






# UNIT TWO - ANGER

## INTRODUCTION

This unit is designed to examine the components and triggers of anger that will help us look within for the answers that apply to us. We can examine the thoughts, beliefs and attitudes of our past lives that caused us to act wrongly or totally out of control.

### IN *REACHING OUT FROM WITHIN*, WE BELIEVE:

-  Everyone has a right to be angry—it's a natural emotion.
-  It's our responses to angry feelings that work for us or against us.
-  Acting out our anger with violence will always work against us.
-  That no one has the right to hit anyone.
-  Once we understand our anger, we can learn how to express it in more positive ways. We can keep our family and friendship ties strong and violence-free. We can improve our self-esteem and become empowered.

"Buddha likened anger to reaching into a fire to pick up a burning ember in our bare hands with the intention of throwing it at someone. Before the injury is done to another, it is done to ourselves."  
~the Buddha

The phrase, "getting angry won't solve anything," is true. Simply being angry won't fix the issue that's making us angry. But the physical cues of anger alert us that something needs to be done, and the way that we express our anger *could* lead to solving the problem.

Positive goals of anger expression include:

1. **Correcting wrongdoing** or showing the offender (or self) that the behavior was inappropriate.
2. **Maintaining the relationship** or addressing the interpersonal problems that caused us to get angry.
3. **Demonstrating authority**, which may be a way to ensure that this trigger doesn't happen again.

*Do you think these are worthwhile goals? How might you use them?*

### OBJECTIVES

- To understand and accept anger as a normal and even a beneficial emotion.
- To identify and realize the impact of childhood experiences as the source of our beliefs and attitudes and possibly our anger.
- To recognize how thoughts become distorted and how they can be corrected.
- To better understand the different ways that men and women express anger and react to it.

- To identify the thinking process that triggers rage and violence.
- To examine anger in the light of gender stereotypes.
- To learn how to short circuit thoughts that trigger our violent responses and to express anger in positive, healthful ways.
- To understand the costs of anger.

## **MATERIALS**

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board, supplemental articles that the facilitator may have researched and wants to share.

## **NOTES TO FACILITATOR**

It is important to encourage the group to participate in this unit by sharing and listening to what others have to say. Caution the group not to judge one another, but being respectful, do not allow misperceptions to stand. Work toward positive solutions.

“A person who  
angers me  
controls me.”

Listen, reflect and explore comments of the group. If someone is open enough to talk about something personal, affirm what he or she said in some way.

## **SOURCES**

Listed at the end of each session.

## **SESSIONS:**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Session 1 | Understanding Anger and Its Origins in Our Lives. |
| Session 2 | Ways to Avoid or Reduce Anger                     |
| Session 3 | Gender Expressions of Anger                       |
| Session 4 | The Costs of Anger                                |
| Session 5 | Ways to Deal With Anger                           |
| Session 6 | Dealing with Another's Anger and Aggression       |
| Session 7 | Distorted Thinking.                               |

# ANGER - SESSION ONE

Understanding Anger & Its Origins in Our Lives

## INTRODUCTION

Anger is a normal emotion that occurs on a scale from mild annoyance to rage or fury. It surfaces when we believe our rights have been violated or we feel powerless or threatened. It can be caused by external and/or internal events. In this session we will explore and examine where we learned our reactions to anger.

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand anger and its good and bad effects.
- To explore the ghosts of anger's origins and masks.
- To identify which of them apply to us.

“For every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty seconds of peace of mind.”

~Ralph Waldo

## MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board and exercise forms.

## NOTES TO FACILITATOR

This session is an introduction to anger and its origins in our lives. The goal here is to introduce the topic of anger for a generalized understanding. A fuller picture will emerge in the following sessions. Respect all members who respond to questions by acknowledging them in some way. Allow the discussion to evolve but bring it back to the outline if it goes too far astray.

## ACTIVITY:

Begin with this statement:

**“People with anger problems seldom realize the root causes of their anger. They simply live with it.”**

*Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?*

*What is so bad about simply living with it?*

# UNDERSTANDING ANGER

## A. ANGER

“If your house is on fire, the most urgent thing to do is to go back and try to put out the fire, not to run after the person you believe to be the arsonist. If you run after the person you suspect has burned your house, your house will burn down while you are chasing him or her. That is not wise. You must go back and put out the fire. So when you are angry, if you continue to interact with or argue with the other person, if you try to punish them, you are acting exactly like someone who runs after the arsonist while everything goes up in flames.” – Tich Nhat Hanh

### 1. What are some synonyms for anger?

*How about: spiteful, mad, upset, irritated, infuriated, or enraged?*

One definition: Anger is a range of feelings from mild to extreme displeasure, hostility, indignation or exasperation toward someone or something.

”Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.”  
- Robert Ingersoll

Rage and fury are intense, uncontained, explosive emotions. Wrath applies to anger that seeks vengeance or punishment on a grand scale.

### 2. Anger is an emotion we experience on a scale from mild to extreme.

Anger can also be described as a feeling of great annoyance or antagonism as the result of some real or supposed grievance. It may be caused by a serious threat to our well-being or it could simply be an annoyance or a mild interruption. What often triggers anger is our belief that we **must** deal with the situation in some way.

*Can you think of a serious threat that might cause you to get angry?  
Name an “annoyance” that might cause you to become angry.*

We can be thankful for our anger when we choose to use it properly. When we decide to use anger the wrong way, it can cause problems.

### 3. Childhood experiences often influence the way we experience and react to anger.

*Do you agree with the following statements?*

- a. If you grew up in an environment where your parents discussed situations that angered them, you learned to talk about situations and find non-violent ways to resolve them.

- b. If you saw your parents yell, curse or hit the wall when they were angry, you learned to respond the same way.
- c. If you saw your parents hit each other and call each other names when they were angry, you will be inclined to do the same to your partner or spouse.
- d. If you saw your parents abusing drugs and alcohol to feel less pain when angry, you are susceptible to abusing drugs and alcohol to self-medicate when you get angry.
- e. Now that you are grown, you are what you are. There is little you can do to change your angry reactions.
- f. You can learn to short circuit your anger before it becomes explosive, but once you have tasted the power of angry violence you probably will always have to guard against its attraction.

“Bitterness  
Imprisons life;  
love releases it.”  
  
-Henry Emerson  
Fosdick

Human behavior is far too complex to apply flat rules to everyone, but in general, only (e) is a false statement.

## B. GROUP EXERCISE

Most of our angry and aggressive reactions were learned during childhood. Unconsciously, the people around us taught us through the unspoken messages of their actions. Ask each member to answer the following on a piece of paper. Discuss the answers.

*What messages did I receive about anger and aggression as a child from the following people?*

*Father or father figure?*

*Mother or mother figure?*

*Brothers and sisters?*

*Friends?*

*Gang Members?*

*Television?*

Follow your anger to its roots, as far as you need to go.

Insults are magnified by similar insults from the past.

If we don't recognize old insults, new ones will seem more serious.

*Teachers, school?*

*Does this affect the way I act today?*

### **C. BEHIND THE MASK OF ANGER.**

- 1. Everyone gets angry.** It's normal and natural. Developing a healthy, controlled response to anger is helpful and good. It calls our attention to problems in need of solutions. It helps us protect ourselves and set boundaries. It gives us energy and focus.

*What are some examples of the positive uses of anger?*

Uncontrolled or misdirected anger doesn't solve problems. Most often, it creates them. Some people use aggressive anger as a defense mechanism to mask feelings of fear, shame, ignorance, worthlessness. Some use it to avoid responsibility. Others become addicted to the feeling of power it gives them. They use it to get high.

*Do you agree with the above statements about using anger to hide feelings?  
Have you experienced the addictive qualities of anger?*

The following are some examples from Claudia Black's "Anger Strategies:"

- a) Shame is the internalized belief that you are defective, insufficient, unworthy. Rage is one defense against it. It pushes people away, so they don't get close enough to see what you believe is so ugly about yourself. Anger often is used to verbally attack someone before they attack you.

*Do you use anger as a form of self-protection against those attempting to humiliate you?*

- b) Anger allows you to achieve moments of intensity in an otherwise dull life. You get high with the excitement of feeling suddenly alive instead of dull and apathetic. But the rush you get from anger keeps you angry.

*Have you used anger to get high?*

### **2. Discuss these penetrating questions posed by Claudia Black:**

- *Is your anger a buffer against feelings you would rather not experience?*
- *Against what is your anger defending or protecting?*
- *Do you use anger as a buffer against sadness or disappointment or when you feel helpless or hopeless or guilty?*

"Your anger is like the bubbles in a can of soda:

The more you're shaken, the more you want to let it out. The longer you keep it in though, the greater the size of the eventual explosion – and the flatter the drink at the end."

*~Anonymous*

- *Do you use anger when you do not want others to see your hurt, loneliness or neediness?*

### 3. Hot Buttons, Hot Thoughts

Anger triggers are the hot buttons that set off your anger. They can be provoking events, people, places or situations. Examples: Someone breaks into line ahead of you; a family member does not fulfill a promise; untrue rumors are spread about you; you are wrongly accused; someone is taking advantage of you. These are triggers. At this point you have not yet decided how to react to them, how to use your anger.

“He who conquers his anger has conquered an enemy”  
- German Proverb

### 4. The Cue of Clenched Fists

Anger cues are warning signs that you are becoming angry in response to a hot-button trigger. They include clenched fists; increased heart rate; tightness in the chest; raised voice; talking to yourself in a hostile way; and thoughts of aggression and revenge. These are cues alerting you to your anger. At this point you still have not yet decided how you will react to the situation.

*Is it possible to simply stop getting angry without addressing the underlying causes and triggers?*

*What are YOUR hot buttons? What pulls your trigger, or makes you see red?*

*What cues have you noticed when you get angry? Are these productive?*

This book cannot answer those questions. The answers can only be found within each of us. The search for those answers never really ends. But the Blue Book is a tool with specific questions and some general truths that can help steer you in the right direction.

## SOURCES

Anger Chapter in original *Blue Book* written by Greg Musselman, Lisa Dunn and inmates at Lansing Correctional Facility, Kansas

*Anger Chapter* written in 2009 by Damone Cox and Ronald Rhodes, members of *ROFW* at Lansing Correctional Facility, Kansas,

The *Anger Messages* group activity was created by Deborah Douglas-Keough, a member of the Topeka Correctional Facility Med/Max *ROFW* group.

*Anger Strategies* by Claudia Black, Ph.D., 2006

*Men & Anger*, by Mary C. Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo

*The Anger Control Workbook* used in anger management groups at LCF

Bodily cues and anger trigger information courtesy of Marla Baldwin, LSCSW and Linda Stiles, LMSW, therapists from The Family Conservancy in Wyandotte County, Kansas where Anger Management and Domestic Violence Offender groups are conducted.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Thich Nhat Hanh: Anger - Putting Out the Fire of Anger:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/3045831/Thich-Nhat-Hanh-Anger-Putting-Out-the-Fire-of-Anger>

Controlling Anger Before Its Controls You, *American Psychological Association*:

<http://www.apa.org/topics/controlanger.html>



## **Transforming My Time**

**When I arrived at the gates of “Hutch” in the mid-1990s, the only thing I felt was the dread of a dreary reality that awaited me. The life I knew was all but gone as I forced it to the back of my mind and focused all my attention on the reality of prison life. I found it easy to forget about the pain and loneliness that I felt by immersing myself in the drama that surrounded me. It was an easy path for me to follow in my first few years as I struggled with the pain and anger that consumed me. I allowed these raw emotions to control my life before prison; and now, locked behind these walls, they were dictating every decision I made.**

**Looking back, I can readily acknowledge my troubled state of mind. Violence pervaded every aspect of my life. This admission hasn’t been an easy thing for me. It has taken me years to come to terms with it. In fact, it wasn’t until I found myself confined in El Dorado Supermax that I began to become aware of my violent disposition.**

**I spent several years in isolation, not only segregated from society but also from other “out-casts” like myself. I was in a prison within a prison, both metaphorically and literally. Instead of confrontations with others, I was forced to confront myself. Then one day I awakened from my dazed perceptions and realized that in my blinded rage, I had transformed into the very thing I detested most. And, although the tragedies that I perpetrated upon others can never be forgotten or ignored, I came to realize that I victimized myself more than any other. I did this by squandering the life I was entrusted and blessed with.**

**All the hopes and aspirations that I possessed as a child were destroyed by my own hands. It was my own anger that clouded my decisions and slowly deprived me of my full potential. I finally came to recognize that I was my own worst enemy in life and sought to heal the wounds I had inflicted upon myself. I committed myself to a path of peace and began to learn skills that will someday enable me to rise to the heights that I once envisioned for myself as a child.**

**And now that I am on the verge of re-entering society, I hope the experience and the knowledge I have acquired over the past decade will prove useful to others and perhaps in the future I will benefit the world more than I harmed it in the past.**

*By James - ROFW Winter Newsletter, 2007, El Dorado Correctional Facility*

# ANGER - SESSION TWO

## Ways to Try to Avoid or Reduce Anger

### INTRODUCTION

We are shaped by our thoughts. The way we think about things determines how we react to all situations including those involving anger. Thinking is a process that happens automatically, and we seldom are aware how it works. But it can be managed.

*Do you agree with this? Why or why not?*

In this session, we will examine the “thinking” process, trace its mechanisms and learn how to step in at critical points to avoid potentially violent reactions.

“Don’t compromise yourself, you’re all you’ve got.”  
- Janis Joplin

### ☑ OBJECTIVES

- To understand our thinking or thought process.
- To identify how our thinking leads to actions and consequences.
- To become aware of the thought process as it occurs.
- To modify the process—if needed—in response to anger.

### MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.

### NOTES TO FACILITATOR

Respect all participants by acknowledging their contributions to the conversation. This is an important session to understand so take as much time as needed. It’s not natural to stop and think about HOW we think, but that’s exactly what we want members to take away from this session.

Let’s begin with this statement:  
**Thought is the cause of it all.**

*Is there ever a time when we are not thinking about something, reflecting, pondering, wondering, arriving at or jumping to conclusions?*

*Isn’t thinking the most basic of human activities? Don’t we all do it?*

We all think, but few of us know enough to stop and think HOW or WHY we think. That’s the key to learning how to short circuit the impulse to jump from annoyance to anger to verbal abuse and violence.

## ACTIONS & CONSEQUENCES

### A. THE THINKING PROCESS

1. Cognitive development classes are useful in learning about anger. What they teach can be summarized in three words: **stop and think**. **Stop and think** before acting in stressful, potentially anger-charged situations. We can learn how to control our lives by learning how to take control of our thinking.
2. **Cognitive self-change** is a formal term for the process whereby we practice new ways of thinking that steer us away from trouble by paying attention to our thoughts and feelings. First, we step outside ourselves and try to observe our thinking and feelings. Next, we recognize how thinking and feeling can lead to trouble. Finally, we use new thinking to reduce the risk.

*During the next week, try to do this. Step outside yourself and try to figure out HOW your thoughts can lead you into trouble. Can you give an example from something that happened recently?*

### B. THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

**Have two members of the group act out the following confrontation:**

A corrections officer keeps you waiting at the door while he continues a conversation with another officer. After a while you express your irritation: "Take your own sweet time." He asserts his authority in a loud voice: "Stand behind that line until I open the door," pointing to a line behind where you are standing.

Identify the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and attitudes that might arise due to this exchange. Write them in the box to the left,

**Feelings are emotions.** They are based on the **beliefs and attitudes** we learned from experiences in our past. They are the rules, principles and habits we live by. They may be expressed in simple statements like: "*If someone disrespects you, you have to take care of it.*" Maybe your experience leads you to believe: "*Corrections officers are power-hungry.*" Maybe you feel like muttering: "*Power-hungry idiot*" loud enough for the officer to hear.

*Is the officer experiencing similar feelings, beliefs and attitudes toward you?*

*Can the exchange possibly have a positive or even a neutral result? Is the antagonism likely to continue in the future?*

The key here is to **stop and think**, to observe your thinking process soon enough to recognize the risk you are taking before you become too emotional. The angrier you become, the harder it

Thoughts & emotions from example at left:

is to think straight. You have a choice just as the officer does. You **can't** control the other **person's** thinking, but you can control your own.

*What might be a better way to approach the situation?*

*Any chance you can change the officer's attitude toward you in the future?*

*How can you discover new thinking, new ways to respond?*

*What are some "new thinking" ideas for a challenge you have faced in the past?*

A general guideline that will help is to try to be objective. That means don't give excuses or blame others for your thinking. Don't argue about it or embellish it or tell stories about it.

Cognitive self-change is a process that **takes practice**.

## C. SOCIAL SKILLS

Abraham Maslow said: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." Many of us never learned productive ways of dealing with our anger. When angry and frustrated, we may react too quickly and with violence. We probably get results. The question is: are they productive ones? We use social skills whenever we deal with other people. Good social skills are more likely to get us what we want than acting impulsively. They enhance the chances for a positive response and reduce the negative responses from other people.

"In a controversy, the instant we feel anger, we have already ceased striving for truth and have begun striving for ourselves"

~ Abraham J. Heschel

**1. Listening** is a social skill. When we listen to someone, we pay them respect because we try to hear their point of view. When someone else is talking, are you listening? Or just waiting for your turn to talk?

Here are some tips for effective listening that can help calm potentially explosive situations:

- a. Look at the other person who is talking.
- b. Sit quietly.
- c. Think about what is being said, not what you are going to say.
- d. Say "yes" or nod your head
- e. Ask a question to find out more.

**2. Asking questions and giving feedback** are social skills. Ask sincere questions that show you have an open mind, not loaded questions. Give some thought to what you want to find out and whom to ask. Pick the right time, the right place and the right person. The same applies to giving feedback. Give it sincerely and honestly. (See the Communication Unit for more on these skills.)

**3. There is also a skill to knowing your feelings.** It's a matter of three things:

- a. Tune in to what is going on in your body; it may help you realize what you are feeling. Anger is accompanied by physiological and biological cues; when you get angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up, as do the levels of your energy hormones, adrenaline and noradrenalin.

- b. Think about what happened to make you feel that way; what was the trigger?
- c. Name the feeling.

## **D. THE ANGER METER**

A simple way to monitor your anger is to use a 1-to-10 scale called the anger meter. A score of 1 represents total calm and a complete lack of anger. A score of 10 represents a furious explosion that often leads to negative consequences.

“Anger is only one letter short of Danger.”

*During the next week, try to monitor and record the highest number you reach on the anger meter. Compare and discuss it with the group at your next meeting.*

*Is there a pattern to what set you off?*

## **E. TIME OUTS**

A time out is a cool-down period you can use when your body’s cues tell you your anger is dangerously high. Remember from Session One; put the fire out before chasing the arsonist. Sometimes it’s best to leave the situation and take care of your anger first. Go somewhere and try to relax. Do not swear, raise your voice, threaten or intimidate. If the source of your anger is a friend or relative, tell them what you are doing. Promise to return to discuss the issue later.

*What if the source of your anger is a stranger who has challenged you in front of everyone?*

Each situation is different. Try to remember your basic belief that nobody has the right to hit anyone. Try looking at the source of your anger while calmly saying: “I don’t want to fight right now, but I’d like to talk to you about this later.” The point is to try to extinguish *your* fire first.

*Do you think you could try this in prison?*

## **F. PREPARING FOR A STRESSFUL CONVERSATION**

When you have time to think ahead, you can avoid a dangerous reaction to a stressful conversation by preparing for it. Here are some precautions that you can take:

1. Imagine yourself in the stressful situation.
2. Think about how you will feel and why.
3. Imagine the other person in the same situation; think about how the other person feels and why.
4. Imagine yourself telling the other person what you want to say.

5. Imagine what she/he will say.
6. Repeat the above steps with as many approaches as you can think of using.
7. Pick the best approach.

“Prison is the  
ULTIMATE  
time out.”  
- Brian Linn,  
Member

*Do you often have time to “think ahead” in prison?*

*Could you take the time?*

*Think of a stressful situation: would using these tips be helpful?*

*What can you do to make the situation less stressful?*

### OPINION:

Alumni Kenneth Robinson says: “Stop...Think...then Act. This only works when you have **control of your thoughts**. When anger engulfs you in a manner that it turns into rage or fury, there is no turning back. I think that in some situations, we lose all control of thinking. Our thoughts are to harm the person who has harmed or hurt us. An eye for an eye...”

*Do you agree with Kenneth?*

“It is wise to  
direct your anger  
towards  
problems—not  
people; to focus  
your energies on  
answers—not  
excuses.”

## G. LIFESTYLE SKILLS FOR REDUCING STRESS

The original Blue Book listed a set of common-sense skills for reducing stress and tips for preserving peace in our relationships with others. Many are still valid.

1. **Support Groups** of people dealing with similar problems and circumstances can offer a double benefit: they prevent frustrating isolation and may offer practical solutions. Don’t be afraid to seek the company and advice of others. You may discover your problems are not unique. *Reaching Out From Within* is a support group.
2. **Specialized Training** is available for families and individuals in many places. For instance, parenting training is particularly helpful if physical punishment is the primary tool used for controlling children in your family.
3. **Family Fun Time & Individual Recreation** serve a similar function: restoring mental health. Anger and violence basically are incompatible with having a good time. A change of pace activity can be very helpful.
4. **Break Controlling Habits:** Drugs and alcohol are two examples of controlling habits. Those who become violent under the influence of a controlling habit should consider taking the necessary steps to stop.
5. **Good Health Habits:** Good eating, exercising and sleeping habits contribute to a good self-image and positive behavior. Likewise, bad health habits can contribute to negative behavior.
6. **Remove Sources of Stress:** Identify stressful activities and sources of irritation that lead to violent outbreaks and eliminate them. It may be as simple as avoiding football on television if every time your team loses, you take out your frustrations on others.

*How easy is it to avoid stressful situations in prison?  
Are there things you could do to avoid some situations? Like what?*

- 7. Stop Reinforcing Violence:** Look at ways to delete whatever it is that reinforces violence as a means of solving problems in your life. Your television habits, language and even your fantasy life can reinforce negative problem-solving methods rather than positive methods. The flip side of this is to emphasize activities that reinforce positive methods.

*What sort of things do you do that reinforce  
negative problem-solving?*

“Speak when you are  
angry – and you will  
make the best speech  
you’ll ever regret.”  
- Laurence J. Peter

- 8. Self-Image Assessment:** If you have a poor self-image, you may want to take steps to change that image. (See the Self Unit.) Some people who feel badly about themselves and feel that they are powerless may reach a point where they feel they can only deal with issues or people using force. You are important and what you say is important, but you may need to improve your skills in presenting yourself in an assertive manner instead of in an aggressive or violent manner.

*Is there a difference between “assertive” vs. aggressive?”  
What’s the difference?*

- 9. Find Your Own Answers:** If you are looking for ways to change, you can find those ways. Ask for advice and do not feel locked into any behavioral pattern. Use your energies to change yourself rather than trying to "fix others." Become an example to others that we can change for the better.

- 10. Be of Service. Volunteer!** There’s always someone you can help: Soup kitchens, retirement centers, Red Cross. Get out of yourself and get involved in someone else. It works!!!

*What do you think of these ten skills?  
Which do you think would be most helpful to you in reducing stress?*

## **SOURCES**

**Thinking for a Change** Integrated Cognitive Behavior Change Program, 1997, Jack Bush, PhD, Barry Glick, PhD and Juliana Taymans, PhD. for National Institute of Corrections  
*Reaching Out From Within* Blue Book, 1990, Greg Musselman and Lisa Dunn.

# ANGER - SESSION THREE

## Gender Expressions of Anger

### INTRODUCTION

Anger happens regardless of gender; women can become just as angry as men. However, pre-determined gender roles—largely created by society—result in women and men reacting to anger in different ways. In this session we will explore the differences.

“I was angry with my friend: I told my wrath, my wrath did end. I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow.”

~ William Blake

### ☑ OBJECTIVES

- To understand anger in terms of gender stereotypes.
- To examine the validity of the stereotypes.
- To sample what research says.
- To understand which stereotypes influence us.

### MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.

### NOTES TO FACILITATOR

This session explores stereotypes based on expected anger-involved behavior of men and women. Expect lively debate from the group. Pay respect to all responses by acknowledging them. In many cases, there are no right and wrong answers here. Stereotypes classify people into “neat” categories that are rarely “neat.”



## HOW GENDER IMPACTS ANGER

### A. STEREOTYPES

*What is a stereotype?*

One definition: a fixed notion or idea of a person or group allowing for no individuality or variance.

*What are some examples of stereotypes harbored by society toward prison inmates?*

*Do you like being stereotyped that way; if not, why not?*

*Women: what kind of stereotypes do you have about men? Men: about women?*

### B. GENDER STEREOTYPES INVOLVING ANGER

#### 1. Examples

*Can you think of stereotypes regarding how men and women deal with anger differently?*

*Do you agree with the following statements?*

- a. When angry, women are expected to be soft spoken and avoid loud outbursts. They typically react with tears.
  - b. When angry, men are expected to be strong and are given greater license to be aggressive, even to the point of violence. This affirms their role as males.
  - c. Women talk about their angry situations more than men.
  - d. Men don't care to discuss anger. They are more likely to react without thinking the situation through.
  - e. "The silent treatment" and withholding cooperation or sex are typical passive-aggressive female responses to anger.
  - f. Men will accept the passive aggression of their mates only so long. At some point, they must force the issue to demonstrate that they are in charge.
2. **The above gender stereotypes are social generalities** that have influenced the behavior of the sexes for generations. However, they are less widely held today than ever before.

*Why do you think stereotypes such as these, change?*

*How do stereotypes affect relationships between men and women?*

*Do stereotypes increase the odds of an argument between men and women accelerating into violence?*

*What about an argument just between men? Between women? Do they differ from arguments between both genders? In what way?*

## C. WHAT RESEARCH INDICATES

Men and women tend to become angry at different types of things.

*Make a list of what might make women angry. How about men?*

“Anger makes you smaller, while forgiveness forces you to grow beyond what you were.”  
- Cherie Carter-Scott

Various research studies have arrived at the following six conclusions, though these conclusions may not hold as society changes. The conclusions are:

**1. Anger in women** is more likely triggered by close family members and friends who have let them down. A man is more likely to be angered by strangers, objects that aren't working correctly and larger societal issues that prompt concerns about right and wrong. Men's anger is more abstract while women's' anger is more often focused on the hurt, they feel from those closest to them.

*Do you agree? Why?*

*Do you think a person's gender impacts how they think about "larger societal issues?"*

**2. Men seem to embrace their anger** and use it to their advantage while women view anger as being counterproductive. Although women report feeling uncomfortable with their anger, they often act on it just as well as men do except that women tend to develop alternative routes for getting what they want.

*In what ways do women express their anger? How is that different from men?*

**3. While physical expressions of anger in men are viewed as manly,** anger in women is seen as unpleasant and unfeminine. Their anger finds expression in passive-aggressive maneuvers such as sulking or destructive gossip.

Society influences the different expressions of anger among both sexes. Boys are capable of verbal aggression, but they shout with their bodies as well as their mouths. Girls learn to snub one another; walk off in a huff; pretend not to care; sulk; criticize; or gossip. These are indirect expressions of aggression and as just as effective.

*Do men “shout with their bodies?” How do they do this?*

*What about girls: do they learn these “indirect expressions” of anger as they’re growing up?*

“No one can make you jealous, angry, vengeful, or greedy unless you let them.”

~Napolean Hill

**4. Angry women are more likely to display** a wider range of emotions than men. Women cry more than men. Women also are more likely to verbalize their anger and the reasons behind it. Male anger rises and falls more quickly than female anger.

*Why do incarcerated women experience more depression than incarcerated men? Or do they?*

**5. Psychologists know that women are more likely to internalize** anger problems while men are more likely to act out through yelling or hitting. They believe it is a factor in the higher rates of depression and anxiety among women. Among incarcerated women, the contrast is even more pronounced.

*Does that mean the way males handle anger is healthier?*

**6. “Taken to extremes, neither behavior pattern is healthy.”** It is important for both men and women to be clear and forthright when angry and to use sound problem-solving techniques.

## **D. Modern Trends in Gender Stereotypes**

**Although old gender stereotypes persist**, the rapid evolution of changes affecting modern society have modified them significantly. Many women have entered the workforce, and many are educated professionals.

*How do the changing roles for women impact stereotypes?*

Fewer men feel the need to dominate and fewer women are willing to tolerate being dominated. Many men and women recognize the benefit and necessity of performing non-traditional roles. The larger number of single-parent households also requires both sexes to assume non-traditional roles and society is more tolerant of these changing roles. More relationships are characterized as partnerships of equals.

*How might these changes affect someone who has been incarcerated for a long time?*

*What roles were normal for your generation or family?*

Do you agree with the following statements?

- a. "Only a bunch of wusses would agree with the latest trends in gender roles. God created men first and made them stronger for a reason. The Bible says so."
- b. It takes a strong, courageous man to walk away from a fight in the heat of anger. It takes a strong man to return to the source of the problem later and address it with a cool head.
- c. A woman should never make more money than her husband.
- d. When I get out, I will immediately take over as head of the household.

"Before you give someone a piece of your mind, make sure you can get by with what is left."

~Anonymous

## **SOURCES**

Anger and Gender Expression, 2005, *Dr. Andrea Brandt, Ph.D.*

Differential Pathways to Violence and Self-Injurious Behavior: African American and Caucasian Girls in Juvenile Justice System, *Kristi Holsinger, PhD and Alexander M. Holsinger, PhD.*

Sandra Thomas, PhD. - study at University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Deborah Cox, PhD. from a 2000 study at Southwest Missouri State University.

Mark P. Cosgrove, PhD. of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

## **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

The Anger Workbook for Women: How to Keep Your Anger from Undermining Your Self-Esteem, Your Emotional Balance, and Your Relationships, (*New Harbinger Self-Help Workbook*) (Paperback) by [Laura J. Petracek](#)

## **AN EXAMPLE OF CHANGED THINKING**

*Reaching Out From Within* co-founder, *SuEllen Fried*, offers the following example of how a

*German concentration camp survivor managed to change his thinking and quell his anger toward his captors.*

## **ANGER MANAGEMENT**

One of the most profound lessons I ever learned about anger occurred many years ago.

I mentioned to Greg Musselman that I had been contacted by Jack Mandelbaum, a concentration camp survivor, to help establish the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education in Kansas City. Greg was intrigued with the idea of inviting Jack to speak to the members of our program at Lansing Correctional Facility. He thought it would be invaluable for incarcerated men to hear about imprisonment from the perspective of a former concentration camp prisoner.

Jack agreed to speak but as we drove to the Lansing facility in July, he expressed some concerns about entering a site that would stir up so many painful memories.

After being introduced, Jack spoke very frankly to the assembled crowd about his two years of slave labor and three years in several different camps from the time he was thirteen until he was eighteen. He lost his entire family and his youth. He shared his fearful anticipation of coming in contact with barbed wire and prison walls again. He then observed that this institution reviled no pain for him because it was a country club compared to the prisons he had known.

He noticed that the men were wearing appropriate clothing and they had just come from dinner. They were served three meals a day, had access to health care and were permitted communication with their families. They had heat in the winter and the air conditioning was functioning in our meeting room. Many of them had determinate sentences and would leave their confinement – alive. He concluded by saying: “I had none of these things, and I never did anything wrong.”

This account did not sit well with the men who did not feel gratitude about their incarceration. One of them asked Jack what he did with all his anger. Jack’s reply that he wasn’t angry, was met with fierce skepticism. Jack restated that he had no anger but insisted that it was not because he was saintly.

He went on to explain that if a Nazi guard from one of his camps was watching television at that very moment, drinking a beer and eating a knockwurst, any anger of Jack’s would not affect the Nazi. The only person affected by his anger would be Jack himself and the people he loved who would suffer the anger that he stored. He was not about to give the guard one more ounce of his life.

Jack went on to say that his philosophy had literally been a life-saving position for him to take and he asked the question, “What good is it to be free in body and not be free in mind?” What an incredible lesson about the futility of holding on to anger, no matter how justified.

# ANGER - SESSION FOUR

## The Costs of Anger

### INTRODUCTION

In this session we begin exploring how anger impacts our biochemical reactions and our health. Then we'll look at some of anger's emotional and social costs. Finally, we will assess our own personal costs.

Occasional moderate anger creates no lasting harm. But chronic anger that keeps the body in an extended state of emergency exacts a heavy toll on physical and emotional health. Drugs and alcohol compound the problem. Personal costs, including the loss of freedom, can only be assessed by each person. This session will explore some of the costs and offers a worksheet at the end for self-assessment.

### OBJECTIVES

- To appreciate the body chemistry involved in anger.
- To understand the health costs of anger.
- To understand the emotional costs.
- To make a self-assessment of the personal costs of anger.

### MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.  
Personal Cost of Anger worksheets.

### NOTES TO FACILITATOR

The group will find plenty points of agreement and disagreement here. Allow the discussion to follow its natural course. Pay respect to all views expressed. The take-away goal is a better appreciation of how anger affects, and is affected by, the interaction of body chemistry, hormones, drugs, alcohol, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes.

“If you can be patient in one moment of anger, you will escape 100 days of sorrow.”  
- Chinese Proverb

## THE COST OF ANGER

### A. PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO ANGER

Anger is an emotion, and emotions cause biochemical reactions in the body that affect our behavior. Adrenalin, testosterone and other hormones interact to affect our health and influence behavior.

Drugs, alcohol, anger, and hormones frequently are involved in domestic violence, rape, assault and other crimes. A mixture of some or all of these elements can serve as a convenient excuse or justification for violent behavior: “I was too drunk to know what I was doing,” or “I was in a blind rage when that happened,” or “My testosterone level must have been out of sight.” Those excuses don’t work in court or anywhere else.

*Why do we use such excuses; is it a way to avoid responsibility?*

A combination of ingredients may make self-control more difficult, but a person is still responsible for choices made and actions taken. At *Reaching Out From Within*, we believe nobody has a right to hit anyone; that includes rape, assault or any other violent act.

### PHYSICAL REACTIONS

#### 1. Adrenalin

The body reacts instantly when the brain perceives danger by releasing the hormone adrenalin. It is immediately released into the blood stream by the adrenal glands. It speeds up the heart rate, depresses the immune system, and gets the body ready to fight or flee.

#### 2. Testosterone

Testosterone, the male hormone produced in the testicles, influences male behavior. Violent sex offenders often have elevated levels of testosterone. Alcohol abuse, which alters testosterone levels in complex ways, also is associated with violent behavior.

“Every time you get angry, you poison your own system.”  
-Alfred Montapert

#### 3. Alcohol and drugs

There is a strong connection between substance abuse and anger. Studies show over half of those in treatment for chemical addictions have anger problems. Often, anger is a factor when people relapse from substance abuse recovery programs. **But recovery from chemical addictions does not ensure recovery from anger.** The term “dry drunk” applies to the sober person who has not yet recovered from his or her anger. EACH behavior must be addressed squarely, honestly and courageously.

*Does anger trigger our hormones or do hormones trigger our anger? Or does the threat to our safety in a high-stress situation trigger our hormones first, then the anger second?*

Answer: It can work in any of these ways. The relationship between hormones and behavior is clear, yet complex. Behavioral scientists continue to work on this

complexity.

*Do hormones and anger influence my ability to think clearly and make rational decisions?*

Answer: They make it more difficult to think clearly and make rational decisions. Brain research clearly shows that the brain operates differently under threats, high anxiety and stress. There is an altered blood flow and electrical activity pattern that minimize the brain's ability to think rationally. That's why we say we "just can't think straight" when we are emotionally upset. Drugs and alcohol compound the problem.

*If that's so, then how can we be blamed for our angry outbursts and violence?*

Answer: Some claim anger is an emotion and not a choice. Others—including experts cited in this session—say it's more difficult to think clearly when angry, but not impossible. In most cases, it's not an all-or-nothing thing. It's a matter of degree.

The sooner you can take control of your thinking process in any situation, the better you can control your anger. Anger is driven by the way we think about situations. We can choose to change our way of thinking and thus avoid the extremes of anger.

"People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing."  
~Will Rogers

*Paradox:* We are not responsible for how we came to be who we are as adults. But as adults, we are responsible for everything we think and do. As a rule, anger is not accepted as a defense in a court of law. The same goes for criminal actions influenced by the abuse of alcohol or drugs.

*Do you understand this paradox? What does it mean to you?*

*If anger, drugs and alcohol were accepted as defenses for crimes, what percentage of the nation's prisoners do you think would go free?*

## **B. HEALTH ISSUES**

**Hypertension** – Anger-induced hormones reduce the diameter of blood vessels and increase blood pressure. The rates of heart attack, coronary artery disease and stroke are greater among those with chronic anger problems. A seven-year study found that men with high scores on an anger expression scale were twice as likely to have strokes as those who are calmer. In another study, the angriest men were three times more likely to have coronary artery disease.

*So, are there reasons we should try to be less angry?*



Molly Edmunds states in her article, *How Anger Works*, “If you're constantly being activated by triggers, then this state of response can start to cause damage. Chronically angry people may not have the mechanism to turn off these effects. They may not produce **acetylcholine**, a hormone which tempers the more severe effects of adrenaline. Their nervous system is constantly working and can eventually become overexerted, leading to a weakened heart and stiffer arteries. There's potential for liver and kidney damage, as well as high cholesterol. Anger may bring along some accompanying issues, such as depression or anxiety.”

## C. EMOTIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL COSTS

### 1. Relationships

Relationships cannot help but be affected by frequent displays of anger and hostility. Friendships drift away. Others avoid making contact. Family and friends don't visit. Feelings of isolation follow. Spouses or partners become more guarded. Intimacy suffers.

“Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath.”  
~Eckhart Tolle

*What effects has anger had on your life?*

### 2. Loneliness

Studies reveal a significant cause-and-effect relationship between hostility and loneliness. Angry people end up feeling painfully disconnected from others and often develop cynical attitudes toward others. They keep others at arm's length, becoming more isolated and lonelier, which can feed their anger.

*What are some tell-tale signs that anger is affecting your relationships?*

## D. PERSONAL COSTS

A story told by a member: *A recently incarcerated offender looked forward to the first visit of his wife and their 5-year-old son. When they arrived, the inmate was surprised that the little boy was scared to death of him.*

*“What's the matter with him?” he asked his wife. “It's your anger,” she said. “He's afraid you will blow up at him like you did the last time he saw you.” The man was filled with regret.*

Few understand the costs of anger better than the incarcerated. Many are here because anger was involved in their crimes. Perhaps, as children growing up, you learned how to belittle, demean or accuse others. In addition, many incarcerated women were victims of anger as children and as adults. The time came when they participated in crimes and lost their freedom. How big a cost is that?

The natural tendency is to ignore, deny or minimize the personal costs of anger in our lives. What's to be gained by focusing so much attention on mistakes of the past? Maybe a more peaceful and joyful future can be gained.

Ronnie Rhodes, an ROFW alumnus, recommends using the *Personal Costs of Anger* exercise from the *Anger Control Workbook* as an aid toward gaining a complete understanding of the impact anger has had on our lives and the lives of others. The worksheet appears at the end of this session.

## **SOURCES**

Anger, 2009, *Ronald Rhodes, ROFW alumnus, Lansing Correctional Facility*

The Anger Control Workbook, *Matthew McKay and Peter Rogers*

Inside Out, 2005, *Russell S. Thompson, PhD.*

Anger Strategies, *Claudia Black, PhD.*



## **PERSONAL COSTS OF ANGER WORKSHEET**

*Write brief descriptions of how anger has affected you in each topic area.*

1. How anger has affected my work relationships:
2. How anger has affected my marriage or intimate/romantic relationships:
3. How anger has affected my friendships:
4. How my anger has harmed people who aren't family or friends:
5. How anger has endangered me:
6. How anger has affected my relationships with my family of origin:
7. How anger has affected me financially:
8. How anger has affected me spiritually:

# ANGER - SESSION FIVE

## Dealing with Our Anger

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this session we will explore several positive ways to deal with anger. These steps may be familiar to group members from the original Blue Book. They also serve as a review of points made in this Unit. Tailor the approach to your individual circumstances, but don't exclude the support of the group. The group will help keep you on track.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To acknowledge anger.
- To learn skills to aid in dealing with anger.
- To explore our feelings and learn ways to express them.

### **MATERIALS**

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.

### **NOTES TO FACILITATOR**

Read each step and then use the questions that follow to generate discussion on that point. The discussion will aid in the understanding and application of these steps.

# DEALING WITH OUR ANGER

## A. Steps to Deal with Anger

1. **Acknowledge your anger** and communicate it in ways that are not abusive.

*Why do we tend to acknowledge our anger in abusive ways?*

*Stuffing* anger is not good. We should understand that it builds up inside of us and eventually comes out—sometimes explosively.

*What are some positive ways we can defuse our anger?*

2. **Accept responsibility for your own behavior.** Stop blaming others.

*In what ways can we accept responsibility?*

*Do we, often, try to blame someone or something else? Why do we do this?*

*How often—when we're written up—do we accept responsibility for our actions?*

3. **Make choices for yourself.** Act rather than react.

*Do other people try to tell you what to do when you are angry? Do they usually give you good advice?*

Sometimes it's good advice and sometimes it's bad. Some people will even egg you on to rile you up. It's okay to talk to a friend but remember the next step: *You* have to accept the responsibility, so *you* have to make your own decisions.

Follow this formula:

**STOP . . . . . THINK . . . . . and then . . . . . ACT**

Act in a positive, non-threatening manner.

4. **Make your needs and feelings known**—if only to yourself.

Express them using “I” messages. You've acknowledged *your* anger, accepted *your* responsibility and made *your* choices. **Now** try to communicate these things: “I feel angry because...” or “I've given it some thought and have decided to...” It helps to understand why we act as we do so that we can do better next time.

Do this instead of using blaming statements such as: “You shouldn't have...” or “You screwed it up...”

“Anger is a killing thing: it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had been before—it takes something from him.”

~ Louis L'Amour

“When anger rises, think of the consequences.”  
- Confucius

**5. Learn to confront issues and/or behavior rather than people.**

*Why is this step important? What happens if we direct our anger at a person rather than the problem?*

**6. Recognize, understand and admit your distorted thinking.**

Understanding how we perceive helps us understand how to control our anger. Session 7 of this unit helps us understand how distorted thinking can fuse our anger.

**7. Accept partners** (spouse, friend or significant other) as equals. Value them as people, not objects or possessions.

*How might treating others as equals keep us from getting angry? Or would it?*

*If people aren't possessions, why do we say: "She's my old lady?"*

**8. Own your own feelings** and express them assertively rather than aggressively.

*What's the difference between assertive and aggressive?*

Assertive persons express wants and needs directly and honestly without denying the desires of others. They gain by influencing, listening and negotiating in the hope of gaining cooperation. If others don't cooperate, they haven't angered anyone and do not become angry themselves. They gain respect for being straightforward and maintain self-respect.

"Assertiveness is not what you do, it's who you are!"  
- Shakti Gawain

An aggressive person exudes superiority and disrespect. He puts his wants, needs and rights first. She wins by making others lose. In doing so, she loses respect and opens herself up for retaliation.

When you're assertive, you stand up for something. When you're aggressive, you're against something. They're really quite different. One is FOR, the other is AGAINST.

*Can you give some examples of assertive behavior?  
What would it look like?*

**9. Don't become angry because of change.** Sometimes we don't even realize that changes in the world around us make us angry; they happen, and we can't do anything about it.

*Why does change cause so many people to be angry?  
Do you need to make changes that you don't want to make?*

*What kind of changes might those be?*

- 10. There is a “first aid” technique to use** when you feel you are about to lose control. Walk away from the situation. **Concentrate on your breathing. Calm your body down.** Talk it out with a third party you trust. Use physical exercise, hobbies or other activities to vent the steam etc.

“Change is inevitable; growth is optional”

~Author

*What other first aid techniques might you use?*

- 11. Feel good about yourself** when you are in control of your own behavior; take the time to realize this. Being in control of your own behavior is very powerful—more powerful than trying to control others.
- 12. Know that you *can* change** and that you *can* unlearn inappropriate behavior.

*What are some changes you’ve made since being incarcerated?  
Are they positive or negative changes?*

In dealing with anger, we must look honestly at ourselves and others. We cannot be opposed to change. We need to find alternatives that help us vent our anger in positive ways.

It is important to **always STOP....THINK.... and then....ACT.**

It is time to begin taking responsibility for our actions. Learning to control anger and defuse it in a positive way is not only possible, it is necessary for our emotional well-being. Try to use this list; copy it down and hang it somewhere where you can see it and draw from it in time of need. Remember, when everything fails and you’re about to lose control, it’s better to walk away and regroup.

## **B. Effective and Ineffective Communications**

Although the Blue Book has a unit on communication, the points as they relate to anger cannot be repeated too many times:

Effective communication isn’t possible when...

- 1. ... you are interrupted** before you’ve stopped talking. In any conflict, it is very important that all sides can tell their story.
- 2. ...you are ignored.** Another method of ignoring is when one side hogs the conversation and doesn’t give the other time to speak.

**3. ...you or your opponent resorts to insults and name calling:** You're ignorant; you don't have the brains of a mule." Personal attacks are sure to raise hostilities.

Effective communication is possible when...

**1. ...both sides try to agree** on an honest assessment of the details leading up to the disagreement.

**2. ...you state how you feel** and think, using "I" statements instead of "you" statements. For instance, say: "I felt frustrated when you didn't bring the article like you promised because now, I won't be prepared," instead of, "You're worthless. You'd forget your nose if it weren't attached to your face."

**3. ...you calm yourself down** inside and out to the point where you can laugh. It is hard to laugh and be angry at the same time.

"It is impossible for you to be angry and laugh at the same time. Anger and laughter are mutually exclusive and you have the power to choose either."  
~Wayne Dyer

### **Three Rules For Dealing With Anger (rules of ROFW):**

**1. We agree to acknowledge our anger as soon as we become aware of it.** Acknowledging anger is not venting it; it is simply communicating to another person—or to ourselves—the state of our emotions, without accusations or blame.

When we acknowledge our anger, we take a positive step in solving the problem or facing what makes us angry. We speak of "acknowledging anger" a lot. This involves looking within ourselves and identifying what we are feeling and why.

*The importance of this cannot be stressed enough.*

**2. We agree we will not vent anger at each other.** That doesn't mean we won't express our anger verbally, but we won't become violent or abusive.

*How does the formula: STOP...THINK...then ACT, come into play?*

**3. We agree to ask for the other's help in dealing with the anger that has developed:** "I love you; I don't want to hurt you."

*Why is it important for both parties to be a part of the solution?  
Is this rule the hardest to follow? Why?*

None of us like being the subject or the object of anger. Working out an anger situation as it develops has is the "creative use of conflict." (See the Conflict Unit for more about this.)

"Angry people are not always wise."  
~Jane Austen

### **C. COOLING OFF PERIOD**



Sometimes anger is too hot to handle now, but we need to make sure that we get to it with the least possible delay. If you feel yourself getting out of control, walk away and take time to "cool off." This gives a person time to think and discover reasons for his/her anger.

In dealing with anger there are many basic things to remember. These basics will enrich our lives and help relationships to grow.

## **D. THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT ANGER**

**1. Anger is a natural, normal and useful emotion** that everyone experiences.

Talk about the importance of the above statement.

*Do you think most people understand that anger can be useful? Why/how can it be useful?*

**2. Anger does not disappear.** It always finds a way to express itself.

*Why doesn't anger disappear?  
What are some of the ways we discussed to defuse anger?*

**3. Anger shows that we care and are concerned.** It is impossible to love someone without getting angry at times.

*Who agrees with the above statement? Why or why not?  
Do we tend to get angry with people we love more readily than with friends or strangers?  
Do we strike out at the people we love and who love us because we never learned to deal with our anger effectively?  
Is that an acceptable reason?*

### **ACTIVITY:**

*Have you learned something from this unit that will help you in the future?*

*What is it?*

## **HELPFUL WAYS TO EXPRESS ANGER**

- ✓ Describe what you feel.
- ✓ Describe what you see - describe offending behavior.
- ✓ Describe what needs to be done.
- ✓ Use assertive "I" messages to get your point across.
- ✓ It's okay to be angry at things, issues and behavior, but we should try to direct our anger at those things rather than at people; it's not okay to be hurtful.

**\*~REMEMBER~\***

**Anger is okay**

**Rage is not.**

## **SOURCES**

**Thinking for a Change** Integrated Cognitive Behavior Change Program, 1997, *Jack Bush, PhD, Barry Glick, PhD and Juliana Taymans, PhD. for the National Institute of Corrections*  
*Reaching Out From Within* "Blue Book," 1990, *Greg Musselman and Lisa Dunn.*

# Monsters Are Real

Growing up, I had a very abusive stepdad. . He was also an alcoholic. He did things that no child could understand. I watched him beat my mom senseless. His beatings put her in the hospital a few times.

His rages would send me scurrying for a hiding place, but my hiding places weren't soundproof. The sound of my mom begging, pleading, and crying – and of us kids begging him to stop – still plays loudly in my head. It did no good. My mom's endless apologies would not stop The Monster.

The Monster did not stop with my mom. He unleashed himself on my brother and me. He terrorized us. I remember the time he locked me in a root cellar with no stairs going up or down. No lights. Just darkness: dirt, spiders, creepy crawly things. And my screams.

Another time, The Monster held my hands under scalding hot water because he'd caught me rinsing the silverware in cold water. I remember he put his other fist against my jaw and told me not to make a sound, not to cry out for my mother, or he would break my jaw. I was five years old. He filled my life with terror.

I went from being beaten to being raped by his brothers and their friends. (They were a little older than me.) I ended up in foster care. By the time I was 23 years old, I'd overdosed three times and was saved in the nick of time. I also came to the realization that I was gay.

When I was 26, I ended up going out with a friend of one of my uncles because, at the time, I didn't have anything better to do. After an alcohol- and drug-induced night, I ended up pregnant. I should have walked away from this man, but I was truly convinced that my pregnancy was a sign from God: that I was straight, and that I was meant to be with this man.

I knew he drank, but I thought it was something I could deal with. But when I was six or seven months pregnant, he was in a drunken rage and ended up pushing me and causing me to fall into the bathtub in our apartment. I should have left after that, but, again, I told myself that this was who God wanted me to be with, that I **was** meant to have a family. I kept telling myself that things would get better. They didn't.

Things kept getting worse, but I kept telling myself that he loved me and that my baby needed her parents. Besides, where could I go? How could I take care of a baby by myself?

The abuse went on for 6 more years until one day, I broke. I'd had all I could take, and I became a bigger monster.

Society calls me a monster because I took a man's life; and at that precise moment, I was a monster. But, today, I'm a survivor.

My prayer is that ROFW and domestic violence shelters will be able to help more women find the strength and courage to leave their abusers. Life does not have to end in tragedy. We are all human beings, and no one should ever take the life of another. We should not be monsters.

*~Angela E, Topeka Correctional Facility*

# ANGER - SESSION SIX

## Dealing with the Anger and Aggression of Others

### INTRODUCTION

Someone else's anger will inevitably come our way. It can be justified but can also be verbally destructive or physically violent.

We can learn a lot about ourselves if stop and consider how we deal with another person's anger. While we can't control another person's feelings, we can control our reaction and thereby defuse the situation. If we haven't learned to control our reactions, the situation may escalate.

In *Reaching Out From Within*, we believe that no one has the right to hit anyone. That "sounds good" but it must be put into action. But how do we avoid the verbal and physical anger or rage of others?

### OBJECTIVES

- To understand what angry people want.
- How we may get trapped by others' anger.
- To become aware of how we can best respond to another's anger.
- To understand that while we may be responsible for causing anger in others, we are not responsible for their violence or rage.

### MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.

### NOTES TO FACILITATOR

While it is important not to own someone else's anger, it is equally important that we, in *Reaching Out From Within*, take responsibility for our actions and their consequences. In this session, the group explores how the anger of others affects us.

### DEALING WITH THE ANGER AND AGGRESSION OF OTHERS

## A. WHAT ANGRY PEOPLE WANT

Mort Orman, a specialist in stress management, wrote that all angry people want the following:

1. They want you to admit that you did something wrong.
2. They want you to acknowledge and empathize with the pain or damage you have caused.
3. They want you to admit that you, and you alone (or your children, etc.) are 100% to blame for whatever happened, and that they had little or nothing to do with it.
4. They want you to take full responsibility by apologizing for what you did wrong, by offering to make amends, or by being appropriately punished or sanctioned for your misdeeds.

“Anger is a signal, and one worth listening to.”  
-Harriet Lerner

Dr. Orman says that if angry people don't get these kinds of responses from you, their anger will intensify.

*Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?  
Think of times when you've been angry. Are these the things you wanted, or did you want something else?*

“Sometimes when I'm angry, I have the right to be angry. But that doesn't give me the right to be cruel.”  
~Author Unknown

## B. RESPONDING TO ANGER DIRECTED AT YOU

Anger isn't always verbalized before the first punch is thrown. If someone is intent on fighting, the following tools may not be helpful. But presuming someone tells us they're angry, here are some ways we may be able to respond:

### 1. Understanding

Understanding the feelings of others is a useful skill in many circumstances. But unless someone expresses their feelings to us, we may not know precisely what it is they're feeling.

*If someone is angry, what emotions might they be feeling towards us?  
Can we ask them?*

### 2. Responding

Responding to the anger of others is a matter of first deciding what might be the best course of action. It might be helpful to tell them you understand their feelings. However, this can annoy someone, who might respond: “You don't have a clue what I'm feeling.” When someone is angry and stressed out, they may not want to hear you say you know what they're feeling; they may just want you to ask what's going on with them. Show concern; that may give them a chance to verbalize their emotions.

Six tips for responding to anger:

1. Listen carefully to what the other person has to say.
2. Show that you're trying to understand what they're saying.
3. Ask the other person to explain what you don't understand.
4. Try to show you understand why the other person feels angry.
5. Body language is very important. Be aware of non-verbal messages you project by how you stand, sit, what your hands are doing, your facial expressions and so on.
6. If appropriate, express your thoughts and feelings about the situation.

*Think of a situation when someone has been angry with you. Why were they angry?*

*How can we respond in a way that values the person who is angry and lets them know we hear them?*

## **C. RESPONDING TO RAGE & AGGRESSION**

*How is being angry different from being in a rage?*

*What does someone in a rage want?*

*Should we react differently when someone is full of rage rather than anger?*

*What are the consequences of responding without thinking?*

“We boil at  
different  
degrees.”  
Clint  
Eastwood

## **D. AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S RAGE**

Consider or act out the following:

*Jim comes home to find his wife has been out with friends and brought home his least favorite take-home food for dinner. He flies into a rage and hits his wife, saying it's her fault he's mad. If she had stayed home and cooked, he wouldn't have had to get angry.*

### **Who's at Fault?**

*Define fault.*

*Are we responsible for someone else's rage, verbal abuse or violence?*

*Why do we sometimes accept the fault for someone's anger or abuse?*

*Is there any way to respectfully show we are not responsible?*

*If someone is in a rage, is it useful to use the listening skills we learned about dealing with anger?*

*Is submitting or behaving meekly in the face of an out-of-control spouse immediately effective? Is it a long-term solution?*

## **E. AVOIDING VIOLENCE/PROTECTING OTHERS**

Whenever two or more people are together with different needs and wants, someone can get angry and conflicts can arise. One of life's many important lessons is to learn how to handle these conflicts well, especially when someone is angry at us. Every week there are stories of emotions gone awry.

Knowing how to "de-fuse" a tense situation might save a life—yours or someone else's.

*Is it our job to calm down a violent person?*

Therapists and educators recommend a combination of communication, assertiveness and problem-solving strategies when dealing with conflict. When someone is angry at you, first take steps to protect yourself and those you are responsible for from any potential violence (i.e. leave, go to a safe house, wait until your partner is sober, etc.). (See the Unit on Domestic Violence.)

Consider or act out the following scenario:

An inmate blames you for starting rumors about him. Although you have told him it wasn't you, he is determined to fight you. He keeps yelling at you and comes at you in a menacing way.

*How can we avoid getting into it with a person who is full of anger?*

*How can we stay safe in the face of another's anger? Their rage?*

### **Long-term effects of another's anger:**

- Being an abused child significantly increases the odds of being involved in future delinquency and young adult crime.
- Being abused or neglected as a child significantly increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile and being arrested for a violent crime in young adulthood.
- Of boys and young men, ages 11 to 20, arrested for homicide, the majority killed men who were abusing their mothers.

The above effects indicate how important it is for a child to learn how to deal with the anger and rage of others. (We explore the effects of child abuse in another Unit of this book.)

*If you have experienced another person's rage, how did you act around them at other times?*

### **Unresolved Conflicts**

Not everyone wants to work out a "win-win" solution to a problem. Just

“Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

as some people will never be happy, others thrive on hostility and violence.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we are the object of someone else's bad mood. Rather than deal with it by themselves, they take it out on you.

*What might you say to a person who's always angry and critical and directs it at you on a continual basis?*

*Can you just "let it go" or does something have to change? What must change?*

If you have a situation where someone has trouble keeping a lid on their hostile feelings and you are in danger of being abused, you should leave; go to a safe house; or seek professional counseling (from your local crisis center, victim assistance, child abuse hot line, mental health facility, licensed marriage and family therapists, counselors, etc.). (See the Unit on Domestic Violence.)

*What can you do when you're in prison and find yourself in such a situation?*

## **FINAL REFLECTION:**

*Have you learned some different techniques you could use to reduce your anger or someone else's?*

## **SOURCES**

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# ANGER- SESSION SEVEN

## Distorted Thinking

### INTRODUCTION

Distorted thinking doesn't simply relate to anger; it relates to the mistaken ways we can think that can lead to problems for us. Many times, those problems result in Anger. However, the Anger Unit isn't an easy unit to get through and the group can decide if it wants to engage in this last session now or possibly leave it for another time. Let the group decide whether they want to continue.

In his book, *Beyond Anger*, Thomas J. Harbin says: "Angry men have a bad habit of distorting the meaning of events around them as well as the intentions and thoughts of others. As a result, angry persons live life based on faulty information."

*Do you think he's right? Have you done this yourself?*

It's a lot like the explanation that computer programmers give when their programs don't work right: "Garbage in, garbage out. You can't make good decisions if you are starting out with bad information."

What we think today influences how we react to any given situation. If we agree that anger is healthy but how we react may not be, then we want to be sure we are thinking clearly.

It's always easier to point out problems. The challenge is to slow ourselves down, recognize distorted thinking and make a habit of correcting ourselves thoughtfully.

This session identifies eight major types of distorted thinking that can feed our feelings of anger. For each one, we've included some alternatives as examples of different ways of thinking.

### OBJECTIVES

- To recognize that thoughts may be distorted.
- To realize that distorted thinking can be corrected.
- To identify examples of distorted thinking followed by alternatives.

### MATERIALS

Paper, pencils, markers/chalk, dry erase/chalk board.

"So you try to think of someone else you're mad at, and the unavoidable answer pops into your little warped brain: everyone."  
~Ellen Hopkins

### NOTES TO FACILITATOR

Have a clear understanding of this topic before introducing it. Allow the discussion to follow its natural course but bring it back to the outline when it goes too far astray. Pay respect to all views expressed by acknowledging them. The take-away goal is to understand several common thinking distortions that can lead to trouble.

As you work through the categories:

1. See if you know what each thinking distortion category means.
2. Read the examples provided.
3. See if you agree with the alternative coping thoughts provided.
4. Can you think of other examples from your experiences and how you would correct them or did correct them?

## DISTORTED THINKING

Thinking distortions can lead to anger distortions. Remember the statement: “Thought is the cause of it all”? As we move through this session, it’s important to concentrate on our thought processes. Thoughts dictate behavior. Twisted thoughts and warped perceptions can easily lead to anger.

### EIGHT CATEGORIES OF DISTORTED THINKING:

Blaming  
Magnifying the situation  
Inflammatory global labeling  
Mind reading or misattributions  
Overgeneralization  
Demanding, commanding  
“Can’t” Thinking  
Being Right

#### 1. BLAMING

**Blaming** is the belief that the bad things that happen are always someone else’s fault. It is the most self-destructive and damaging anger distortion. The mistaken belief behind blaming is that others are doing bad things to you, usually on purpose, and they aren’t going to get away with it. It also helps you escape responsibility.

“Anger, if not restrained, is frequently more hurtful to us than the injury that provokes it.”  
~ *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

Blaming can make you feel better sometimes, but it also leaves you feeling helpless. If we make it someone else’s fault, we make ourselves powerless to correct it.

#### Examples:

- A. I didn’t get the job because you didn’t help me with my resume. (It’s your fault.)
- B. I can’t get my level because the officers are against me. (It’s their fault.) "I didn't know I was breaking a rule..."
- C. If she wouldn’t have called me names, I wouldn’t have slapped her.

#### Alternative Coping Thoughts:

- a. I’m not helpless. I can take care of myself in this situation.
- b. I know blaming makes me helpless. What can I do to change the situation?
- c. What she said hurt my feelings, and I should tell her how I feel.

When you use a blaming strategy, your entire focus is on trying to change the other person. The

key to dealing with self-defeating blaming is to develop a new coping strategy. This requires you to take responsibility and make your own plan to change the situation. Forget the other person. They're not going to do anything different.

*How often do you blame others for problems that are really yours?  
Do you know why you do that? Is it a way to take blame off yourself?*

## 2. MAGNIFYING THE SITUATION

**Magnifying the situation** is when we turn everything into a catastrophe, always expecting the worst case to happen. It's making things seem worse than they are.

Making a situation out to be awful, terrible or horrendous sets you up to respond in a similar manner. You act as though this distorted view were true.

### Examples:

- a. This is the worst thing imaginable. It's all over for me now. I'll never be able to show my face around here again.
- b. This write-up killed my chances for getting a good job. I'll never be able to better myself now.

“Only in quiet waters do things mirror themselves undistorted. Only in a quiet mind is there adequate perception of the world.”  
- Hans Margolius

### Alternative Coping Thoughts:

- a. It's just a setback and not worth getting all bent out of shape about.
- b. Wow, this situation is really messed up, but I'll do the best I can and make the most of it.

Make a realistic assessment of how bad things really are. They may be bad, a hassle, messed up, but how bad are they *really*? Be accurate in the language you use to describe the situation. Be sure to look at the whole picture, not just one piece. Every situation has its positive and negative aspects.

## 3. INFLAMMATORY GLOBAL LABELING

**Inflammatory global labeling** is when we make sweeping judgments about someone or something based on very little evidence. The label tends to paint the person as being totally wrong, bad or worthless. It is often expressed with one-word epithets like: “the system,” or “loser,” etc. Labels are always misleading and false because *nobody* can be reduced to a single characteristic.

### Examples:

- a. That guy who just cut in front of me is a complete asshole.
- b. He's a pig. All he does is eat.

### **Alternative Coping Thoughts:**

- a. Maybe he's got more anger issues than I do; poor guy.
- b. Why does his size bother me so much? What really bothers me?

The best way to combat a tendency toward global labeling is to be specific. Describe the annoying behavior with precision. What happened? When? How? How often? Use this thought process and you won't make broad judgments about the other person.

*How often do we make broad judgments about others?  
Would we want them to do the same about us?*

## **4. MIND READING OR MISATTRIBUTIONS:**

**Mind reading or misattributions:** This is all about jumping to conclusions and mind reading. When you find yourself hurt or annoyed by another's behavior, you *assume* they did it on purpose. You *assume* you know their "real" motives. You *jump* to conclusions without checking whether they are true. You don't watch or listen carefully enough to realize that your assessment is wrong. When you take the trouble to check out your assumptions, you likely will discover how often you were partly or entirely mistaken. You may still be annoyed, but at least for the right reason.

The best way to avoid misattributions is to pay attention and catch yourself making the assumptions. Then, if possible, check it out. Ask someone you trust what they make of the situation.

### **Examples:**

- a. His criticism is just a way for him to attack me and make me feel inferior.
- b. She should have known I was upset. I know she was doing that just to embarrass me in front of everyone.

### **Alternative Coping Thoughts:**

- a. That's one possibility, but there are probably other reasons behind why he did it.
- b. I should have told her that upset me and asked her to stop.

*Do we not want to use any of these "alternative coping thoughts" because, by doing so, we acknowledge we made a "thinking error?" Which is worse, finding an alternative or lashing out at someone?*

## **5. OVERGENERALIZATION**

**Overgeneralization** is when we reach a broad, generalized conclusion based on

just one piece of evidence. Any problem can be made to look bigger by using words like “never,” “nobody,” “everybody.” You exaggerate, going way beyond the truth of the situation.

**Examples:**

- a. All men are abusers
- b. Everybody is always asking me for a favor.

“All generalizations are dangerous, even this one.”  
- *Alexandre Dumas*

**Alternative Coping Thoughts**

- a. Just because all the men I grew up with abused me doesn’t mean all men are abusers.
- b. How often does this **really** happen?

One way to deal with overgeneralizations is to deconstruct the statement. For example: Everybody is always asking me for a favor. Who is everybody, what do I mean by always, what do I consider a favor?

**6. DEMANDING, COMMANDING:**

**Demanding, commanding:** This is when you turn your personal preferences into the equivalent of the Ten Commandments. You operate from a rigid set of rules about how everyone, including you, should act.

These distorted thoughts often involve terms like “should,” “got to,” “have to,” or “ought to.” It’s good to have a well-developed sense of values, but problems with anger can occur when you demand or command strict compliance from others.

**Examples:**

- a. This is the way it’s got to be. Any other way is just plain stupid.
- b. I should have known never to trust him to visit me in prison each week.

**Alternative Coping Thoughts:**

- a. I don’t like what they’re doing, and I don’t agree with it, but I can live with it.
- b. So, what if he’s a big disappointment. It’s not the end of the world. He’s got his own sack of rocks to carry.

Others rarely do what you think they should. It may be hard to swallow, but there’s no reason why things “should” be the way you want.

The best way to cope with “shoulds” is to reframe them in terms of your personal preferences, not in terms of what others should do. It’s perfectly honest to say, “I don’t agree. Personally, I would rather ...”

## 7. “CAN’T” versus “WON’T” THINKING

**Can’t thinking** is when you use the word “can’t” to respond to a need, want, decision, or choice when the more honest response may be “I won’t” or “I don’t want to.” Can’t thinking can be self-defeating; it infers that you are unable when, in fact, you are able, but unwilling.

### Examples:

- a. I can’t give a presentation on anger to the group.
- b. I can’t control myself when I’m around her.

### Alternative Coping Thoughts:

- a. I don’t want to give a talk; I’m not ready.
- b. I don’t *want* to control myself, but I’ll try.

“A fellow can’t keep people from having a bad opinion of him, but he can keep them from being right about it.”  
~Anonymous

“He who angers you conquers you.”  
~Elizabeth Kenny

## 8. BEING RIGHT

**Being Right** is when you always feel like you must prove that your opinions and actions are correct. You can never be wrong, and you will go to any length to demonstrate your rightness.

Having to be 'right' often makes you hard of hearing. You aren't interested in the truth of a differing opinion, only in defending your own. Being right becomes more important than an honest and caring relationship.

### Examples:

- a. He is wrong.
- b. All she cares about is that the kids don’t see the druggies coming to the house. She is so stupid; she can’t understand my drug business pays the bills.

### Alternative Coping Thoughts:

- a. Maybe I am wrong.
- b. Maybe she cares about our kids and doesn’t want them exposed to my business.

## SOURCES

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The Anger Control Workbook, *Matthew McKay and Peter Rogers*  
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## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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Eastern Washington University's 15 Styles of Distorted Thinking: <http://www.ewu.edu/x6671.xm>  
Survivors & Friends website:  
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