

PROFILES OF ANGER

Anger is a protective mechanism against a real or perceived loss of power. It energizes people to take needed action. However, many people have anger that works against them. Although these people are often said to have “bad tempers,” this term is far too general and does little to further the understanding of destructive anger. The following profiles of people who have difficulty with anger suggest different treatment approaches. Although types overlap, pick the one that best describes you or your loved ones. Finally, examine the explosive temperament that may underlie all the others.

DEFIANCE

Defiant people are irresponsible, impulsive, reckless, dishonest, unfaithful, unlawful, self-centered, or violent. They may see themselves in others and be jealous and on guard.

- Cause: Their basic needs may not have been met in the first two years of life, or caregivers may have anticipated needs before any frustration was experienced.
- Effects: They never bonded with nor developed trust in caretakers, causing rejection of authority and lack of internalized controls. Other people are considered possessions, and relationships serve to achieve some end (sex, money, or power).
- Anger: Accumulated rage from early unmet needs can be triggered any time or on anyone due to frustration or not getting their way.
- Treatment: Because they don't care about others' feelings or rules, they will have little desire to change unless there is legal intervention.

HYPERACTIVITY

Hyperactive people can be restless, distractible, moody, underachieving, and disorganized and have difficulty completing tasks. Poor impulse control can lead to legal problems.

- Cause: The frontal (thinking) cortex does not receive enough stimulation from the lower area of the brain, possibly causing self-stimulation through constant activity. “Sluggish” frontal lobes may also have difficulty inhibiting incoming stimuli, creating the effect of attending to everything.
- Effects: Continual activity and problems focusing creates an abundance of disturbing triggers and difficulty moderating reactions to them.
- Anger: Outbursts may be frightening but are usually short-lived.
- Treatment: Stimulants and some antidepressants can be very helpful, along with learning anger management techniques.

HYPOMANIA AND PMS

Hypo(mild)mania and Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) can cause people to have episodic anger. The “highs” of hypomania are more intense and inconsistent than overenergy of hyperactivity and can be followed by “lows” in which energy vanishes.

- Cause: Hypomania may be due to poor regulation of neurotransmitters that excite the brain. During PMS, fluid retention may put pressure on the brain.
- Effects: Increased excitability (and anger) of hypomania can last days or weeks. PMS anger begins 2–10 days before menses and stops shortly afterwards.
- Anger: In extreme cases, violence can occur. As people become more manic, hostility and paranoia increase. During PMS, women can be keyed up and explosive.
- Treatment: Mania is highly responsive to mood-stabilizing medication that can eliminate anger problems. Antidepressants and hormone treatment can help PMS.

ERRATIC PERSONALITIES

Erratic people have intense or stormy relationships with many people; often feel empty and bored; are uncertain about abilities, worthiness, or desires; have rapid and radical shifts in moods; and are impulsive in ways that can be self-damaging.

- Cause: Parents may have failed to meet needs for support or autonomy.
- Effects: They alternate between fears of suffocation and abandonment, cannot deal with mixed emotions, and see people as all good or all bad.
- Anger: Outbursts can be unpredictable and out of proportion to trigger events. They may be fueled by fears of abandonment or control, disappointment in others' inability to live up to idealizations, and feelings of victimization.
- Treatment: Mood stabilizers and antidepressants may help. Anger management techniques can be learned through considerable repetition over time.

HYPERSENSITIVE PERSONALITIES

Inflated, hypersensitive people feel self-important and entitled to special treatment; exaggerate their achievements; seek constant attention or admiration; and have difficulty understanding others' feelings.

- Cause: They may have had parents who were overindulgent, failed to set limits, or saw children as an extension of themselves and only valued them for their abilities.
- Effects: They must be all good to keep from feeling all bad. They can swing from feeling superior, powerful, and smug to feeling worthless, incompetent, and empty.
- Anger: Rage is a means to avoid feeling shame and humiliation from criticism and absence of complete approval from others. They may hold long grudges.
- Treatment: They may be motivated to learn anger control techniques during crises when they are in jeopardy of losing significant others or jobs that supply self-esteem.

PERFECTIONISTIC PERSONALITIES

Perfectionists can be preoccupied with details, rules, and order; inflexible about matters of morality and cleanliness; and insist that others submit to their way of doing things.

- Cause: They may be biochemically predisposed to feeling displeasure, or could have had critical parents with similar unrealistic standards.
- Effects: They can swing from feeling competent and in control to feeling vulnerable and unsettled when things aren't "right."
- Anger: Frequent outbursts can happen when others do not comply with their efforts to control. They may be easier on people who aren't "extensions" of themselves.
- Treatment: Antidepressants and mood stabilizers can sometimes help. Their high standards justify their anger and they may seek help only in a crisis.

EXPLOSIVE TEMPERAMENT

Explosive people have temperaments that can be extroverted, bold, passionate, intense, sensuous, energetic, lively, critical, complaining, and outspoken.

- Cause: A lack of the enzyme MAO may cause underregulation of neurotransmitters that respond to incoming stimuli. Too much testosterone may cause aggression.
- Effects: They can be very reactive to environmental stimuli, whether with positive feelings of passion or negative feelings of annoyance.
- Anger: They are excitable about things others find trivial and may have trouble calming down or recognizing the source of their anger.
- Treatment: Antidepressants that balance the function of different neurotransmitters and mood stabilizers that reduce brain excitability can be enormously helpful. However, medication is not always needed to master anger management techniques.