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Programs Help Installations Stand Against Anger

Kevin Stabinsky | USAG Fort McPherson

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It can "lead to the dark side," but anger doesn't have to be an emotion that takes over and ruins one's life.

According to the "About Anger" pamphlet now available at Army Community Services, "anger is a powerful but perfectly normal emotion.

It is harmful when we ignore it or express it inappropriately."

Additionally, the pamphlet states "anger is the most poorly handled emotion in our society today, but it doesn't have to be."

Anger, like all emotions, can be beneficial, said Merri Slick, a licensed clinical social worker at the Lawrence Joel Army Health Clinic's Behavioral Science Service Clinic.

"Anger helps us set limits and boundaries," she said, explaining that when a person gets angry at someone for doing something to them, they are setting boundaries on how they expect others to treat them.

"If I value myself, I set appropriate boundaries," said Slick. "About Anger" states anger can also be a motivating force, helping people to overcome obstacles or achieve goals they thought were impossible.



Unfortunately, anger tends to make headlines in negative ways, such as in stories of domestic violence, child abuse, assault or murder, said Slick.

Slick, who primarily works with domestic violence and child abuse, said anger issues affect everyone regardless of rank or sex.

She said she has worked with privates through lieutenant colonels on anger issues, and that men and women get angry about the same amount of time.

"The difference is intensity.

Men are bigger and tend to do more damage," she said. "Women are more passive. They do violence by breaking, throwing or busting up things."

If handled improperly, anger can lead to major consequences.

In Georgia, if someone is arrested for Family violence, they are ordered to a weekly, 24-week domestic violence class, or a 10-week anger-management program they have to pay for, Slick said.

Angry outbursts can also lead to jail time, divorce and, for military members, a loss in rank or pay, Slick said.

"About Anger" states anger can have negative health affects, such as high blood pressure, headaches, stomach problems, skin disorders, constipation and diarrhea.

It can also make a person tenser and more likely to get into accidents. Anger can affect Family, friend, work and romantic

relationships, said Cynthia Giesecke, Army Family Team Building/Army Family Action Plan specialist.

It can also negatively affect memory, concentration and creativity.

While all of these negative byproducts are unhealthy, that doesn't mean anger is, Slick said.

"Emotions are good and keep us healthy.

You don't eliminate anger, just contain it," she said. "It's really emotional management."

Unfortunately, emotional management is difficult for many people, said Slick, adding the process begins back when someone is a child.

"A child is born with a temperament and learns to use that temperament from role models.

That's how we learn to deal with emotional pain," she said. Some people, however, through abuse or lack of role models, never learn how to handle emotions like anger, said Slick.

She said even people who know how to manage their anger can run into problems.

"People can have good anger management (skills) but lack of sleep, physical pain and illness can affect them," she said.

This is where a lot of post-deployment issues come in, Slick explained.

Soldiers who come back from deployment often lack the ability to consistently get the three cycles of rapid eye movement sleep the brain needs, Slick said.

Additionally, during deployment, the primitive portion of the brain, which is responsible for the "fight or flight" response, is stimulated excessively due to the increased danger.

"Normally, human beings don't experience fight or flight daily," Slick said. "Any little stressor can push someone over the top with the primitive brain stimulated so much."

It normally takes about six months for a Soldier in this state to readjust, said Slick, but that only happens under optimal conditions, such as being able to catch up on sleep and lack of conflict with a spouse, children or co-workers.

If Soldiers don't get that readjustment, they are more prone to let their anger control them, Slick said.

Even if a Soldier doesn't succumb, the effects of multiple deployments can be consecutive, eventually leading to an outburst.

Sadly, many people refuse to change until it is too late, said Slick.

"Most people don't change unless there is a consequence," she said.

Additionally, some people see the benefits of anger and use it negatively, said Giesecke, adding those individual use anger to reduce stress, hide emotional pain, get attention or punish or change the behavior of others. Slick agreed, saying sometimes anger gets reinforced by the response it creates in others.

Some tips to deal with angry people are to soften one's language, avoid using swear words, lower one's voice, suggest a solution or compromise or withdraw from a situation and try to see things from the other person's point of view, Giesecke said. Other options, according to "About Anger," are to keep calm, be considerate and be a good listener.

Individuals are responsible for maintaining their anger, Slick said.

"Anger starts with emotional pain, which triggers thoughts and emotions and produces behavior," she said. "Some people let their emotions control them instead of controlling their emotions."

To help people learn how to control their anger and learn these skills, Army Community Services offers anger-management classes.

Giesecke, who is the class instructor, said her one-hour class focuses on six different areas: understanding what anger means, learning how anger affects one's life, recognizing anger pay offs, understanding ways anger affects thinking, learning techniques to defuse an angry situation and learning practical ways to manage anger.

Those who feel they may have issues with anger should seek help from behavior health specialists before it causes problems, she said.

Additionally, Slick said men should not be ashamed to come in and get help if they are the victims of domestic violence.

"You might be able to physically protect yourself, but you also need to protect yourself legally," she said, explaining that unless a man can show a history of violence directed to him, it might be tough to prove self defense.

Educational materials and resources are available at ACS in addition to anger management classes.

Slick said help can really make a difference, citing how she has seen some people completely turn their lives around.

Besides helping people overcome their anger issues, help can also address other issues that may contribute to a person's anger, such as drugs or alcohol.

Slick said Behavioral Science Service Center personnel work with the Army Substance Abuse Program to work on drinking, if that is an issue. "It is hard to do, but you can learn to control emotions," Slick said. "We've had a lot of success."