

Managing Anger Worksheet

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In getting prepared to manage your anger, it is firstly important to be aware of the following:

1. Don't react in anger. Take time to consider what is going on. Reacting in anger is impulsive and very likely will not advantage you or others. The people you are angry with often just respond to the anger and miss the message
2. Try to dispel the thought that you will explode with anger if you do not express it
3. Physical violence is always off limits, as well as threats of abandonment or separation
4. Realise that anger management is challenging and often not easy. It is a work in progress throughout life. Slipups are the order of the day. You can learn to do better, to have more control but it takes time and effort.

Step 1: Developing Awareness

Step one in anger management is to develop awareness of what causes you to react in anger, to learn your triggers. Start by keeping a journal and tracking your triggers. Carry a small trigger book with you and as things happen that make you angry, write them down. See if a pattern emerges and whether you can identify certain people, events, circumstances or particular times of the day that are triggering your anger states.

Following this, a useful thing to do is to identify what situations you can and cannot change. By identifying what you cannot change, such as traffic jams at certain times, you might be able to avoid this altogether, or, if you have identified something that cannot be changed you can learn not to react. This would be a good time to use some stress reduction techniques like slow breathing or breath awareness techniques. It may also be necessary to realise there are some things, situations, or people that we just have to accept. We cannot change them, we just have to come to some acceptance and tolerance of them.

Step 2: Gaining Balance and Control

a. A good place to begin in gaining control of our anger is to maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle. Getting enough sleep, for instance, is very important. We know that sleep deprivation triggers states of anger, depression and anxiety, so try to develop a sound sleeping habit. Good nutrition and

appropriate exercise are also essential. Lack of attention to either of these can lead to fatigue and when we are fatigued we are much more prone to react rather than respond appropriately to anger triggers. Also, vigorous exercise can help to “burn off” some of the anger/stress hormones such as cortisol, leaving you feeling calmer and more relaxed.

b. Talking to someone can help. Start with a friend or family member, or alternatively a professional counsellor or psychologist, particularly if your anger is out of control

c. Work out whether any of your needs are not being met such as respect from others and consideration for your personal boundaries. Good questions to ask are, “What are my underlying needs”, “Do I feel that I am being taken advantage of?”, “Can I change this or not?” and “What do I want to do to fulfil my needs?”.

c. Learn about irrational beliefs and how they can be dealt with. Sometimes irrational beliefs can trigger emotions which lead to anger. Examples of irrational beliefs are, “I must be loved or liked or approved of by every person I meet” or “I must be completely competent in every task and situation”. If such beliefs are not fulfilled, we may feel frustrated and angry in certain situations. Alternatively we may have beliefs that are counterproductive to dealing with our anger such as “my unhappiness and anger are out of my control” or “my problems come from my past and there is nothing I can do about them and that is why I have problems now”. Such thoughts will only get in the way of making progress to gaining balance and control in our lives.

A good way to deal with irrational beliefs is to learn some cognitive strategies such as challenging your negative beliefs or statements with alternative statements which are more realistic and rational. Some ways in which we can challenge our thoughts are by asking ourselves the following questions:

- What evidence do I have for this thought? Is there another way of looking at the situation, another explanation, other options?
- Could it be seen differently by another person? Am I setting unrealistic or unobtainable standards
- Do I have all the facts or am I overlooking relevant ones and overemphasising irrelevant ones?
- Am I thinking in all or nothing or black and white terms only?
- Am I overestimating my responsibility in this?
- Am I underestimating my ability in this?

d. Time out is a very basic but effective technique. It can be as simple as counting to 10 [or 100!] or it can involve removing yourself from the situation or person. When we are in anger mode, poor decisions or

responses can easily be made. Time out is a soothing technique as is breath awareness and other techniques that the Counselling Service can instruct you in. The use of such simple techniques has the effect of calming you down, allowing you to make more considered and appropriate responses to trigger situations.

e. Learn detachment and mindfulness. Mindfulness is a skill which enables us to pay attention to the present moment in a non-judgemental way. Learning such a skill may assist us in reacting less to trigger situations. Mindfulness can be learned through a formal meditation practice called mindfulness meditation. The University Counselling Service can refer you to resources and places where you can learn this skill.

f. Learning assertive behaviours can also be useful . This involves speaking up for your rights, while being aware of the rights and needs of other's, in a strong and appropriate way without resorting to aggression verbally, psychologically or physically. The Counselling Service conducts workshops in Assertiveness training.

Summary points:

1. You realise you have an anger problem so a good place to start is to reflect on what you learned about anger expression and management in your family and culture. We have all picked up some unhelpful habits, so now is the time to work out what needs to be changed. Awareness is the critical first step.
2. Realise that “reacting” does not work. Learn to respond in a more controlled manner instead.
3. Become aware of your triggers so that you can begin to develop more control over your reactions.
4. Managing strong emotions is a reality check time and a useful question to ask is “what can and cannot be changed”. You may need to learn to accept what cannot be changed and start working on what can be changed.
5. Learn some strategies such as breathing exercises or mindfulness to help control your anger reactions.
6. Seek professional help if you are having difficulty controlling your anger or need further assistance. The Counselling Service is able to help you with this.

Main reference

1.Allan, R. (2005). “Getting Control of your Anger”. New York : Mc Graw Hill.

Others:

1. Eifert, G.H., McKay, M., Forsyth, J.P., Hayes, S.C. (2006). “Act on your life not on anger”. Oakland, CA : New Harbinger Pub Inc.
2. Gottlieb, M. (1999) “The Angry Self : A Comprehensive Approach to Anger Management” Phoenix, Ariz. : Zeig, Tucker & Theisen.