

ANGER MANAGEMENT

A set of handouts compiled by

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ANGER - GOOD OR BAD?

Anger is an emotion just like sadness and happiness. It is a normal and natural part of life.

Positive aspects of anger

1. It can give us energy to do difficult things.
2. It can help us feel powerful and in control.
3. It can give us information that something is wrong.

Negative aspects of anger

1. It stops us thinking clearly about our choices and actions.
2. It can cover and obscure other feelings, such as sadness, upset or hurt.
3. It can lead to aggression and violence, causing harm to self and others.
4. It can lead to physical problems, such as tension and stomach problems.

Ways of dealing with anger

Winding up

People who wind up are quick to blame others. They call people names. In an argument their anger increases and may result in violence.

Keeping the lid on

Some people bottle up their anger or even deny they are angry. Sometimes this anger builds up and explodes like a pressure cooker.

Channelling anger

Anger can be channelled into constructive energy, or expressed without hurting ourselves or others.

METAPHORS OF ANGER

Below are some common metaphors we often use for anger. They usually describe a process of losing control. Often they have a 'trigger' which can also be described metaphorically.

- Volcano
- Escalator
- Thermometer
- Explosion
- Pressure cooker
- Short fuse

ANGER: FIVE-STAGE MODEL

Stage 1: Something winds you up or gets to you e.g. person, situation, something goes wrong.

Stage 2: Body language changes e.g. tension, clenched fists, raised voice.

Stage 3: Something goes on in your head e.g. 'This is all I need'

Stage 4: Feel wound up e.g. heart pounding, sweating, muscles tense
Mood changes e.g. becomes volatile

Stage 5: Get angry and act out your feelings e.g. shout, hit something or someone

There are different strategies we can use to help at each stage.

RECOGNISING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANGER (SELF AND OTHERS)

Physical signs

- Muscles tense up in chest, face, neck, back, arms, legs
- Stomach ache or in knots
- Butterflies in tummy
- Headache
- Clenched fists
- Clenched jaw
- Posture stiffens
- Face goes red or white
- Sweaty or cold
- Breathing gets faster

Not everyone will feel these, we all have our own individual pattern. It is worth getting to know your own pattern of physical signs. Similarly, it is worth reflecting on what calms you down, e.g. exercise, listen to music, have a fag, talk to a friend.

Behavioural signs

These can include:

- becoming withdrawn or depressed
- smiling or being extra cheerful
- shouting or calling names
- showing frustration at small set-backs because you are angry about something else

Thoughts

Our thoughts are usually affected when we are angry. They may be:

- racing and incoherent
- going round in circles
- numb and difficult to reach
- blanked out completely
- negative about oneself
- vengeful towards others

Obviously we won't make good decisions if we are in this state. We can use relaxation and 'cool thoughts' to calm ourselves down enough to think more clearly about the situation which is triggering our anger.

Triggers

These are the situations which set off our anger, e.g. being criticised, being kept waiting, being insulted (or one's relations). It is worth getting to know these, and rehearsing an assertive response.

RELAXATION

Relaxation is a way of reducing tension, anxiety and anger, so that you can deal more calmly with any situation and feel in control of your actions.

METHOD 1: RELAXING MUSCLES

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. If you are sitting, make sure your back is well supported and your feet are planted on the floor. It's best not to have arms or legs crossed. Your head and back should be in a straight line. If you can, close your eyes.

Starting from your toes and feet, tell yourself to relax each part of your body in turn - toes, feet, ankles, calf muscles, knees, thighs, buttocks, tummy, stomach, back, rib cage, chest, shoulders, fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, upper arms, shoulders again, neck, back of head, forehead, eye sockets and eyes, cheeks, mouth area, chin, unclench teeth, neck (again). Take it slowly the first time. Feel your body resting on the floor or chair, well supported; then check through again fairly quickly to relax any part which has tensed up again.

Then take a few deep breaths. Gradually find your own regular rhythm for breathing in and out in a relaxed way, with your tummy rising and falling as the air goes in and out. Continue this as long as you need to calm down.

When you feel centred, you will be able to think about the situation making you angry more clearly, and work out the best response or action.

METHOD 2: TENSE AND RELAX

As with Method 1, find a comfortable position. Then, starting with your toes, tense them gently, hold them and then relax - feel the difference between the tension and the relaxed feeling. Slowly work up through your body as in Method 1, but this time tense each part of your body, hold it for a moment, then relax it. Try to experience a sense of relief as you let go of the tension.

Then pay attention to your breathing as in Method 1.

METHOD 3: GUIDED IMAGERY

Do the relaxation as in Method 1.

Then imagine a place you know well (from present or past) where you can relax and feel good. Bring to mind the sights, sounds, smells and feel of that place and imagine yourself in it. Continue breathing regularly and calmly in your place until you feel good about being there and able to 'come back' to ordinary life and deal positively with the situation making you angry. Work out the best response or action.

FEELINGS UNDERLYING ANGER

Often anger covers many other feelings.

Example

In a situation where you felt really angry....

“I felt angry when what I said was ignored.”

A layer of **hurt** often underlies anger.

“I felt hurt because nobody seemed to value my opinion.”

The reason for the hurt is often an **unmet need**.

“I need to be accepted and valued by others.”

Alongside the need are **fears**.

“I have a fear that I’ll be left on my own.”

Anger and hurt are often two sides of the same coin. If we can identify the hurts, needs and fears that lie at the roots of anger (either our own or others’), then we can begin addressing these, rather than remaining caught up in the anger.

(Adapted from *Playing with Fire* by Nic Fine and Fiona Macbeth, Youth Work Press 1992)

I-STATEMENTS

Often when we are angry, we blame others and put them down. This often makes it difficult for the other person to hear our point of view, because they are too busy defending themselves against the insults.

I-statements are ways of expressing emotions assertively, concentrating on how the situation is affecting us, without putting the other person down. This makes it easier for the other person to listen to what we are saying.

The formula is deceptively simple, but quite hard to put into practise. If done well, it can help people to improve their communication skills a great deal.

**When you.....
I feel.....
because.....**

**I would like.....
so that.....**

Example

You statement: You're so noisy!

I-statement: **When you** play music late at night
 I feel angry
 because I can't sleep

I would like peace and quiet
so that I can sleep properly and get up in time for work.

This lets the other person know what the problem is, what your feelings are and what you want to happen.

It also concentrates on **behaviour** that needs changing (music late at night) rather than making global personal statement (noisy person).

Limitations

Some people feel that I-statements are best used in situations where there is some trust and relationship. It may not be possible to use them in situations where expressing genuine feelings leads to being taken advantage of

ANGER: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SELF TALK

Negative self talk

Often during conflict we find thoughts coming into our heads which can make us more and more angry - 'winding us up'. Examples are:

- That's it!
- Here we go again!
- I knew it!
- It started badly and now it's getting worse.
- Just my bad luck!
- It's all your/ my/ his fault.
- They deserve all they get.
- I'll get them back for this.

All these statements are negative and often blaming, of ourselves or others. They may seem to 'justify' our anger and bad feelings, but in fact they usually make us feel worse.

Positive self talk

We can often turn things round (or at least stop them getting worse) by positive 'self talk'. Examples are:

- It's bad luck, but I'm not going to let it spoil my day.
- I know I can deal with this situation.
- Stay calm - I can sort this out.
- I'm upset, so I'll find a friend to talk to.
- I can work out how to solve this.
- I'm doing really well, just keep going.
- Let's clear up the mess together.
- It didn't work today, but there's always another time.

Note that all these statements are forward-looking and mostly practical - they look at ways of solving the problem or conflict, rather than who to blame.

It is quite hard to turn round our patterns, but even one positive thought can sometimes make a big difference. Young people find this easier to do than adults.

Self praise

Even if things don't always work out, it's good to look at what we did well:

- I did well there
- I kept my temper this time
- Things didn't go my way, but I didn't lose it

ANGER MANAGEMENT A SHORT BOOK LIST

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