

# Do You 'Manage' Your Anger Or Does It 'Manage' You?

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***Anger management! Anger training! Anger therapists! Wherever you look there's a surge of interest in finding ways to better manage the feeling of anger. Do we get angry with our horses and how well do we handle ourselves when we do? Love it or hate it we are all human and will succumb to the feelings of anger. We explore what we can do about it!***

Good news - anger is a perfectly normal human emotion. It should be felt, expressed and not suppressed or denied. Yet it scares us. We are taught "not to let it out" or "not to show it" and never to "turn it towards others"!

Anger has a power! It is a strong emotion all of its own convincing us it's hard to control. When under this anger spell we find ourselves thinking, saying and doing, things that we later regret. We wish we could get rid of anger forever and we want it to stay away!

On a bad day we lose our temper quickly, and often with those we love. With our horses this results in us delivering a hasty smack, impatient shove, or pony club style kick in the ribs! Often such actions are followed by feelings of guilt and self criticism: we feel embarrassed at our outburst; even shame. "He didn't deserve that"!

**Let's look at what we can do to 'get a grip' before we lose it!**

## **Step 1: Notice your early warning system!**

Pay attention to what you are thinking and especially to what you are feeling (afraid, disappointed, embarrassed,) as these feelings are your early warning signals that precede anger. Your thoughts will become your best friend if you pay attention to them. Learn how to recognise the early signs of a negative pattern building, as step one to getting a grip.

## **Step 2: Find the Source!**

There are 2 likely sources for our 'early warning system' that alert us to the build up of anger. One is the body, the other is the mind.

**BODY SIGNALS:** - Ever noticed a sudden pain in your body; a twinge or ache? We are good at dispelling them, ignoring them, preferring to 'struggle on'. Remember, HOPE is not a strategy and hoping it will just 'go away' is rarely enough. Our body uses unexplained pain as a way to get our attention.

Recognising the significance of that area of our body housing the ache or pain will help identify the underlying emotions building up. But, just like the behaviour of a 'needy' child trying to get a parent's attention, if ignored the symptoms can worsen, move, and intensify.

**MENTAL SIGNALS:** - We all have a voice inside our head. Do you know what triggers it and how to silence it? Does your inner voice control you or do you control it?

Once you can quickly notice this inner voice rising up – you can give it the attention it needs, then silence it – and you will cracked step 2 in overcoming the ‘anger habit’!

### **Step 3: Journey into Outer Space!**

Like our horses we share the ‘fight or flight’ instinct. The 'gap' between being startled and taking action, is small. One of the keys to 'anger management' is to create a metaphorical *space* between the stimulus and our response. So, just because we think we aren't going to ride well today doesn't mean we have to prove ourselves right!

Learn how to meditate (without having to wear orange and live in a cave)! The early steps in meditating start with paying attention to your breathing. Count seven deep in-breaths followed by seven long slow exhalations. Slow yourself down. Breathe. Let go of all your thoughts and all your feelings (even the positive, constructive ones).

### **Step 4: Filling the Void!**

It is hard to count breaths and at the same time plan tonight's dinner! A break from our thoughts (especially when full of frustration and negativity) begins to halt our anger in its tracks! This ‘break’ in this circuitry provides time; time to choose your next response - to find a new possibility or perspective. This is the moment to implement your honesty policy!

### **Step 5: The Honesty Policy!**

Back to that 'pony club' style kick we just delivered and wonder why! When we inflict punishment on others we are angry! We are probably also experiencing other emotions which could include fear, inadequacy or embarrassment. “Will this ever come right”? “Why me!”

All these emotions and feelings need to be recognised as often anger is just a symptom. Using the technique of ‘labelling’ pays attention to, and let’s go of, those emotions.

With any habit to be broken it is about finding a different way of responding to the need that created the habit! Consider this: most of us (if riding regularly) have mastered the art of mounting and dismounting! Yet, when things start to go wrong we become hell bent on “sticking on” when a ‘break in the circuitry’ can best be achieved by ‘getting off’!

The process of physically walking helps to calm us down; forces us to breath and signals that ‘we are about to do something different, this time’.

Next time you notice your temperature building, your teeth clenching, your inner voice rising or holding your breath – ask yourself “what am I feeling and thinking”? If anxiety, fear, disappointment or frustration is there, then have a go at steps 1 – 5 in an order that feels right for you. Remember no one has the right to criticise you for taking responsibility of your emotions and if you don’t other may have to pick up the pieces of the consequences!

***Good Luck!***