



LOS ANGELES COUNTY — DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
550 S. VERMONT AVENUE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90020

Anger Response Tips for Telephone Situations

1. Why are Callers Angry?

In the aftermath of a disaster, callers may be angry, rude and frustrated for many understandable reasons. People who have been affected by a disaster will most likely feel profoundly shaken in their sense of security and well being. Frequently, their lives will have changed drastically.

The greater your understanding about the reasons for your caller's anger, the easier it will be for you to manage the situation.

2. Tips

DO

- Stay clam.
- Listen seriously and attentively.
- Acknowledge and validate feelings.
- Identify specific sources of anger.
- Focus on the problem and its resolution.
- Remain respectful.
- Follow up and keep promises.

DON'T

- Do not take anger personally.
- Don't tell the person he/she shouldn't be angry.
- Don't argue.
- Don't joke if they are not joking.

3. Common Reasons for Caller's Anger.

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Personal Losses | Having little food or money |
| Living in less than satisfactory conditions | Feeling unsafe |
| Concern for the welfare of loved ones | Delays in receiving assistance |
| Having received incorrect information | Little sleep |
| Having been treated rudely by other helpers | Chronic fatigue |
| Being dissatisfied with benefits | Increased marital/family tension |
| Loss of employment | Increased workload |
| Increased substance use/abuse | Personal integrity questioned |
| Feeling of humiliation | Feels like no one understands |
| Feels discriminated against | Expectations not met |
| You do not have enough information | Trouble reaching the right person |

4. What to do if You are the Recipient of a caller's "Unrelenting Verbal Abuse."

- a. Emphasize "I didn't cause the problem but I am attempting to resolve it and I need your help."
- b. Have someone else take over.
- c. Warn that if abuse continues you will end call, and do so.
- d. Take a brief break after a difficult call.

5. How to Handle an Angry Telephone Caller.

- a. Stay calm.
- b. Practice breathing exercises.
- c. Self talk.
 - "This is not about me personally."
 - "I have the courage, and the ability to remain calm."
 - "Becoming angry will not help this person or myself."
 - "I am not absorbing this anger."
 - "I am competent to handle this situation."

- d. Count to ten – slowly.
- e. Tune in to your physical body.

For example:

- How are you sitting?
- Is your back pushed “hard” against your chair?
- Is your hand tightly gripping the telephone?
- Is your voice loud?

2. Listen

- a. Be attentive and take the caller seriously.
- b. Let people tell their story - try not to interrupt.

3. Acknowledge Feelings

- a. Label the feelings.
 - “You sound angry/frustrated ... Disappointed/Irritated ... At your rope’s end.”
- b. Validate concerns:
 - Make sure that people feel heard. Be very cautious about giving an opinion. You can be very understanding without agreeing or disagreeing.
 - “I heard that you called several times to get an appointment and haven’t gotten through. I can understand how that would be frustrating.”
 - “This is most unusual and I’m concerned about that too. I am going to try to help you now and I will also let my supervisor know about this situation.”
 - “I can understand why you are upset, please tell me more about what happened.”

- c. Offer choices if the person is present:

Why? This empowers, redirects, and shows caring. For example: coffee, have a seat, schedule a time to meet later.

4. Identify the Specific Sources of Anger

Get a clear picture of what the real problem is. Ask questions if you need to clarify.

5. Keep Task Focused

Inquire as to how you can directly be of assistance at this point in time. This clarifies your role and their expectations.

Focus on the problem and its resolution. Give hope, be confident that you can provide some assistance or guidance. Find some small way to help them so they can feel their call was a success.

6. Remain Respectful

Refrain from making commiserating or sarcastic remarks.

7. Keep Your Promises!

8. What Not to do if you are the Recipient of a caller's "Unrelenting Verbal Abuse"

- a. Don't take anger personally.

Remember that although the anger is directed at you, it is not about you. The person is upset with his/her situation and possible with who or what you represent.

- b. Do not try to convince the person he/she should not be angry.
- c. Do not argue back.
- d. Do not joke if they are not joking.

- e. Do not allow yourself to be abused during this process.
- f. Take a pause, then say, "I realize this is an upsetting situation for you. I did not cause this situation and I would like to help you resolve the problem...but I need your cooperation.
- g. Do not try to solve the problem while the person is angry. You cannot talk constructively to someone in the heat of anger.
- h. If possible, have someone else take over... "Look, I don't think I'm the person for you to deal with."
- i. If you decide to hang up, give a warning. "I feel uncomfortable with your profanity/calling me names/shouting. I hear you are angry and be assured that I would like to help but I will have to hang up if you continue.
- j. Then if it continues-suggest he/she call back when feeling calmer/more in control/can be more appropriate.
- k. Then tell them you are going to end the call and hang up.

9. End of call - At the end of every call that is upsetting to you, take a break.

- a. Stand up and stretch.
- b. Smile
- c. Walk away from your desk.
- d. Have a drink of water.
- e. If you are able, walk outside your building to the fresh air.
- f. Know that You are important.
- g. Talk to a friend.
- h. Know that there are bad days ... some are worse than others!

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