



Getting Started with Anger Management

Warm Up Exercise: Understanding the Anger Spectrum

Background: At times people can mistakenly view anger in “black or white” terms. Assessing your anger is much more than a Yes or No type of a situation limited to just two choices:

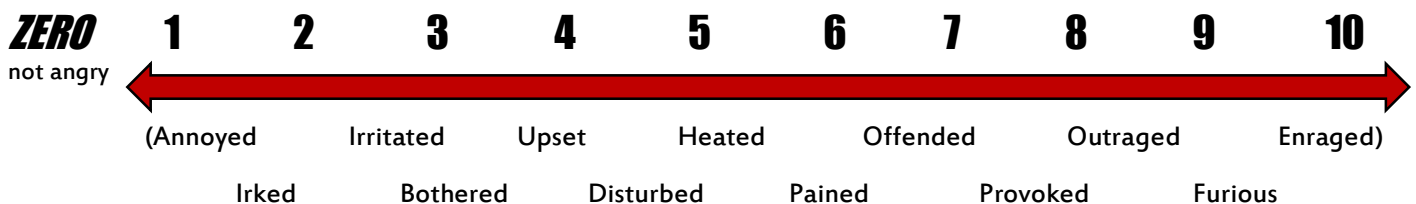
★ **Yes I am angry...**

★ **No, I am not angry...**

In actuality, the experience of anger is better described with a full range of emotions. Anger can start with irritation or annoyance in its earlier stages then extend all the way up toward fury or rage at the more severe levels of the spectrum. Different triggers and situations can result in varying levels of intensity of anger.

Assessing Your Anger Spectrum Exercise:

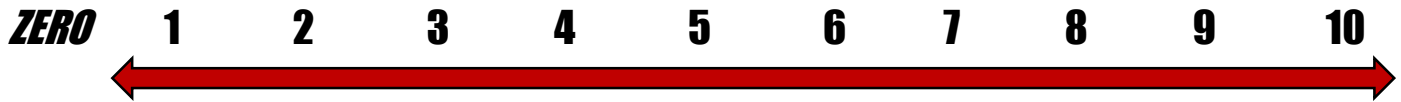
Directions: Look at the anger scale below that runs from zero to ten. Read each potentially anger-inducing situation below and discuss your anger rating using the scale below. Give your answer using a number from 0 to 10, based on how intense your anger might be in that situation. If you are not sure exactly give your best guess. (The adjectives provided below the scale are just there as a guideline to help put things in perspective)



Potentially Anger-Triggering Situations*

**Keep in mind, there may be several factors for each situation that could change your reaction. Feel free to discuss those variables*

1. You are talking to someone you just met and you notice they are invading your personal space
2. You are trying to concentrate and someone in the room is making a distracting noise even after you look right at them
3. Someone you don't like says something clever to you in front of a room of people and everyone laughs
4. You're about to eat and you drop your entire tray of food and drink, wasting it all
5. Someone you care about promises to take care of a huge favor for you, but then you come home and find out they didn't do it
6. A device that is relatively new, suddenly seems to be not working
7. Your computer crashes before you are done saving your work



(Continued)

8. You are driving and running late and you are stuck behind someone slow you can't pass
9. Someone says something insulting out loud making fun of someone you know
10. You are tired and eager to get home but have to stop somewhere to pick up something and for an unexpected reason there is a huge line in front of you
11. You overhear two of your co-workers in the cubicle next to you whispering and laughing but you can't understand however you are pretty sure you hear your name mentioned
12. You find out one of your best friends has been lying to you that they knew your ex was dating one of your other friends but they didn't tell you all along
13. You walk out from a store and see a couple of kids leaning up against your car
14. Your spouse or relationship partner gives you the extended silent treatment when you think you should be getting an apology instead
15. Someone posts something insensitive, ignorant or negative as a comment on a post you made on social media
16. You just stained your favorite new outfit when you are out trying to have a good time
17. Someone is talking out loud about how great someone or something is that you personally can't stand (Like a politician, athlete, etc.)
18. You are around someone who is speaking their mind as if they are an authority but they are saying things that are really ignorant
19. You are stuck in a situation where you have to listen to someone brag about his or her achievements for an extended period
20. You have a slow internet connection

**Going forward, continue this exercise but make up some of your own situations.
Write them down because these situations are going to be used again later**

- 21.
- 22.
- 23.
- 24.
- 25.

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves” – Carl Jung

(If time permits, close out the activity by discussing the above quote)



Anger Management: Introduction – The Basics

Consider the following questions for discussion:

1. What is anger?

- ✦ Anger is an emotion like sadness, joy or fear. Emotions can be difficult to define and explain but they are a normal part of being human.
- ✦ Anger can range from **mild annoyance** all the way to **fury or rage** with everything in between
- ✦ Anger is feeling based the perception that something is wrong. Often anger results from a perceived threat to the safety of ourselves or those we care about.

2. Is anger “bad”?

- ✦ This is somewhat a trick question. Since anger is an emotion, it in itself is not bad. In some situations it “normal” to experience anger. When it comes to “good” or “bad” and anger, what matters most is how we react to our feelings of anger and what we then decide to do with our feelings of anger.
- ✦ For example, on a positive note, anger can be a motivator. Feelings of anger can cause someone to want to make changes for the better
- ✦ Negative reactions to anger may include aggression or violence

3. What is aggression?

- ✦ **Aggression:** n. hostile or destructive behavior or actions (The Free Dictionary). If anger is the feeling, aggression one type of behavioral response to anger that is often harmful or hurtful
- ✦ There are several types of aggression. Aggression can be verbal, emotional, physical or sexual. Aggression is often fueled by a desire to get your way at all costs. Aggression does not take into account **respect** for others
- ✦ Aggression can lead to abuse of ourselves or others or both. One basic aspect of anger management starts with realizing that **you can feel anger without having to exhibit aggression.**

4. What is anger management and why do some people need to learn anger management skills?

- ✦ Anger management may mean different things to different people because not everyone gets angry over the same types of things and not everyone expresses anger the same way
- ✦ There are many factors that contribute to someone’s ability to identify, manage and express anger. Including:
 - **The environment you grew up in:** For example growing up in a home with a lot of fighting and anger can affect someone’s ability to manage anger as an adult. Anger can be learned
 - **Genetics and your personality:** There is evidence that even some babies are born more easily irritated than others. Some adult seem to be naturally more “hot-headed” and easily angered than others
 - **Your current environment:** If someone is in an environment where anger is encouraged and valued, there may be an increased likelihood of anger
- ✦ Anger management is about learning to control reactions to anger rather than letting your anger control you. There are many skills involved depending upon the way you specifically experience, perceive and react to it



Basic Anger Management Skills – Calming Our **HOT THOUGHTS**

Simply reviewing a basic skills worksheet about anger management usually is not enough to change a long-standing problem with managing anger. Still, with time, patience and practice, where there is a desire to get better, many people do improve their ability to manage their anger and related behaviors. There are many facets to the process of anger management. A great place to start is to consider the following concept:

“Hot Thoughts” (aka Anger-Inducing Thoughts)

FUEL

IRRITATION and **ANGRY FEELINGS**

In other words, there are specific kinds of thoughts (Hot thoughts) that we may allow ourselves to focus on, that are like fuel to the fire of irritation and anger. Therefore if we can learn to change hot thoughts into *calming thoughts*, we can learn to improve our ability to manage irritation and anger.

To illustrate: Consider the following situations below with “Hot-Thought” Hank & “Calming” Carl

1. **The Late Night Barking Dog:** Someone in the neighborhood leaves their dog outside barking on and off throughout the night. No one is really sure whose dog it is and it’s too late to go around the neighborhood trying to figure it out. Two men Hank and Carl are in nearby homes react to this situation differently:

Hank: Thinks hot thoughts all night long such as “When I find out who let their dog out all night I am going to knock his head in” and “If that stinking mutt doesn’t shut up soon, someone is going to pay for this”

Carl: Focuses on calming thoughts such as “Wow this is really irritating but I have to try to make the best of this” and “What can I do to get my mind off of this barking dog and try to still get some sleep”

Outcome: Both Hank and Carl both have a rough night’s sleep, but the difference is that Hank wasted the whole night letting his anger get the best of him for nothing whereas Carl wakes up feeling a lot less stressed because he didn’t waste time fueling his own anger with negative thoughts

2. **The Bad News Boss:** Its time for the monthly staff meeting and everyone knows the budget at work has been tight and there have been problems on the job so the boss who is in a rotten mood is going to let everyone have it with threats that people may lose their jobs if things don’t change for the better soon. Hank and Carl are both at the same meeting

Hank: Sits through the staff meeting clenching his fists thinking hot thoughts about his boss such as “How dare this jerk threaten us about losing our jobs, this tyrant has no idea how hard I break my back around this lousy place”

Carl: Sits through the same staff meeting thinking calming thoughts such as: “All I can do is to continue to work as hard as I can like I have been, and the rest is out of my control” and “The boss has made threats like this in the past but we have made it through tough times before”

Outcome: Both Hank and Carl sit through the same staff meeting knowing that they have to work hard to protect their jobs but Hank walks away a lot angrier and a lot more stressed out than Carl



3. **The Constantly Late Girlfriends:** Both Hank and Carl have something in common: Both of them are in relationships with girlfriends who are constantly late. Both Hank and Carl like to be on time and they both have had several previous conversations with their girlfriends about their constant lateness. It's Saturday night and both Hank and Carl have plans with their girlfriends but once again, their girlfriends are both late.

Hank: As Hank sits there waiting 20 minutes for his late girlfriend to meet him, he thinks hot thoughts to himself such as "I can't believe she is doing this again after I told her how much I hate being late!" and "Once she gets here I can't wait to let her know how inconsiderate she is!"

Carl: As Carl waits 20 minutes for his late girlfriend he focuses on calming thoughts such as: "This really stinks that she is doing this again but I am not going to let it ruin my night" and "I am going to let her know that she is late just once, but after that I will drop it so we can just enjoy the rest of the evening and then maybe we can try to talk about it later at a better, less stressful time"

Outcome: Both Hank and Carl's girlfriends arrive late and Hank spends the next half hour with his girlfriend in a nasty heated argument. Carl nicely tells his girlfriend just once that she is late and in response to his calm demeanor she apologizes and they proceed to have a nice evening out together.

The main point in the above examples is there are situations in life that we cannot change, so getting angry about them is really just a waste of time. **We can learn to manage anger in many situations by learning to stop "hot thoughts" and replace them with "calming thoughts"**

***Interesting Side Fact:** Studies show that alcohol intoxication increases the likelihood of "hot thoughts", For example, to the drunk person in a crowded bar, the person nearby accidentally bumping into him/her is more likely to be perceived as doing it on purpose prompting a desire to curse, hit or fight. The same goes with falsely thinking someone is looking at you the wrong way or talking about you, prompting the increased likelihood of an angry reaction from a drunk person who assumes the worst

Final Exercise: Practicing Identifying Hot Thoughts and replacing them with Calming Thoughts

Directions: Go through each of the scenarios in the first warm up exercise and first think of "hot thoughts" that could make your anger worse. Then identify calming thoughts that can decrease your anger.

For example (using #1 from the activity) -

1. You are talking to someone you just met and you notice they are invading your personal space

- **Hot Thought:** "If this jackass doesn't back off soon I am going to have to smack him"
- **Calming Thought:** "Ok this person obviously is a close talker, I am just going to have to calmly get out of here before I get upset"

Go through the rest of the examples and practice identifying potential hot thoughts then replacing them with calming thoughts. Use your own scenarios if time permits.

- Learning to automatically replace hot thoughts with calming thoughts is one of the most effective long term anger management strategies when it becomes a habit. Practice!

"Fools give vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end" – Proverbs 29:11