

Strategies for Dealing with Anger

Unit

4

Unit 4

Managing Anger

Learning objectives:

On successful completion of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Explore various strategies for managing anger.

Test Your Knowledge

Coping Strategies

What coping strategies can you think of?

Test Your Knowledge

Sanctuary

Another coping strategy is to think of some place where you always feel calm and secure and confident. Picture it in your mind. Be able to describe this place.

What does it look like?

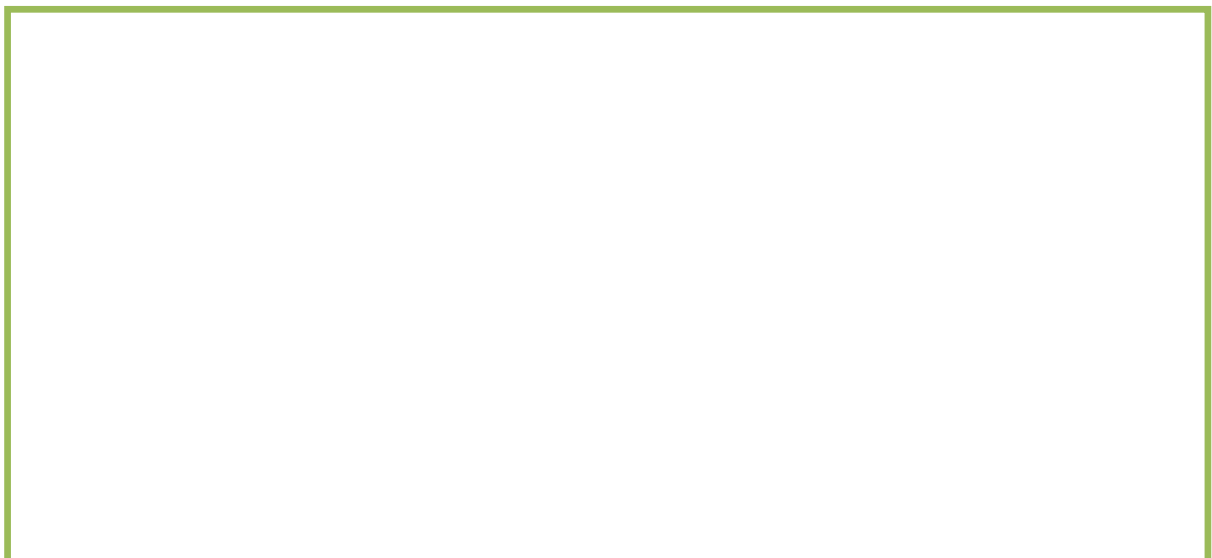
Do you associate any sounds with your sanctuary?

What does your sanctuary feel like?

What does your sanctuary smell like?

What are its emotional components? (Safety, calmness...)

Use this space to draw a picture if you would like.



Taking Care of Yourself

Give yourself permission to take a break when you sense that things are getting tough, or plan a break in your day when you need it most. For example, if things are hectic when you get home from work and you need time to detach from work, incorporate some down time before you get there. Take a 15 minute walk before you get home (perhaps get off the bus a few stops early) or head to the gym. That way when you get home, your mind is cleared and focused on the people there instead of things hanging over your head from work.

Here's another example. If you have kids and their rooms are a mess, instead of getting angry, shut the door. Don't say, "Your messy room makes me angry." The point is to keep yourself from getting angry, not to vent to your children. Then, establish rules and consequences so that your children clean up their own rooms.

Relaxation Techniques

It's essential that you learn to relax if you want to reduce your anger levels. If stress seems to be wearing you down and you are having trouble bouncing back, you may need to consult your doctor. However, for the usual day to day stressors that we encounter, here are some quick, easy ways that you can lower your stress levels quickly.

Deep Breathing

Loosen your clothes, close your eyes, mentally relax your body, and take ten or more deep breaths. Your goal is to breathe into the bottom of your lungs (where the oxygen is readily absorbed), not the usual upper lung breathing we do. Put your hand on your stomach and feel it move as you inhale to make sure you are getting the air in good and deep. We call this **diaphragmatic breathing** because you are using your diaphragm muscle to breathe. When people are experiencing anxiety, they are most often breathing into the upper area of their lungs rather than the bottom.

Each time you exhale, count silently: "one," after the first breath, "two," after the second breath, etc., up to at least ten. If you lose count, or find yourself working on thoughts as they pass through your mind, start your count over again. When you are finished, you should feel more calm and relaxed. (Your blood pressure will go down temporarily too.) If you're in a meeting, on the phone, or dealing with a customer, count in your head.

Visualize

Use positive imagery to boost your mood. In your mind, picture a place that you love. Feel the sunshine on your face, or the breeze on your skin. See the things that you love to see in great detail. If you are getting ready for a presentation or an interview, visualize yourself performing it perfectly. This way, when you get to the event your mind thinks you've done it

before, so it will be even easier than the last time you did it. (This is a technique used by athletes and performance coaches.)

Music

Music has the power to soothe, or to give us energy. It actually has healing power. Find a type of music that relaxes you and play it when you need to calm down. When you feel tired and listless, play some rousing music (rather than relying on caffeine or other stimulants) to give you a pick-up.

Acupressure and Massage

Holding a fingertip to the point of most pain or tension and pressing very hard into the offending muscle for up to a minute can avert a headache or relieve tension. Have a friend or spouse learn how to do massage therapy and/or acupressure on tense muscles, since daily treatment is better than once or twice a month.

Laughter

Laughter is the best medicine of all. A good belly laugh can lower blood pressure, slow your adrenaline, and reverse the stomach acid that comes with negative responses. Be on the lookout for jokes and cartoons you can share with family and friends. For a smaller dose, find a cartoon or picture that always makes you smile and post it near your desk. (Just make sure it's appropriate for all audiences!)

Replace Worry with Problem Solving

Focus on what you can do, and then go ahead and do it. Chronic worriers tend to focus on what they cannot do, what should be happening, or how things are going wrong. Replace worry with problem solving so that you identify where you can step in. Then, stop waiting for the perfect time and do it.

Resilience

Each stressful experience that you have prepares you to deal with one in the future. The more resilient you become, the less of an impact each of these events has on your mind and body. Lots of us go to great lengths to avoid stress, and although avoidance initially feels like you are doing alright, the reality is that stressful things come up in our life all the time. The better we are at handling them, the more resilient we become, and the healthier we can be.

Each stressful experience leads us into a cycle of confusion and anguish. If we stay with those feelings in an attempt to minimize the impact the stress will have on our life, things actually get worse. But if we make a decision to deal with those circumstances by problem solving and adapting, we develop resilience and can enjoy life more and be more successful.

As you encounter more stressors in life (and we all do), we can rely on the experience we've had in dealing with negative circumstances in order to cope. We get more effective at managing that cycle of confusion, anguish, problem solving, adapting, and moving on.

Communication Tips and Tricks

Asking Good Questions

Communicating well can help you minimize angry situations and manage your own anger. If you can express yourself well and listen well to others, you will reduce miscommunications, which are a common source of conflict. If you understand how to communicate with others, you can express your anger in an assertive, healthy way.

Two of the most basic elements of good communication are asking questions and listening to others. Some of us naturally ask a lot of questions, while for others this is a learned skill.

There are two kinds of questions: open and closed.

Closed questions are those that can be answered by either "yes" or "no," or with a specific bit of data, such as your name, date of birth, or occupation. These questions restrict our responses and give us little opportunity to develop our thoughts before answering. As a result, these questions require very little effort on either person's part. They can be used (intentionally or unintentionally) as a way to close down a conversation.

Closed questions tend to get over-used, in part because they are so easy to work with. They are easy to phrase and we get quick answers. This type of questioning can cause us to make assumptions as we create fuller answers in our minds, and assumptions can be big barriers to good communication.

Open questions, on the other hand, encourage people to talk. These questions are phrased so they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open questions often begin with a variation of the five W's (who, what, when, where, why), or can ask how.

Open-ended questions can be used to:

- Get information
- Focus conversations
- Solicit opinions
- Gain consensus

The unintentional use of a closed question can often be overcome by simply following it with a short open question. For example:

- "Do you feel that was the right thing to do?"
- "Yes, I do."
- "Can you help me understand why you feel that way?"

Here is an example of a closed question:

- Do you like ice cream?

Replacing it with an open question provides us with more information:

- What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?

The first question will only tell us whether the person likes ice cream or not. That's a closed situation. The second question will let us know a little bit about the person. It could also lead to follow up questions depending on their answer. Questions that are open ended will help us learn more about the people we speak with, establish things that we have in common, develop rapport, and make meaningful connections.

It is possible for you to ask someone an open question and for them to be evasive or try to shut the conversation down. Children are famous for this when a parent says, "What did you learn at school today?" and they reply, "Nothing." One of your team members may come see you after a meeting, and you say, "How'd the meeting go?" and they say, "Fine." If you want to engage them, you'll have to ask a follow up question. Some examples:

- What was the most interesting point raised in the meeting (or at school)?
- What were the challenges that we need to consider?
- What questions did the group ask?

There are several different types of open-ended questions. We can ask **leading questions** to influence how people think ("Don't you just love the way vanilla ice cream smells?").

Rhetorical questions are ones that we don't really want an answer to, such as "Do I look like I care?" Rhetorical questions can be used to engage your conversation partner and make them think about the obvious answer. (They may also be something that you blurt out because you are thinking out loud!) A rhetorical question can engage the listener in a persuasive manner as they process your ideas.

Active Listening Skills

Listening and hearing are not the same thing. Most of us were fortunate to be born with hearing, but listening is a skill that must be learned and practiced in order to use it successfully. When you **hear** something, sound enters your eardrum, passes through your ear canal, and registers in your brain. **Listening** is what you do with that sound and how you interpret it.

Here are some tips for successful listening:

- Listen intentionally for people's names.
- Listen with interest.
- Try to get rid of your assumptions.
- Listen for what isn't said.

Listening is hard work. When other people are listening to us, they have the same difficulties we do in trying to focus on a message. Our minds wander, noises or thoughts distract us, and we can be thinking about what to do next.

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension to listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, provided you are genuine in using them.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- "Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"
- "So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?"

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- **Make a decision to listen.** Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- **Don't interrupt** people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments until they have finished.
- Keep your **eyes** focused on the speaker and your **ears** tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Carry a **notebook** or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

The Assertive Formula

I Messages

Speaking articulately can be hard when you're upset or angry. It's easier to communicate with others if we stick with our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and avoid direct or implied criticism of the other person. One way to do that is to stick with "I" messages, expressed in a matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone of voice.

You Message	I Message
You talk too loudly.	I have sensitive hearing.
You should send out an agenda.	I'd like to know what we're going to discuss in the meeting tomorrow so I can bring the right information with me.

If you are trying to address a particular root cause of your anger (such as someone else's behavior), you can use this same type of message to give feedback.

The Assertive Formula

You can also use this formula to express your feelings assertively.

Step	Goal	Example
Step 1	Non-judgmentally describe a specific behavior of the other person.	When you...
Step 2	Describe, as specifically as possible, the effects this behavior is having, or the practical problems it is causing in your life.	The effects are...
Step 3	Describe how you feel as a result, without using the expression, "you make me..."	I feel...
Step 4	You describe what you want, preferably after you give the other person a chance to state what they think might be done.	I prefer/would like...

Example: "When you leave your papers all over my office, it causes it to be cluttered and I feel disorganized and upset. I would like it if you could pick your papers up when you are done."

Test Your Knowledge

Turn these statements below into constructive "I" messages.

You missed that deadline! I want to fire you right now!

You are late again. You're always late and making me look bad!
