



‘Tis the Season: Dealing with Holiday Stress and Anger, Part II

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“Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose...that is not easy.”

Aristotle

We continue our look at how medical doctors and their families can deal with holiday stress and anger. Last month, we discussed the expectations of a perfect holiday and how those unrealistic expectations, coupled with an active addiction or untreated behavioral health problem, can lead to disappointment, depression, and unhealthy anger.

The first step to handling stress and anger begins with “acceptance,” an easy word to understand but so much more difficult to incorporate emotionally into our lives. What is acceptance? What does it have to do with anger and stress? One of Webster’s definitions of *acceptance* is “...to recognize as true.”

The myths surrounding anger, as we mentioned last month, are by definition, not true. However, many of us accept them as fact and act accordingly. Acceptance means identifying those myths we believe, dispelling them, and replacing them with truths. For example, to those who believe the myth, “*Anger is wrong*,” I pose the question, why is it wrong? Isn’t anger an emotion just like fear? Is fear wrong? If not, then neither is anger wrong.

Once we have begun to identify and dispel the myths in our lives, we have begun the process of *acceptance*. Once we begin to incorporate these truths into our lives, we can begin to deal efficiently with the situations that create anger and stress.

Here are some efficient ways of handling anger and stress:

- *Talk about the problem or make a plan to talk about it* – Verbalizing a real or perceived problem keeps it from building into a bigger problem.
- *Think about your anger* – Am I angry over something that is beyond my control? Is it an issue where I *do* have *some* control?

- *Think positively* – Don't automatically expect a negative response to your anger.
- *Communicate caring* – If it suits the situation, let the other person know that you still love or care about them.
- *Communicate using "I" messages* – By taking responsibility for your anger, you can avoid the "blame game" and passing judgment.

Remember, it's okay to be angry; it's what we do about it that gets us in trouble! Take control of your anger and it won't take control of you.

For more information on dealing with holiday stress and anger or to learn more about the Physician's Health Program (PHP), contact the Tennessee Medical Foundation at 615-467-6411, or log on to www.e-tmf.org.