Anger is often misunderstood as only a negative emotion. Anger is a natural response to something that is threatening or potentially harmful. As such, anger can be a healthy reaction in some situations. Other times, however, expressions of anger can be excessive and unwarranted. Angry expressions can damage relationships and can be bad for your health. In its most extreme and unhealthy form, anger can lead to violent and destructive behavior.

**What causes anger?**

People experience feelings of anger for many different reasons. Simple frustrations are normally tolerated and dealt with; however, if they seem to occur in rapid succession with little chance for recovery or resolution, they can lead to building feelings of anger. Other times, a situation is judged to be so completely unacceptable to someone that they feel they have no other choice but to respond in anger.

Anger is also sometimes referred to as a secondary emotion. That is because anger can cover up other feelings such as fear, embarrassment, shame, disgust or sadness. Anger is also multi-layered because it exists not only as a feeling but also as thoughts we have and actions we take to express what we are feeling.

Almost always, we see causes of our anger as being outside of ourselves. However, thorough analyses of anger have shown that it is much more about what we think as opposed to the things that happen outside of us. Proof of this is the fact that similar events can happen to two people, and one will get angry as a result while the other person will not. Therefore, changing how and when we become angry has a lot to do with changing how we think about things.

During a pandemic, people have lots of thoughts about what is happening around them. They have thoughts about how the pandemic was started and who or what they think might be to blame for it. In addition, they pass judgment on how they think other people are responding or should be responding to the pandemic. Job loss, financial strain, isolation, lost opportunities, and health conditions all contribute to feelings of frustration and anger.

**How do people cope with anger?**

Most people don’t like to feel angry; throughout their lives, they develop ways of dealing with their anger. Many people discover they are able to talk to themselves and calm themselves down. Others find that by breathing deeply, closing their eyes and changing their thoughts, they are able to lessen their feelings of anger.

There are times, however, when someone may find themselves unable to stop feeling angry. Even with their best efforts, they may find that feelings of anger seem to sneak up on them. They find themselves getting angry more often than they would like and being angry with people or situations that don’t deserve the anger. People closest to them are often those who suffer the most as a result. The angry person may have tremendous feelings of regret.
following a display of their anger, and they may recognize they need to get help learning to control their anger.

Fortunately, there are many avenues of help available to learn to better manage anger. Books and online resources that provide guidance about how to thoughtfully make changes to expressions of anger are easily accessible.

**Professional Strategies**

Professional help is available to identify causes of anger and to develop strategies to better manage it. A trusting relationship with a nonjudgmental professional counselor provides the foundation to begin making initial positive strides to manage anger. Success in treatment tends to provide a feedback loop—the more successful one is at controlling anger, the more hopeful they become and the more effort they make for continued improvements.

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Coping with Depression during COVID-19

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Sustaining this state of well-being can be a challenge even when the stresses of life are normal. But global stressors such as a pandemic can make it even more difficult to maintain this sense of well-being, and we may become susceptible to mental health conditions such as depression during this time.

What is Depression?
Depression has to do with mood: our state of mind or how we are feeling. Mood can fluctuate during normal, non-stressful times and even during the course of a single day. We may have a range of feelings that vary from feeling very happy, joyful, competent, and hopeful to feeling sad, discouraged, frustrated, or lonely. While we all have different ranges of moods or feelings, most of the time our moods stay within certain limits, allowing us to function so we can participate fully in our lives.

Sometimes, however, mood can begin to drift outside this normal range. Some people can get so happy and overexcited that they are not able to focus on their daily activities, or they are not able to sleep at night. This condition is referred to as mania.

Depression is the opposite of mania. Depression sets in when someone feels sad, discouraged, afraid, alone, and down, usually for more days than not. These feelings seem to persist even when the person is engaging in activities they usually enjoy. Depression tends to linger as an undercurrent throughout every aspect of a person’s life, and they often feel helpless and hopeless as attempts to change how they are feeling produce little difference. There are, however, strategies and treatments that can help.

 Treatments
Treatments can be divided into two categories: self-help and professional help.

Self-Help Strategies
Self-help strategies involve actions that you can take on your own to help with depression. They can include talking to someone close to you, perhaps a dear friend or family member, and sharing what you are feeling. A good listener and an offer of caring support can sometimes be enough to help turn the tide of a depressive mood. Other self-help strategies include reading positive books, listening to uplifting music, or even reading books about depression that provide step-by-step exercises to begin making a change.

Many self-help books focus on making a change in thinking or cognitions. Mood is powerfully affected by the things we think, and if we are able to make changes in our
thoughts, becoming more positive, hopeful, realistic, and fair, our mood will often improve as well.

**Professional Strategies**

Sometimes, even with our best efforts and those of other people close to us, we may find we are not able to change a depressed mood. Someone may find they are tired all the time and have no energy. They may sleep too much, or they may sleep during times when they want to be awake, and then not be able to sleep during times they want to be sleeping. This may go on sometimes for days, weeks, or even months.

When a depressed mood reaches this level of constant disruption, and when we are not able to change it, we likely need to seek help from a professional who is trained to treat depressed moods. Family doctors or psychiatrists can help identify whether or not an antidepressant medication may be warranted. Professional counselors, therapists, or psychologists can help provide not only understanding and listening, but also individualized strategies to help lift someone out of their depressed mood. Most people who are struggling with depression who fully engage in counseling feel better over time, especially if they also take a properly prescribed antidepressant medication.

Time spent isolated and disconnected from normal routines during a pandemic can sometimes foster feelings of depression. It is important to recognize depression early on and then to seek help when it is indicated.

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Throughout life, we have meaningful relationships with other people. These people can be in our lives for different lengths of time, sometimes for very long and sometimes only for a short time. Regardless of the length of time we have them in our lives, losing them when they die can create significant sorrow and feelings of loss. Grief or grieving is the emotional response we experience when we lose someone close to us. Grieving can affect not just how we feel but also how we act and how we think. Beliefs we have about that person and about what happens to them after they pass play a big role in the grieving process.

There are actually many different kinds of loss that can lead to feelings of grief. For some people the passing of an animal, a dear pet, can be just as difficult as the passing of a person. Children can feel a similar sense of loss when someone close to them moves away or has to be gone for a long period of time. Grief is powerfully affected by the sense that we won't see that person or animal or be with them for a long period of time, if at all.

What is the process of grieving?

Many authors and researchers have made attempts to define the process of grieving. They have tended to focus on certain steps including denial, anger, bargaining, resolution and acceptance. What seems to be true about all of these grieving processes is just how different they are for every person. Some people pass through the stages of grief as described in these models. Other people may skip steps or go through the stages in a different order. Finally, some people seem to come up with their own steps that have not been identified before. The important fact is that everyone grieves differently, and everyone has different reasons for grieving a particular loss.

You may be grieving the actual loss of someone close to you during, and perhaps as a result of, the pandemic. You may also be grieving other losses that have occurred such as the loss of important opportunities or events as a result of the pandemic.

What can I do to help with my feelings of grief and loss?

At some point in a grieving process, it becomes important to talk with someone else. That point can be different for every person, and it is important to never try to force someone to talk if they are not ready, or if they feel like they don’t need to. When the time is right, listening is more important than talking. The listener should pay attention not only to the feelings that the person is expressing but also to what they are thinking and what was important to them about the person, pet, or experience they have lost. Simply repeating to the person what they said to show you are listening can be helpful. More helpful, however, is to really try to understand why they are feeling the way they are. This requires a certain kind of listening that tends to be done more with the heart than just with the ears.
If you have lost someone close to you, or if you are grieving any kind of loss, simply acknowledging you’re grieving is a good first step. Some people find it very helpful to consult with spiritual advisors they trust or resources about an afterlife to gain a sense of perspective that works for them and helps provide them with understanding about the loss.

When grieving starts to take on the features of prolonged depression, someone may need to seek professional help. Other people close to a person, or the person themselves, may start to notice the grieving process is taking longer than they think it should, or that it is having a more significant negative impact than they think it should. When this happens, it would likely be beneficial to talk with a helping professional who can assess the particular experience with loss and grieving and help accompany the person to a better place of healing and improvement.

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Coping with Relationship Issues during COVID-19

We depend on our relationships with others from birth on. Some relationships are chosen for us, like our parents and siblings; some relationships are of our own choosing. Close relationships are part of what make us who we are. Healthy relationships are integral to our happiness and well-being—they support us and can help us to be our best selves. In times of stress and crisis, however, we can be hardest on those closest to us.

Interacting with a significant other can present its challenges even in the best of times. People are different in terms of what they think, how they feel, and how they act. Each person's background is uniquely their own. Differences make us appreciate one another, but they can also be a cause of frustration as well. We may not understand why someone close to us acts or thinks the way they do because it is so different from how we act or think. It is important to always remember people have their own reasons for doing the things they do even if it doesn’t make sense to us. Giving another person the benefit of the doubt can go a long way in helping maintain the close relationships that are important to us.

Most people say they are at their happiest and greatest level of well-being when relationships with people close to them are warm, intimate and rewarding. Conversely, most people list relationship problems as one of the biggest causes of distress in their lives. The stress and disruption caused by a pandemic can lead us to take out negative feelings on people closest to us. This can create a vicious cycle as people close to us respond negatively because of how we are treating them.

What can I do to create and maintain a healthy relationship?

People in close relationships are most likely the best experts about their relationship. Relationships are as different and varied as the people who are in them. Relationship dynamics, or how a relationship works, can be healthy and unhealthy. Relationships built on trust, compassion, understanding, and devotion are healthy and lead to deep feelings of satisfaction for both people in the relationship. On the other hand, relationships that are full of conflict, disagreement, arguing, and even violence are unhealthy and have a negative effect on the people in the relationship and often even on other people around them.

Improving a relationship takes tremendous time and effort. For most people, maintaining a positive relationship is some of the hardest work they ever do in their lives. Even people in relationships who seem to have it all together and who make it look easy will say they were only able to get there after a lot of work and effort.

Time spent together is the most important ingredient in a successful relationship. Limiting distractions, focusing on each other, and really listening to each other are necessary building blocks for a healthy and happy relationship.

Many books and online resources have been developed to help partners strengthen and maintain strong relationships. Some couples are able to take advantage of these resources to help them through turbulent times. Other couples, however, find that they need an outside party,
someone not involved in the relationship itself, to help them recognize and overcome negative or harmful ways of interacting with each other.

Professional relationship counselors are trained specifically to be able to intervene and identify changes that can be made to improve relationships. In addition, they have many hours of experience working with a variety of couples, helping to bring about change in their relationship dynamics so there is a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in the relationship. Often, these counselors focus on patterns of communication; they help couples improve how they express themselves to each other and how to better understand where the other person is coming from.

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Coping with Substance Misuse during COVID-19

What is Substance Misuse?
Throughout history people have used substances to alter their ways of thinking and feeling. This has provided a relief or an escape from the sometimes monotonous experience of daily living. Mood altering substances have also been used recreationally to enhance enjoyment of certain activities or events. Societies have varied on their definitions of which substances are permissible from a legal standpoint and on the ages at which people are determined to be able to exercise sound judgment regarding the use of these substances. For our purposes, we are talking about alcohol and certain drugs as the focused substances in these considerations.

A pandemic can create certain challenges regarding the use or the misuse of drugs and alcohol. While drug or alcohol use may not be problematic in normal conditions, the stress and disruption caused by a pandemic can produce patterns of use that may involve using more of the substance than is commonly used, or using the substance more frequently or for a longer period of time than is typical.

When patterns of drug or alcohol use become extensive, they tend to bring accompanying features of dysfunction and often result in different problems. Some of these negative outcomes can be physical, such as withdrawal when the period of use is stopped, or they can be social, such as how other people are treated when someone is under the influence. In addition, the effects can be behavioral such as being unable to discontinue use or engaging in activities that are dangerous to perform under the influence of the substance, such as driving.

How can I recognize when there is a problem?
The first realization of a problem that someone misusing substances, or people close to the substance misusing individual, may have occurs when problematic patterns of misuse continue even when the person expresses regret for their use and intent to make a change. Knowing you don't like how you are using drugs and alcohol or how you act when you are under the influence, but being unable to make a change, are signs you likely have a problem with substance misuse.

Recognizing the problem and acknowledging that it is a problem is the first step. This is sometimes difficult as it is not always something someone wants to admit is true about themselves. Supportive and direct conversations may be needed to bring this recognition about. Sometimes these conversations have to be repeated before they make a difference and the person fully acknowledges that their drug or alcohol use really is a problem.

What do I do when I recognize the problem?
There are many different options when it comes to addressing substance misuse. These range from self-help strategies, to group meetings, to professional help.

Self-Help Strategies
Once someone recognizes they are misusing drugs or alcohol, they may want to make an initial attempt to change their pattern of use on their own. The inability to follow...
through with this intent is a sign the problem is more serious than the person may realize. It is at this point the substance misusing person will need to get help from other people and resources.

**Group Strategies**
Admitting their problem to someone identified as a helping individual is necessary for the help from others to be effective. Recovery support meetings and 12 Step groups consist of other people who have struggled with substance misuse themselves and who have discovered solutions. Many of those people involved in these groups see helping other people misusing substances as an important step in their own progress. Often, they call this progress their recovery.

12 Step or recovery support meetings are in just about every community. During a pandemic, they are more easily and safely accessed online. An online search for these meetings reveals that there are meetings happening somewhere in the world that can be accessed via computer just about every hour of the day or night.

**Professional Strategies**
Professional help becomes necessary when the negative effects of someone's misuse of substances are extremely harmful or when non-professional support groups have not proven sufficient. Professional help may need to vary in terms of the kinds of services that are provided and the intensity of these services. For example, some people whose misuse of substances has created patterns of physical dependency and withdrawal need medical treatment as well as psychological treatment if they are going to safely make a change to their patterns of use. Medical professionals should be consulted as someone takes the beginning steps to discontinue substance misuse.

The intensity of professional treatment services for substance misuse can vary from weekly meetings with a counselor to inpatient hospitalization, with many levels of treatment intensity in between. Treatment intensity is determined based on need, and a thorough assessment by a treatment professional is necessary to determine the level of care needed.

Substance misuse treatment is provided to individuals and often also to groups of people. Interactions with other people also working to overcome substance misuse can be a very helpful and rewarding part of treatment.

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