



## Anger Management

**Angry    Irate    Enraged    Furious    Indignant    Frustrated**

**Ornery    Disappointed    Upset    Annoyed    Irritated**

**Pissed Off    Antagonized    Infuriated    Bothered    Ticked Off**

**Mad    Boiling    Fuming    Hot**

“**Anger**” is a term borrowed from the Latin word “**angere**” meaning to strangle. Although anger in and of itself is not destructive, it can and often does lead a desire to ‘strangle’ another person (aggression) and/or can result in our “strangling” (hurt, block) ourselves emotionally, psychologically, physically, and/or spiritually. Anger is:

\*A strong feeling of displeasure and/or antagonism.

\*An emotional and/or physiological response to injustice, loss, real or perceived threats, mistreatment, neglect, abuse, unmet expectations, barriers to accomplishing a desired goal, and/or violation of one’s rights.

\*Often viewed as bad, wrong, not Christian-like, unfeminine, etc.

\*Unfortunately often confused with ‘aggression’ or violence (behaviors) vs. being seen as an emotion

### **Impact of Anger:**

Our anger is helpful in allowing us to recognize and protect ourselves/others from mistreatment. It can provide the necessary energy, motivation, & focus to do what is necessary to survive in response to threats to our well-being. It allows us to set relational boundaries that allow us to stay safe, while still maintaining connection with others. However, it can be very destructive if not managed, leading to either verbal or physical aggression, physical illness/disease, depression, relationship/intimacy problems, and/or self-destructive behaviors.

### **STYLES OF DEALING WITH/EXPRESSING ANGER**

#### **Aggression: “I’m OK, You’re Not OK”**

Verbally or physically attacking the other person: coercion/threats, intimidation, name-calling/labeling, blaming, invading personal space, yelling/screaming, disrespecting their rights, blocking other from leaving, any form of physical violence.

#### **Passivity: “You’re OK, I’m Not OK”**

Ignoring, denying your own anger, not setting or sticking with boundaries, tolerating another person’s aggression or passive-aggression, and/or doing anything necessary to avoid another’s anger:





**Passive-Aggression: “I’m Not OK, But Hey-You Aren’t Either!”**

Indirect, subtle, “under the table” aggression: Sarcasm, denying him/her your time, affection, love, etc., being late, comparing him/her to someone you both know you don’t like, “accidentally” washing a new white shirt with a new red towel, etc.

**Assertiveness: “I’m OK, You’re OK”**

Direct, Respectful of your rights and theirs, your feelings/wants/needs and theirs. Separating the person from his/her behavior. Inviting appropriate guilt/responsibility from other person-not shaming. Taking care of yourself-not trying to control other person. “I-messages” about your anger related to the other person’s behavior(s).

**Other Key Concepts**

**Misplaced/directed anger:** (“He/She Isn’t OK, But I’m Gonna Take It Out On You”). Directing unresolved anger from another event/relationship and expressing it to a different person (destructive even if done assertively)

**Managing Versus Avoiding Anger**

- \*We deny our anger when we fail to recognize it or mislabel it as some other emotion.
- \*We stuff our anger when we recognize it, but choose to not express it, and use some means to distract ourselves from it (numbing out with food, sex, drugs, alcohol, busy-ness, etc.)

**Anger Management**

*A successful and balanced anger management plan is likely to include many of the following components:*

- \*Recognize that anger is a part of the human experience. It is an emotion. It is neither “good” nor “bad”. It depends what we do with it.
- \*Incorporate non-hurtful (to self or others) expressions of anger into our daily lives.
- \*Deal with past issues: accessing and expressing the unresolved anger in non-hurtful ways
  - using non-destructive means to release energy from physiological arousal of anger
  - journaling
  - talking w/friends
- \*Assertively address issues with the other person
- \*Set boundaries-and stick with them
- \*Assertively ask for what you want so as to avoid feeling like victim and becoming angry in response
- \*Control anger by choosing to withhold expression of the anger until a later more appropriate time.
- \*Recognize that you can not control others, or everything around you
- \*Try to determine the “message” our anger has for us, and then act on that information
- \*Identify the cognitive distortions (thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, unrealistic expectations, stereotypes, generalizations, interpretations, etc.) that result in unproductive/maladaptive anger (e.g. becoming enraged at the incompetence of a 16 year old drive-through worker at McDonalds for not providing you the kind of service you deserve and always get when you dine at ‘Mary-Elaine’s’ at the Phoenician!).





- \*Identify what the “payoffs” for mismanaged anger are: We humans are rationale beings, and there is likely some benefit we are afraid of losing by changing how we “do” anger, despite apparent costs.
- \*Taking responsibility for our own actions-past and present as they relate to how we deal with anger
  - apology for past hurtful expressions of anger
  - giving up “victim role”
  - acknowledging your own cognitive distortions which resulted in unnecessary and/or unproductive anger in past
- \*Stress Management: Limit or remove sources of “voluntary” stress (e.g. running late for an appointment) and learn coping skills for better dealing with unavoidable stress (e.g. unexpected illness of self or loved one).
- \*R & R: Take or make time for adequate rest, fun, relaxation and play: Fill your resource tank!
  
- \*Gratitude: Identifying things, people, events, circumstances, opportunities, abilities, freedoms, luxuries, blessings, etc. to be thankful for and acknowledging/expressing that gratitude to others.

And perhaps most importantly.....

**\*Move toward forgiveness and letting go of the past!**

### **Anger List Homework**

Make a list of anything from the past or present that you are angry about, ever were angry about (even if you no longer feel angry about it now), or that you have not been angry about, but realize that you could be/should be. Be as specific as possible (telling what specific abusive behaviors occurred vs. just saying “I’m angry at dad’s physical abuse”). Make the list as complete as possible. If something comes to mind, write it down even if it seems unimportant. Try to focus on childhood and family experiences/relationships. Identify any anger issues with parents, siblings, spouses, friends and children. Include any events which looking back you realize you had a right to be angry about, but at the time you either didn’t know how to express it, didn’t recognize it, or felt you had no right to feel it. Include any “pet peeves” you may have-and try to connect them back to specific events that led to you having that particular “button”.

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## Apology and Forgiveness

**Apology** usually involves more than saying "I'm sorry". To sincerely apologize is to acknowledge wrong-doing to another person, and doing everything possible to make restitution and cease the hurtful behavior. To allow for healing of significant hurts, apology may need to include the following tasks:

1. Acknowledge what you did to hurt/offend him/her. (open, honest, complete responsibility for YOUR behavior(s), sincere, remorseful).
2. Learn how what you did impacted him/her. (Emotionally, mentally, physically, &/or spiritually)
3. Express an understanding of that impact. (Empathy, validation of their pain, fears, etc.)
4. Make restitution where needed & possible. (Replace, restore, compensate, etc.)
5. Learn HOW you did what you did. [Thoughts, decisions &/or behaviors before, during and after the hurtful event(s).]
6. Learn WHY you did what you did. (Underlying motivations (fear, anger, revenge, "numbing out, addiction, coping mechanisms, family dynamics, situational factors, "toxic shame", pride, etc.)
7. Explain to him/her how & why you did what you did.
8. Identify what you need to do to not repeat behavior. (Detailed plan of action/accountability)
9. Share plan of action/accountability with him/her.
10. Overtly apologize again -express sorrow/remorse & commitment to not repeat hurtful behavior(s).
11. Ask for forgiveness and chance to restore trust.
12. FOLLOW THROUGH!!

**Forgiveness** is a way to work through anger, heal from past trauma, resolve current relational conflict, and restore relational trust following abuse, neglect, betrayal and other hurtful behaviors. There are different "degrees" of forgiveness ranging from: **1)** Ceasing to seek/demand justice or revenge; **2)** Ceasing to feel anger/resentment; **3)** Wishing the other person well; and **4)** Restoring Relational Trust.

To be complete and result in a true "letting go", forgiveness often involves the following steps:

1. Recognizing/acknowledging the injustice(s). (what was impact-short & long-term)
2. Choosing forgiveness as an option
3. Getting in touch with feelings of hurt/anger. (talk w/others, journal, not "stuffing")
4. Expressing the feelings in non-hurtful ways
  - \*with self (letter, journal, "empty-chair", vent w/others)
  - \*with him/her (assertive, direct, honest)
5. Gaining insights which allow for self-protection
  - \*how/why did he/she do it? Identify "red flags"





6. Gaining insights which allow you to focus on the behavior, not the person. (context in which behavior occurred, his/her own challenges/weaknesses, family background, recognizing your own mistakes/fallibility, etc.)
7. Recognizing your own role in the “bigger picture” of hurtful behaviors in the relationship.
8. Using new information to change how you view the hurtful event/person.
9. Ceasing to “punish” the other person. (bringing up past, verbal aggression, shaming, telling others how bad he/she is, etc.)
10. The overt act of forgiveness if/when appropriate. (in person, in a letter, empty-chair, etc.)
11. Choosing to restore trust/accept change/reconcile (key = trusting yourself in that and/or other similar relationships!)
12. Choosing to love/accept other person fully (does not mean accepting future hurtful behaviors). (celebrating his/her successes, wishing him/her well, loving, taking risks, etc.)

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