

Anger Management

I have found it helpful to start with the following concepts when working with clients to develop anger management skills. For yourself, start with these ideas and if necessary work with a counselor to refine your skills, or get a book to help you. A popular one is *The Anger Control Workbook* by McKay and Rogers.

Identify triggers - triggers are the situations, words, or ideas that tend to set you off and leave you feeling as if you can't control anger. Start thinking about the times when you have become very angry in the past - what do these situations have in common? What belief underlies the anger? Your values and beliefs, and what you could consider to be a "violation" of those by other people or the world are behind the anger. Being aware of the things that trigger your anger can help you prepare ahead of time, and also notice what is happening sooner so that you can use your anger management skills to handle situations in a more healthy way.

Where do you feel it in your body - becoming more aware of how anger physically feels to you can also help you to become aware of when a situation could be headed in an unhealthy direction. Do your shoulders and neck get tense? Do you shake? Does your body get hot? Do you clench your jaw? Or perhaps your stomach gets tight or upset? Think through this carefully and then the next time you feel this same sensation, use it to stop and think about what is happening before you react.

Find stop mechanisms that work for you - A stop mechanism is a tool that you can use to interrupt the process of anger building. Some people simply say to themselves "STOP" or a phrase that is meaningful to them that will get them to step away from a situation or slow it down. Some people picture a stop sign or other image that helps them. Use your imagination to figure out what will work for you, and try a few things to see what works best, or what combination of acts works best.

Learn relaxation skills - Relaxation skills are often underrated! There are many things you can do to both mentally and physically relax yourself to get a better perspective on a situation. The most common thing you will probably hear is take several deep breaths or count to 10 (or both!). Consider this, if you take several deep breaths, not only is this calming to the body, it gets more oxygen to your brain and gives you more capability to think your way through what is happening and control your emotions better. There are many, many ways to relax. You could imagine yourself in a calming place, start some positive self-talk, try to find a humorous perspective on the situation, and many more.

Understand how anger develops - People often feel as if they can't control anger because it happens so quickly. It may happen quickly but if you break it down, and become more aware of how it develops within you personally, you are better able to find that moment when you can interrupt it. Anger starts with our beliefs. What we believe about a situation determines what we think about that situation. What we think about it determines what we will feel. And what we feel leads us to CHOOSE to act in certain ways. This path is important: beliefs-->thoughts-->feelings-->actions. Learning to manage anger is the process of understanding this path and changing what isn't working for you. If you can challenge unhealthy beliefs you are carrying around, you are breaking the cycle at the beginning. You can also evaluate your thoughts and replace negative ones with positive ones. When your thoughts lead to anger, this is where understanding what triggers you and stop mechanisms that work for you are important. To be able to choose healthy actions, utilize relaxation skills or remove yourself from the situation until you can make a good choice for you and others around you.

Sometimes anger is an appropriate response to a situation and serves as a signal that something is wrong. You can always choose your actions though and how you deal with it.

Understand thought distortions and how to change negative thinking - take a look at our client handouts on these subjects to learn these skills.