

Anger Management

Your anger is a normal human feeling. Everyone feels anger and it can serve some useful functions. The aim of anger management is to express your feelings but to stay in control whenever possible. You can learn to use various strategies for managing anger and staying in control.

1. Identify triggers

Anticipate situations where you are more likely to experience anger. This can be different for each person but you will begin to see what is likely to trip an angry outburst. Examples can include noisy environments, at the end of the day when feeling fatigued, 'hot' topics which cause an intense emotional response. Over a period of a week, record your moods and note the situation when you felt angry or lost control. If you can avoid this situation do so, or make changes to the situation so it will be less stressful.

For Example: Turn off the television when you have a conversation with someone, undertake tasks when you

are feeling less fatigued, avoid topics that cause strong emotion, educate your family on these issues.

2. Early Warning signals

Learn to identify the early signals that you are becoming angry to alert you to use strategies in order to stay in control. Learning to recognise when one is angry involves understanding the "signals" that are often indicators that emotions are high. The key to recognising these early signals is to develop self-awareness. Strong emotion like anger has three parts: body signals, thought signals and actions signals.

Below are some examples of anger signs.

BODY SIGNALS

- Muscle tension in neck, shoulders, jaw, stomach or chest
- Increased heart rate
- Increased sweating
- Shaking
- Clenching fists
- Grinding teeth
- Hot face
- Shoulders raising

THOUGHT SIGNALS

- Changes to your thoughts
 - Jumbled thoughts
 - Irrational thinking
 - Thoughts racing
 - Overgeneralising
 - Jumping to conclusions
- Examples:
The children are deliberately making a mess
He/she always nags me

ACTIONS SIGNALS

- Unable to sit still, agitation, getting up and moving around
- Voice getting louder, higher, more abrupt
- Pointing your finger
- Shaking your fist
- Hitting something

Record your early warning signals and implement your anger management strategies before your anger escalates out of control.

Step One - Personal Coping Strategy

This is a short statement of up to five words to remind you when to intervene when you are becoming angry.

Examples:

- Calm down Charlie Brown
- Shit happens
- Its okay, walk away
- Let it go

Step Two – Walking Away

We often use walking away as a communication tool, eg. Slam down our pen and stomp away, slamming the door. We then let the other person know that we are angry even though we haven't said anything, we use body language to communicate our anger. In order to walk away properly we need to be calm and not communicate our anger.

The problem with walking away is that we start thinking unhelpful thoughts. To stop the thoughts we need another technique...

Step Three – Distraction

You need to undertake an activity to take your mind away from your unhelpful thoughts. Examples include counting backwards, thinking about a fantasy holiday, pulling weeds in the garden.

Rules:

Don't do anything that is automatic so that you can still think about what made you feel angry e.g. ironing, washing dishes.

Focus on the distraction task, immerse yourself in the physical sensations (this is called mindfulness)

Keep doing the activity until the thoughts go away
Don't undertake an activity or task that you find frustrating such as something that takes too much attention.

So what is a good activity or task to use for distraction:

An example of a good activity is to go outside, sit in the sun and pat the dog. Focus on the feel of the dog's fur, talk to the dog, feel the sun on your face, the warmth, notice any breeze around your face. Listen to the outdoor sounds, the traffic, the breathing of the dog, any noises it makes in response to your attention.

Summary:

- Personal Coping Strategy
- Walk Away
- Distraction

Let your wife, partner or family members know what you are doing, give them these handouts to read.

They can assist in the process, you don't have to do this alone.

4. Relaxation

In order to be more in control of your anger it is important to learn to relax. There are a range of relaxation techniques you can use and one is identified below:

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Practice deep breathing, also called diaphragmatic breathing, by following the instructions detailed below.

This will aid in the relaxation process.

1. Place one hand on your stomach, just above your waistline and the other on the middle of your chest, Use your hands to assist the breathing process as they can tell you what part of the body you are moving.
2. Open your mouth and let out a big sigh, as if you are feeling tired and overwhelmed. As you do this, you will feel your shoulders lower and relax. Don't empty all the air out of your lungs, just release any tension in your shoulders.
3. Now just wait for a few moments.

4. With your mouth closed, inhale slowly through your nose and with your lower hand, feel your stomach expand. Only inhale as much as is comfortable and then stop. At this time you should not feel any movement in your chest or shoulders.
5. After inhaling, just pause again for a few moments, for as long as you feel comfortable.
6. Now open your mouth and exhale by contracting your stomach, feel your hands lower.
7. Pause.
8. Continue the exercise repeating steps 4-7 for a few minutes.

Use your hands to control the exercise; if you are feeling your chest rise then you are not breathing into your diaphragm. If you feel dizzy, you may be breathing too quickly, this is not a problem, just slow down your breathing.

5. Self Talk – Controlling your thinking

When you're angry, your thinking can become exaggerated and irrational. Develop a list of things to say to yourself before, during and after situations in which you may get angry. You may find it helpful as these things focus on how you are managing the situation rather than what you think other people should be doing.

Before:

- 'I'll be able to handle this. It could be rough, but I have a plan.'
 - 'If I feel myself getting angry, I'll know what to do.'
- Practise your strategies of personal coping statement and controlled breathing.

During:

- 'Stay calm, relax, and breathe easy.'
- 'Stay calm, I'm okay, s/he's not attacking me personally.'
- 'I can look and act calm.'

After:

- 'I managed that well. I can do this. I'm getting better at this.'
- 'I felt angry, but I didn't lose my cool.'