



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Bless Your Heart!

Ugh! I can't believe I got stuck behind this person who's driving under the speed limit. Doesn't he know the speed limit is just a suggested starting place?? And what about that chick who was so rude to me in the drive through line at lunch? Don't people know how to behave anymore? How is it that I am always surrounded by idiots?

Ever feel like that? If everyone would just act like they are supposed to, the world would run just fine! Better yet, if everyone would just think like you and act accordingly, life would be great. And why is everyone so bound and determined to frustrate you? I have news for you – they're not. The general population doesn't care one whit about you. People are not doing whatever it is they're doing just to irritate you. But I've worked with a lot of people who view it that way.

When I'm working with someone on anger management issues, one thing I see over and over is the tendency for those people to live in a "should" world. People "should" act certain ways; life "should" be easier than it is; relationships "should" not be so much work. These poor people are living in a dream world, and they use their "should" thinking to justify their own angry and abusive behavior.

We all have bad things happen in our lives. Why is it that some people seem to be able to let things roll off their backs, while other people wail that it is the end of the world? People with anger management issues tend to make all the bad things the same size: huge. They have difficulty assigning the appropriate amount of energy to the event. When everything that happens is big, you stay in a constant state of frustration and anger.

Here is how anger works:

- 1. An event occurs**
- 2. You have thoughts about the event**
- 3. Your thoughts lead to behaviors**
- 4. Your thoughts and behaviors will either increase or decrease your emotions**

Let's take an example based on the beginning of this article. Here is the event: you are late for work, and the person driving in front of you on the two-lane road is going very slowly. Typical thoughts might include, "What is wrong with this person?" "Get off the road!" "Why do you even still have

a license?!" Those thoughts will likely lead to behaviors that might include tailgating, honking your horn, hand gestures, or even speeding illegally around the driver and risking a ticket or wreck. Those thoughts and behaviors are most definitely going to increase your anger and frustration.

Now let's look at the same example a different way. You are behind the same slow driver, and you are still late for work. But what if you forced your thoughts in a different direction—what I call the "bless your heart" response? "Bless his heart, he's having car trouble." "Bless her heart, she just left the eye doctor and her eyes are dilated." "Bless their hearts, they are elderly and nervous." Obviously, we don't know if any of those are true, but just choosing to think in that manner automatically begins to calm a person down. When you're calmer, you can make better behavior choices such as coming up with an alternative route, or taking the opportunity to have a "relaxation moment" as you are forced to slow down.

"Bless your heart" is a phrase we hear often in the South. It is one that conveys empathy and understanding. Now you can begin to fully understand its power to help you out of frustrating circumstances. Bless your heart, you just didn't know any better before!

