

HEALTH

Take control of your anger

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



DR. BRAD KLONTZ

Clinical psychologist

Carl loses control. It happens several times a week. Lately, it seems like it doesn't take much to set him off. Sometimes it's a comment from his wife, a criticism from his boss, or an interaction with a rude customer. Or maybe it's a slow driver or a glance from a stranger that lasts just a little too long. When Carl loses it, it's not a pretty sight. His blood boils, his heart pounds and he often does or says something he later regrets. While he has never hit his wife, he has sworn at her, yelled at the kids, slammed doors and broken things. Carl's anger is getting the best of him and is interfering with his life.

In itself, anger is a good thing. It is a highly adaptive emotion that let's us know that something is wrong. Anger warns us we are being mistreated, threatened, or at risk of being harmed. It helps us express our needs to those we care about and argue for change. Anger is part of our hardwired fight or flight system to protect us from threats to our physical and emotional well-being. When our brain interprets something as threatening, it sets off an alarm that mobi-

lizes us to take protective action. Hormones are released into our bloodstream that increase our heart rate, oxygen intake, and muscle tension, preparing us to take action. In that moment, all of our body's resources are aimed at survival. The action-oriented parts of our brain are activated and the thinking parts of our brain are shut off.

Anger is a very effective emotion when we are faced with a threat that requires action for survival. Unlike the world of our pre-historic ancestors, however, most of us are rarely faced with threats that require such mobilization. If we aren't careful, non-life threatening situations such as an argument with a spouse or coworker can lead to intense anger where our thinking brains go off-line, resulting in actions that can hurt us and those around us.

According to the American Psychological Association, human beings primarily respond to anger in three ways: suppression, expression and calming. Suppressing anger involves trying to deny it exists, pushing it down, or ignoring it by focusing only on the positive. While this may work in the short run, it can lead to significant problems later on. When anger is

not dealt with, it can lead to high blood pressure, hypertension, or depression. It can lead to a cynical attitude, chronic sarcasm, or taking out one's anger in indirect and inappropriate ways.

Expressing anger in a non-aggressive but assertive manner is the healthiest way to deal with it. To do so, you must be clear about what you want and know how to effectively advocate for what you need. Since our thinking brain shuts off during intense anger, advocating for oneself is best done after a period of calming. Calming involves taking steps to lower your heart rate, interrupt or challenge angry thoughts, and let the feelings subside.

For example, when in conflict I encourage couples to rate their anger on a scale of 0-10, with 0 representing a total absence of anger and 10 representing uncontrollable rage. When someone feels anger above an intensity level of 5 or 6, further attempts to resolve the issue will likely result in a poor outcome. In such times, calming techniques are useful to lower the intensity of the anger to a level where productive discussions are possible. Often this will involve taking a 20- to 30-minute "time-

Expressing anger in a non-aggressive but assertive manner is the healthiest way to deal with it.

out" from the interaction to allow the thinking brain to come back on-line.

The APA recommends some additional ways of managing anger. These include:

- Deep breathing
Shallow chest breathing occurs when we are stressed or angry. Taking several deep belly breaths can help initiate a relaxation response.
- Repeat a calming phrase
While taking deep breaths, repeat in your mind the words "relax" or "take it easy."
- Helpful self-talk

An exaggerated anger response is often based on exaggerated thinking, irrational thinking, or a misinterpretation of events or intentions. Replace thoughts like "This is horrible and things will never be the same" or "She is hurting me on purpose" with more helpful thoughts like "I am upset but things will work out" or "She may not have known this would hurt me."

- Relaxing imagery
Anger can also be a result of distressing mental images. Try focusing on a relaxing mental image or

scene, such as a beautiful sunset.

- Think before you talk
When angry it is easy to jump to conclusions. Don't say the first thing that comes to your mind and take some time to think through your response.

Misplaced, exaggerated, or chronic anger is often the result of suppressed anger associated with deeper emotional wounds, such as those resulting from a history of physical or emotional abuse. If you feel like your anger is out of control and is having a negative effect on your relationships consider counseling to help you take control of your anger. The quality of your life and the lives of those around you will dramatically improve.

► Dr. Brad Klontz is the president of the Hawaii Psychological Association and co-author of "The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge" and "Facilitating Financial Health." He can be reached by e-mail at brad@klontzcoaching.com. For free, confidential referrals to a psychologist in your area, contact the HPA online at www.hawaiipsych.org or call 808-521-8995.

Stocks, Bonds, Mutual Funds, CDs, Retirement Plans, Annuities & Long Term Care, College Planning.

Before we invest your money, we invest our time.

Ruben J. Rea
3-4301 Kuhio Highway, Suite 205
Lihue, HI 96766
632-0351
www.edwardjones.com

Edward Jones
Making Sense of Investing
Member SIPC

HAMCO
1870 Leleiona Street
Lihue, HI 96766-9000
Supplier of glass products and hardware.
Repairs & installation.

Joni Patricio
Manager
License #C-21761

Ph. (808) 245-8793
Fax (808) 245-3642



JOHN STEM
State Lic. #
PCFR-863

ALWAYS A SMART CHOICE! for all your termite needs

Fully Licensed for:
Drywood Termite Fumigation
Ground Termite Treatment
Real Estate Inspections
Over 6 years experience with Terminix.
Free Quotations and Consultations.
Never a charge to visit your home!
Call me directly on my cellular phone for prompt service.

635-5310 - cellular

Representing **TERMINIX INTERNATIONAL** PCO #618

Paid Political Advertising



\$1.98 Meet the Candidate! Stew & Rice

Mon. Sept. 15 Kilauea Neighborhood Center
Tues. Sept. 16 Koloa Neighborhood Center
Thurs. Sept. 18 Kapa'a Neighborhood Center

5:30 pm to 7:30 pm

Suggested Donation \$1.98—or give us your 2¢!

Paid for by: Friends of Tim Bynum, Puna Kalama Dawson, Chair
P.O. Box 3292, Lihue, HI 96766 822-1652 • www.timbynum.com