Try these tips to help you relax.

- **Deep breathing.** Try to breathe from your abdominal area instead of from your chest. Imagine your breath going into and out of your belly as you breathe.

- **Visualization.** Imagine that you are in a place that is peaceful and calming to you—a place you've been, or one where you would like to be.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Tighten and then relax each muscle group in your body. It often helps to go from head to toe or vice versa.
- **Gentle stretching, yoga, or tai chi.** Slow to moderate speed and gentle movements may help you calm down when things are stressful.

### Habits of Health

It may be hard to keep up with healthy habits after a disaster, when your access to resources may be limited, and you may not be living at home. Do your best and give yourself credit for all you do. Try these tips to stay healthy:

- **Be physically active.** One way to reduce stress and improve mood for many people is to be physically active. Try a walk or run with a friend or alone, push-ups or sit-ups at home, or anything else you enjoy and that helps you feel better over time.
- **Sleep and eat well.** If possible, get enough sleep. Aim for 7 to 9 hours a night, the amount that most adults need. Do your best to eat healthy food, including plenty of fruits, vegetables, and water, if available.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Although it may be tempting to use them to make anger feel more manageable, they lower people's ability to control their behavior. Drugs and alcohol can sometimes lead people to act on anger in ways that have negative effects over the short or long term.





## When To Seek Professional Support

People can feel anger at any time throughout their lives, no matter their stress level. In the first 2 to 4 weeks after a disaster, you may notice more anger in yourself, along with many other signs of distress. These are common among disaster survivors.

Some signs that you may need professional support include the following:

- Your anger seems out of control.
- You do things because of your anger that you regret.
- You have hurt people around you as a result of your anger.
- Your friends and family members have said that they think you have a problem with anger, or they have spent less time with you because of things that happened when you were angry.
- Your anger lasts longer than 1 month.
- You have arguments with coworkers.
- You are no longer welcome in certain businesses because of past behavior there.
- You have been violent when you were angry, or you have thought about being violent.

If you are feeling uncontrolled or overwhelming anger, we encourage you to use the resources on this page for getting help.

## Helpful Resources

### SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-free: 1-800-308-3515

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

### SAMHSA Behavioral Health Disaster Response Mobile App

Website: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/PEP13-DKAPP-1>

### Administration for Children and Families

Website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov>

### Mental Health America\*

Website: <https://www.mhanational.org>

### National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)\*

Toll-free helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (1-800-950-6264)

Website: <https://www.nami.org>

## Treatment Locators

### SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

(24/7 English and español)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Website: <https://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

### MentalHealth.gov

Website: <https://mentalhealth.gov>

*MentalHealth.gov provides U.S. government information and resources on mental health.*

## Helplines

### SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/ind-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 to get help and support 24/7.

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

Website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

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