Is Anger a Symptom of ADHD?

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Dealing With ADHD and Anger

Everyone gets angry from time to time, but people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may have a particularly hard time managing it and finding balance. Anger has the potential to be a destructive force if it is left unaddressed, damaging lives and relationships.

With time and effort, you can lessen the severity of or even prevent anger outbursts. In order to do so, it is important to understand why anger tends to coincide with ADHD — addressing both the situation surrounding the emotion and the contributing factors behind it.

Reasons for Anger in ADHD

There are a lot of reasons people with ADHD may deal with anger. Trouble with regulating emotions is common with ADHD, so anger may be due to the symptoms themselves, or the result of the emotional turmoil caused by them.

Low Self-Esteem and Hypersensitivity

Sometimes the symptoms of ADHD can cause low self-esteem. Symptoms may interfere with work or school performance and day-to-day life in such a way that breeds negative feelings and promotes a poor self-image.

The low self-esteem that can accompany feelings of failure or disappointment set off by the negative effects of symptoms can cause sensitivity — and a short fuse. Certain topics or areas of struggle may be more prone to triggering anger than others, depending on the person dealing with ADHD and low self-esteem.

Mood Swings

In addition to self-esteem struggles, mood swings that tend to occur in people with ADHD can also increase the likelihood of outbursts. Bottling emotions can make you prone to having more mood swings or irritability, which can lead to anger.

Fluctuations in mood can be difficult to navigate and may cause strife in your life. If mood swings are a major problem, it may be necessary to explore options that provide stability, such as therapy or medication, in addition to positive lifestyle changes.

Restlessness and Hyperactivity

As they build, restlessness and hyperactivity can feel like a boiling pot of water threatening to bubble over, so it is understandable these symptoms may cause irritation and anger.

Restlessness and hyperactivity may manifest outwardly in different ways, such as through physical sensations of needing to move around. When a child or adult with ADHD struggles to sit still, they aren't just trying to be disruptive — they are dealing with the complex urges that come with ADHD.

Impulsivity

Along similar lines, people with ADHD are more likely to be impulsive, and impulsivity can cause frustration and anger. Those impulsive urges can appear suddenly and come on strong, and an inability to act on impulses can cause agitation.

Impulsivity needs to be managed so it does not become a destructive force. Learning to control impulses can also help lessen the anger that can come along with it.

Irritability

If irritability is present, anger may not be far behind. Irritability may be tied to many situations, such as the exacerbation of symptoms, or poor diet and lack of sleep or exercise.

Living With ADHD

Having to deal with the symptoms themselves on a daily basis can be enough to cause frustration and anger — whether it is inattention, disorganization, or any other way ADHD may appear.

This is especially problematic with undiagnosed ADHD, but receiving a diagnosis does not magically resolve the issue; you still have to learn to manage the symptoms in order to experience a better quality of life.

Next page: Tips for coping with ADHD and anger.

Tips for Coping With ADHD and Anger

There are techniques and skills that can be incorporated when working to control ADHD and anger, and the reasons behind it. In some cases, prevention is key when it comes to lessening the blow of anger, and there are a number of ways to address the root causes to promote better regulation of emotions.

Incorporate Physical Activity

Exercise is a healthy outlet for hyperactivity and restlessness, but it can also improve your overall wellbeing. Benefits of exercise may include being more alert and focused, getting more restful sleep, and decreasing the risk of other illnesses, such as diabetes.

Interrupt Impulsive Thoughts

Since impulsivity can trigger anger if the person is not allowed to act on impulses, diffusing the impulse itself may be helpful.

When dealing with impulsivity, it is important to interrupt those thoughts before they spin out of control. For instance, if the impulse is to shop or spend money, asking how the purchase will impact life in both positive and negative ways before buying is a step that can be taken.

The goal is to slow down and consider actions before making them, which can result in wiser decision-making. This skill may not be easy to implement, as people with poor impulse control tend to be very 'in the moment,' but with time and practice, interrupting negative thought patterns is possible.

Stopping to think, even for a moment, is progress. Even if you do not succeed at first, celebrate those steps taken

towards making better decisions.

Seek Support

Talking about it, whether with a loved one or in therapy and addressing the root causes may lessen the weight or even calm anger. Exploring your feelings may help you to not only address the current situation but also lessen the severity of future outbursts.

Talking can get out those thoughts and emotions in a healthy way, which can result in lessened struggles with anger.

Take a Step Back

If you find anger is building up, it may be beneficial to temporarily step away from the situation before it escalates. Don't respond in the heat of the moment if you feel your anger is building up, as this could have disastrous results.

Fidgeting

If restlessness or hyperactivity is causing an influx of emotions, fidgeting may help. There are fidget toys available that may be of use.

Coping With Anger When It Rises Up

Sometimes, as hard as we try to prevent it, we get angry. It is something we shouldn’t beat ourselves up about.

There are techniques you may want to implement if you are in a difficult situation, such as:

- Take deep breaths
- Count backwards from 10
- Recite positive affirmations inside your head
- Visualize calming images or soothing sounds
- Ask to have the conversation later or in a different setting
- Walk away if it gets too intense

These may calm racing thoughts or allow you the chance to think before reacting.

Managing Anger Is Possible

It is important to gain control over anger so it no longer rules your thoughts and actions; however, it is equally essential to deal with the anger and its cause rather than internalizing it. Though it may seem difficult or overwhelming, it is possible to manage anger and lessen the hold it has over your future.

Identifying the cause of anger is a good place to start. From there, addressing the struggle in healthy ways may provide a venue to let go of the anger rather than acting on it.