Anger Worksheets

Exercises and Coping Skills to Help Manage Your Anger

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The Anger Iceberg

Anger is often referred to as a secondary emotion. It's thought that we subconsciously shift into anger to protect ourselves from more vulnerable, uncomfortable emotions such as fear and sadness.

Whereas anger provides us with a surge of energy and can help us feel powerful, fear and sadness are more difficult for us to sit with and express.

The Anger Iceberg represents this psychological phenomenon. Although anger is what we see on the surface, there's often a range of emotions hidden underneath.

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Anger Coping Skills

Track Your Triggers

If you use the following Anger Log regularly, your anger triggers will eventually become clearer.

Over time, you can note the emotions, people, places and situations that predispose you to losing your cool on the My Anger Triggers sheet.

Once you become more familiar with your triggers, you'll be better prepared to deal with them.

Notice Your Anger Warning Signs

People often say that their anger "just seems to come out of nowhere", when in fact there are several physical warning signs that anger is rising.

Recognizing and understanding these signs helps with successful anger management.

Common anger signs include:

- Feeling hot
- Sweating
- Clenching your fists
- An increased heart rate
- Tensing your muscles
- Shaking

Next time you feel your anger levels rising, practice tuning into your body and seeing what you notice.

Identify Unhelpful Thoughts

Studies suggest that the feeling of anger is often influenced by the thinking pattern a person has about a situation.

Examples of thinking patterns that feed anger include catastrophizing, blaming and overgeneralizing. We will describe what these mean shortly.

Noticing these thinking patterns without getting carried away by them can help you manage your anger.

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Anger Coping Skills

Process Primary Emotions

Primary emotions are already present at birth and are experienced first in any given situation. Secondary emotions occur as the result of the reaction to the primary emotion.

Secondary emotions can be seen as learned behaviours, usually from family and society. An example is the statement, “boys don’t cry”. A man who has internalised this belief may respond to the primary emotion of sadness with anger. To effectively deal with anger, it’s useful to process the primary emotions which drive it. You can do this by reviewing the bottom half of the anger iceberg in your Anger Log, writing down your feelings.

Develop Healthy Communication Skills

Healthy communication involves expressing your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in an open, yet honest manner without violating the rights of others. It requires that the person state what occurred as a set of factual claims, instead of judging, shaming, blaming or negatively labelling.

Practice this using the Non-Violent Communication (NVC) framework (review the Assertiveness Worksheets in The Thinking Slow Method).

Don’t Vent Your Anger

The act of venting by using a physical outlet, such as screaming into a pillow or hitting a punching bag, does not actually reduce our levels of anger. In fact, venting may actually increase anger levels.

Responding to Anger Effectively

- **Take a time out.** Walking away from a triggering situation can be the quickest way to defuse anger.
- **Practice a breathing exercise.** Slow down your heartrate by slowing down your breathing. Review The Lasting Habits System for a range of exercises.
- **Exercise.** Burn off the excess energy from anger with a brisk walk or run.
- **Use a distraction technique.** Review The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit and discover which distraction techniques work best for you when you’re dealing with challenging emotions.

Anger Log

Describe the situation below. What triggered your anger?

There are three thinking patterns which are associated with anger: catastrophizing, blaming and overgeneralizing.

- **Catastrophizing:** Making a mountain out of a molehill and assuming the worst-case scenario, e.g., “The train is running late – the whole day is probably ruined now!”
- **Blaming:** Blaming other people rather than acknowledging your own role in the situation, e.g., “What happened was all her fault!”
- **Overgeneralizing:** Seeing the world and other people in all-or-nothing terms, e.g., “You *always* do that and it’s so annoying!”

Try to think about the thoughts you were experiencing while feeling angry. Write them down below. Do you notice any of the above?

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Anger Log

What were the warning signs that you were feeling angry?

Common signs include feeling hot, sweating, clenching your fists, an increased heartbeat, tensing your muscles and shaking.

Review the anger iceberg image. Which emotions were you feeling?

Try connecting your feelings to your needs (review The Thinking Slow Method for a reminder). Which needs did your response relate to?

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Anger Log

How did you respond in the moment?

Is there any way you might prevent this trigger from happening again? If not, how would you like to respond in future? Which coping skills could you have used in the moment?

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My Anger Triggers

Which emotions, people, places and situations commonly trigger your anger?

My Anger Warning Signs

What happens in your body as you start feeling angry? Which behaviours are you prone to? Note your personal anger warning signs below.

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Quotes About Anger

The Root Causes of Anger

"Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath." - Eckhart Tolle

"At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled." - Marshall Rosenberg

"Anger always comes from frustrated expectations." - Elliott Larson

"Much everyday anger results when we confuse our own personal wants with general moral codes. When you get mad at someone and you claim they are acting "unfairly," more often than not what is really going on is that they are acting "fairly" relative to a set of standards and a frame of reference that is different from yours." - David Burns

"Inappropriate should and shouldn't statements [...] feed your anger. When you find that some people's actions are not to your liking, you tell yourself they "shouldn't" have done what they did, or they "should have" done something they failed to do [...] When you insist on perfection from others, you will make yourself miserable." - David Burns

"When we are in pain or fear, anger and hate are our go to emotions." - Brené Brown

"Anger is inevitable when our lives consist of giving in and going along; when we assume responsibility for other people's feelings and reactions; when we relinquish our primary responsibility to proceed with our own growth and ensure the quality of our own lives; when we behave as if having a relationship is more important than having a self." - Harriet Lerner

"When a person's speech is full of anger, it is because he or she suffers deeply." - Thich Nhat Hanh

"Every criticism, judgment, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need." - Marshall Rosenberg

"Another distortion characteristic of anger-generating thoughts is mind reading – you invent motives that explains to your satisfaction why the other person did what he or she did. These hypotheses are frequently erroneous because they will not describe the actual thoughts and perceptions that motivated the other person." - David Burns

Quotes About Anger

The Consequences of Anger

"Speak when you are angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret." - Ambrose Bierce

"We are primarily responsible for our anger, but we believe very naively that if we can say something or do something to punish the other person, we will suffer less. This kind of belief should be uprooted. Because whatever you do or say in a state of anger will only cause more damage in the relationship. Instead, we should try not to do anything or say anything when we are angry."- Thich Nhat Hanh

"Anger is the feeling that makes your mouth work faster than your mind." - Evan Esar

"Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame." - Benjamin Franklin

"Anger is only one letter short of danger." - Eleanor Roosevelt

"Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." - Buddha

"Anger is temporary but words said in anger aren't." - Marion Bekoe

"When you say something really unkind, when you do something in retaliation, your anger increases. You make the other person suffer, and he will try hard to say or to do something back to get relief from his suffering. That is how conflict escalates." - Thich Nhat Hanh

Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

"Most misunderstandings in the world could be avoided if people would simply take the time to ask, 'What else could this mean?'" - Shannon L. Alder

"Steps to expressing anger: 1. Stop. Breathe. 2. Identify our judgmental thoughts. 3. Connect with our needs. 4. Express our feelings and unmet needs." - Marshall B. Rosenberg

"Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be." - Thomas Kempis

"How satisfying it is to dismiss and block out any upsetting or foreign impression,

Quotes About Anger

Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts (Cont.)

and immediately to have peace in all things." - Marcus Aurelius

"There are two things a person should never be angry at, what they can help, and what they cannot." - Plato

"Every thought, word, and action plants seeds in the garden of your life. Are you planting seeds of love, compassion, peace, or those of anger, resentment and dissatisfaction? Choose wisely and tend your garden well." - John Bruna

"So other people hurt me? That's their problem. Their character and actions are not mine." - Marcus Aurelius

Processing Primary Emotions

"Anger is the go-to feeling for most people because it's outward-directed - angrily blaming others can feel deliciously sanctimonious. But often it's only the tip of the iceberg, and if you look beneath the surface, you'll glimpse submerged feelings you either weren't aware of or didn't want to show: fear, helplessness, envy, loneliness, insecurity. And if you can tolerate these deeper feelings long enough to understand them and listen to what they're telling you, you'll not only manage your anger in more productive ways, you also won't be so angry all the time." - Lori Gottlieb

"Pain will subside only when we acknowledge it and care for it. Addressing it with love and compassion would take only a minuscule percentage of the energy it takes to fight it, but approaching pain head-on is terrifying. Most of us were not taught how to recognize pain, name it, and be with it. Our families and culture believed that the vulnerability that it takes to acknowledge pain was weakness, so we were taught anger, rage, and denial instead. But what we know now is that when we deny our emotion, it owns us. When we own our emotion, we can rebuild and find our way through the pain." - Brené Brown

"If you want to choose the pleasure of growth, prepare yourself for some pain." - Irvin Yalom

Taking a Time Out

"When angry count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred." - Thomas Jefferson

"The greatest remedy for anger is delay." - Seneca

Quotes About Anger

Taking a Time Out (Cont.)

"When anger rises, think of the consequences." - Confucius

"If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow." - Chinese Proverb

"Patience is the direct antithesis of anger." - Allan Lokos

"When you are angry, be still and do not speak." - Lailah Gifty Akita

"Scores of studies have shown that venting doesn't soothe anger; it fuels it." - Susan Cain

Mindfulness

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." - Viktor Frankl

"Anger is like a storm rising up from the bottom of your consciousness. When you feel it coming, turn your focus to your breath." - Thich Nhat Hanh

"You are not the anger, you are the awareness behind the anger. Realize this and the anger will no longer control you." - Eckhart Tolle

"Instead of catching ourselves after we first felt angry, we develop a visceral sensitivity to what's happening within us in the moment and through mindfulness, we can shape our reaction right away." - Sharon Salzberg

Exercise

"I was very fortunate to play sports. All the anger in me went out. I had to do what I had to do. If you stay angry all the time, then you really don't have a good life." - Willie Mays

"The best remedy for a short temper is a long walk." - Joseph Joubert

"Walking is man's best medicine." - Hippocrates

"Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional and mental states." - Carol Welch

"Exercise is the most potent and underutilized antidepressant." - Bill Phillips

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Quotes About Anger

Practicing Empathy

"Anger can be valuable if we use it as an alarm clock to wake us up - to realize we have a need that isn't being met and that we are thinking in a way that makes it unlikely to be met. To fully express anger requires full consciousness of our need [...] Anger, however, co-opts our energy by directing it toward punishing people rather than meeting our needs. Instead of engaging in "righteous indignation," I recommend connecting empathically with our own needs or those of others." - Marshall Rosenberg

"The opposite of anger is not calmness, it's empathy." - Mehmet Oz

"People are afraid that if they let go of their anger and righteousness and wrath, and look at their own feelings - and even see the good in a bad person - they're going to lose the energy they need to do something about the problem. But actually, you get more strength and energy by operating from a place of love and concern. You can be just as tough, but more effectively tough." - Robert Thurman

"When you look deeply into your anger, you will see that the person you call your enemy is also suffering. As soon as you see that, the capacity for accepting and having compassion for them is there." - Thich Nhat Hanh

My Favourite Quotes

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