Dealing with anger

Sometimes a bit of anger can be a very good thing, especially when it prompts us to tackle social injustices. But when it comes to 'losing it' and harming yourself (or someone else), that's different. The Mix looks at how you can control your anger.

We often read about celebrities throwing tantrums and we see this kind of behaviour on TV all the time. This may make us feel that such behaviour is OK and normal, but it's not usually a productive way to deal with angry feelings and it can be terrifying for other people to witness.

Be assertive

One reason why some people get angry is that they find it hard to express themselves. They tend not to speak up for themselves and bottle everything up only to surprise everyone by exploding in anger. The trick here is to learn to be assertive rather than aggressive. This means that in relationships, at college, or at work, you need to learn to put your point of view across earlier rather than later – and while you are still calm. In order to do that, you have to feel that you are entitled to have your say. The way to be assertive is to use the word "I" a lot. Once you start using the word "you', you will sound angry and much less in control.

Here are some "I" examples:

- "I don't understand exactly what you're asking me to do. I'd like you to explain it again."
- "I really don't want to go to Prague for my hen night. I'd much prefer Dublin."
- "I'm not keen to stay in and have a take-away. I'd like us to go to the cinema. We haven't been out for ages."

Here are some "you" examples:

- "You never explain things. You're hopeless."
- "You are so bloody bossy. You must stop organising me."
- "You make me sick. You're so mean and boring."

Hopefully you should see that that the first set of examples are more likely to be effective, while the 'you' examples are more likely to upset you and others.

Tempers and tantrums

Anger doesn't always stem from people's problems with assertiveness. Excess stress can make people irritable and angry. Some people may have been brought up to think that anger and violence is normal. Others might just feel that they're entitled to 'blow' because they have a very short fuse.

How do you know if your temper is getting out of control?

- You are always, or very often, irritated and stressed to the point where you shout at people, throw or break things.
- You often look back and regret an angry outburst.
- Friends, colleagues and family find it hard to forgive your anger.
- People seem frightened of you.

What can you do to improve things yourself?

You can work on becoming a calmer person by:

- Taking part in a sport
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Walking in the open air
- Self-hypnosis
- Making more time for yourself
- Eating regularly and healthily
- Getting more sleep
- Drinking less alcohol

Anger management techniques

If you get to the point where you are so furious you are 'seeing red' and are ready to hit someone, try this:

1. Step back. People who lose control, and who may even hit someone, are always moving forward. So by taking a step back, you literally stop yourself in your track

2. Steady yourself by holding onto something like a desk or the top of a chair

3. Breathe deeply. This is the best way to defuse your anger and tension. Mentally count to 10 – breathing in and out as you do so

4. Punch something soft. If you're still furious, punch a cushion. If there's nothing soft, then bang on the door, the wall or a table; anything rather than taking out your anger on a person.