

Anger Management Course Workbook

4. Relationships

Where are we so far?

We are now in week 4 of the course and in this class we will be looking at anger and relationships. Relationships can be helpful and supportive or unhelpful and toxic regarding anger. Some people can be supportive, whereas others can be the cause of someone's anger.

In this class we look at different styles of communicating and more helpful ways of communicating and arguing.

Relationships

As we have discussed before, relationships can be supportive as well as a source of stress. Use the people who you trust to help you manage your anger. Talking to someone you trust can help you to reason out the situation and perhaps to see it from a different point of view. Also, the people you care about can be the reason you want to do something about your anger.

Healthy Relationships

- ◆ Can be supportive
- ◆ Can provide motivation to reduce anger
- ◆ Talking to someone you trust can help you reason it out

Action: Find someone you can trust and share your problems especially your anger difficulties

Toxic Relationships

- ◆ Can be the source of anger difficulties
- ◆ Can lead to aggression & violence
- ◆ Can lead to separation
- ◆ Can affect others around you (children)

Action: Work out which relationships are toxic and try to change the way you relate (easier to change you than it is to change the other person) or let them go.

THE DISEASE TO PLEASE

Are you someone who puts other people's needs before your own?
Do you neglect yourself because you have no time or energy to do things you like?

We have a number of roles:

What roles do you fill in your life? (e.g. mother, father, wife/husband, daughter/son, friend/lover/next-door-neighbour, work, within family, social network etc)

.....
.....

What do you expect from yourself in these roles?

.....
.....

What do you believe other people expect from you in these roles?

.....
.....

Often we have many roles, which can take a lot out of us. Some roles place more demands on us than others. Look at the roles that you have written down and circle the ones which drain you both physically and emotionally.

If you have identified roles which drain you in some way, then think about using the assertiveness and problem-solving strategies from the pages below to reduce these demands.

Often when we have many roles to perform, we forget to look after ourselves. So think about ways to put yourself first once in a while. Make a list of things you like to do and try to do some of them a few a times a week.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF!

**Highly recommended book - The Disease To Please:
Curing the People-pleasing Syndrome by H. Braiker**
ISBN-10: 0071385649

WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

The way we communicate with others can make a difference to the responses that we get. There are four main communication styles. We use all four of them at different times and in different situations, but in some relationships we can get stuck in one style.

These communication styles are often defined as:-

1. Passive – “door mat “agreeing or saying nothing but boiling inside, people pleasing
2. Aggressive – forcing our opinion on others,
 - making YOU statements,
 - making the other person feel bad about holding a particular opinion egg ‘I cant believe you think xxxx’
 - Intimidating others with your opinion
3. Passive Aggressive – being angry but never really being specific about what we are angry about. You may recognise this in the person who makes us feel bad about something with a smile on their face. They take pot shots and you are never really sure if they mean what they say or not. They get away with being aggressive because they make us think that perhaps we are being too sensitive. They also make other people feel very angry.
4. Assertive – many people have never really learned or practiced how to be assertive. Often it is confused with being aggressive, but it is very different. One way to understand assertive communication is that it is about expressing our own: *Feelings, Needs, Rights and Opinions* and helping others to understand them.

Being assertive may not always get you the results that you want but it can help you gain respect from yourself and others.

By being assertive:

- You can listen and be open to new points of view
- You will show that you care about the effect your communication has on others.
- You are likely to reduce your own stress and frustration
- Others are more likely to listen to you.

- You should be able to make your needs clear and not get bogged down in intense emotion and noisy anger.

Assertiveness is done with respect for the feelings, needs, rights, and opinions, of others.

If we can express ourselves without blaming or judging then the other person is more likely to listen to us. We need to work towards making requests and clearly stating what our needs are. If we can say what our needs are we will feel better. This is better than demanding things.

The first part of being assertive is being able to outline the situation objectively. That is, to note the things you see, hear or notice. You need to present the facts without making judgments, assumptions, placing blame or guessing at what the other person intended. Here are some examples of factual statements:

- I notice that the sink is full of dirty dishes from last night's dinner.
- I see that the videos we rented are still on the kitchen table waiting to be returned.
- The grass in the back garden looks like it is getting pretty high.

If we can begin with a statement of the facts we are more likely to get a good reaction from the other person. If we begin by insulting the other person, saying "are you too lazy to do the dishes now?" we are likely to fuel our own anger. This will make the other person defensive and angry as well.

We need to be able to separate our feelings from the facts. This will help us to reduce the anger spiral. We need to recognise our own feelings and let the other person know how their behaviour has affected us. It is important to do this in a way that does not make the other person defensive. We should avoid blame or guilt messages. When describing your feelings it is helpful to use "I feel" language rather than saying "you make me feel". Here are some examples of feelings statements:

- When I come home from work and find dirty dishes in the sink I feel angry.
- When you spend much of your free time watching TV I feel lonely and resentful.

- When we go to a party and you ignore me, paying attention to other men, I feel jealous.

The final part of an assertive statement is making a fair request. We must tell the other person what we want. There are some ways in which we can make this part more effective:

- Make the request specific.
- Make the request doable (probably not “I want you to be a millionaire”).
- Only make one request at a time or the person will feel overwhelmed and attacked.
- Seek a behavioural change, not attitudes, values or feelings (e.g. ask your husband to go to your office party but don’t expect him to *want* to go).

Some examples of requesting statements are:

- I would like it if we could come to some agreement about clearing up after ourselves in the kitchen.
- I would prefer it if in future you would warn me if you are likely to be late home from work.
- I would like you to be here at 6pm as agreed and if you must be late for any reason please phone me.

The above ideas are then put into an assertive sentence, which states the facts, how you feel and what you precisely want – FACT, FEEL, WANT:

Fact – feel – want

Fact – feel – want is a simple way to be assertive. You need all three to put together an assertive statement.

Facts: the first point is to outline the situation as objectively as you can and try not to make any judgements or assumptions.

Feelings: try to describe your feelings using “I feel...” statements and not “you make me feel...”.

Wants: say what you want someone to do and not what you *don’t* want them to do.

Below shows different communicating styles:

Harold

- Situation:* when Harold took his car to go to the shops he found that there was no petrol in the car. Understandably, he felt annoyed.
- Passive:* “oh well if I say anything then they’ll get upset and angry. So I’ll let it go again”.
- Aggressive:* “you were bloody inconsiderate not bothering to put petrol in the car when you knew I would need to go out this afternoon. You made me really angry. I wish you could be more considerate next time.”
- Assertive:* “when I got in the car this morning I noticed that there was almost no petrol (fact). I felt annoyed and angry (feeling). When you next use the car I want you to make sure that you refill the tank so I won’t be inconvenienced (want).”

Linda

- Situation:* Linda got particularly angry that her husband was working long hours and bringing work home with him.
- Passive:* “I’ll keep quiet as I should be grateful he has a job”
- Aggressive:* “why are you always at work? You just don’t care about me at all. You should take my needs more seriously if you care.”
- Assertive:* “*you spend a lot of time at work and bring home work with you on weekends (fact). I feel lonely and miss our quiet times together (feeling). I would like to make a date with you for a quiet romantic dinner this weekend (want).*”

There are a number of other strategies to become assertive. If this is an issue then there are many good self-help books to help you.

Consequences

Sometimes we do not get the results we want, even though we have avoided anger. This may be because the person is not motivated to meet our needs. In this case it may be helpful to add some consequences to the statement. However, it is important to be careful when doing this and there are some guidelines to help us:

Consequences should be specific

Be precise about what exactly will trigger the consequences and what will happen next. Do not make vague threats like “if you don’t stop irritating me you’ll be sorry”. An example of a specific statement is: *“If you don’t stop calling me several times a day, I will use my answering machine to screen calls and won’t talk to you for 24 hours after your last call.”*

Consequences should be reasonable

Set reasonable consequences and remain in control. Avoid setting consequences that involve threats of violence or public humiliation. These will tend to make people angry. Angry people are less likely to cooperate with you. A reasonable consequence might be: *“If you speak to me again in that disrespectful manner, there will be no allowance this week”*

Consequences should be consistent

If you say you are going to do something it is important that you carry it out and do it every time the situation comes up. If you do not, the other person will not take you seriously.

Ensure that you can live with the results

Don’t bite off your nose to spite your face. The consequences should be problematic for the other person and not for you. Also, be careful about making dramatic statements like threatening divorce or to kill yourself. They may seem appropriate at the time, but they usually end up hurting you more and rarely get you what you want.

Negotiation

Another way to approach angry discussions is to learn how to negotiate when there is a conflict. This is difficult and you will have to listen and understand the other person's point of view. It is important that you start with the idea that the other person's needs are as important to them as yours are to you. Bullying your way in to getting what you want will not get others to change their point of view. There are six steps to good negotiation:

1. Know what you want

This is more difficult than it sounds and you need to be as specific as possible.

"I want us to go to Scotland for two weeks this summer"

2. State what action you want

This means saying exactly what you want the person to do or not to do.

"I want you to do the dishes before watching any television"

3. Listen to the other person's point of view

This is so you can gather information to help you understand the other person's position. It is not so you can argue. Understanding a point of view does not mean that you have to agree with it.

4. Make a suggestion or proposal

When doing this you should take into account what the other person needs or wants in a situation. This may take some creative thinking and a flexible attitude.

5. Ask the other person to make a suggestion (counterproposal)

If the other person doesn't like what you proposed then ask them to come up with an alternative. You are trying to come up with something that you can both live with.

6. Find middle ground (compromise)

This is the main bit of negotiation. You find something that you can both agree to, you may both have to give some ground in order to do this.

Examples include:

- Let's split the difference.
- When you're driving we'll do it your way, and when I'm driving we'll do it my way.
- Let's try it my way for a week and see if it works. If you don't like it, we'll go back to doing it the old way.

Setting limits

We are often bombarded with requests and being able to say "no" is very important. Being able to say "no" sends the message that we have our own needs, wishes and priorities. It lets people know that we can defend ourselves against other people's demands. It also lets others know that we are not a pushover.

Long-term anger difficulties may happen if we cannot say no. We may feel taken advantage of, feel helpless when others make demands on us or feel like a prisoner in a close relationship. We are then at risk of having little time for the things that we want to do and the things that give us real happiness. There are three steps for setting limits:

1. Acknowledge other person's needs

You will need to start by getting more information about what the other person wants. Ask specific questions. Once you understand what is being asked for, you can repeat it back, to reassure the other person that you have heard correctly.

2. State your own position

This is why you are setting a limit. You may include your feelings, wishes or view of the situation. State your position without apologising, as confidently and assertively as possible. Describe what is right for you without putting yourself down.

3. Say "no"

This is the main part of setting a limit. Some examples include, "no thanks", "I don't want to do that", "It just doesn't feel right for me"

Here is an example of setting limits:

“I understand that you need help with the party, and you want me to do all the shopping. I don’t have the time next weekend. I’m repairing my car. So I won’t be able to help you.”

Saying No

Lejeune (2007) suggests different ways to no and certain ones might be helpful for different situations. Experiment and find the no that helps you:

The No-Frills No:

“No, I won’t be able to help you with that.”

The Empathic No:

“No. I know you were hoping I could help, but I just can’t do it.”

The Reason-Giving No:

“No. I’ll be working on a job/task/project at home this weekend.”

The If-Only No:

“No. If only I had known about it a little earlier, I could have said yes (or considered helping)

The Helpful No:

“No. I can’t help you, but have you considered trying _____?”

The Yes, but No, No:

“I can do *this*, no problem, but No, I won’t be able to do *that*”.

The Good Intentions No:

“I’d really like to help you with that, but no, I can’t (because _____).”

The No-without-No, No:

“I’m very busy, so which of my/these responsibilities should take priority?”

Other things to cope with

Finally, there are a number of situations where you may find it difficult to avoid getting angry. We will look at some of these now and strategies which may help.

Being told “no”

Being told “no” happens to everyone at some time or another and is just part of life. For example we may have made a request and despite being assertive and negotiating, we are still told “no”. This is often difficult to deal with and may make us feel angry or irritable.

Remember the skills you have learned on this course. Notice early warning signs of anger and monitor change in your body, thoughts and behaviour. Use the strategies you have learned about:

- Self talk
- Deep breathing
- Walk away from the situation
- Use calming thoughts
- Distract yourself
- Use calming imagery

Teasing and provocation

People tease to get a response or to get others into trouble. Being teased can bring out negative emotions in us. Use your problem solving technique to decide which of the following may help:

- Ignore the person, say to yourself, “People tease to get results. If I respond they have won!”
- Leave, walk away
- Make a joke
- Agree with the teasing
- Imagine them in a ridiculous situation

Coping with Criticism

Receiving criticism is often difficult. It can remind us of when we were a child and painful emotions can resurface. We may then use anger to cover up these painful emotions. Instead of getting angry we need to find a way of dealing with it.

Firstly, it is important to stop any attack, you do not need to be someone's punch bag. Remember, it is only one person's opinion. Secondly, ask for more information. We need to find out whether the criticism is justified or unjustified. Thirdly, use your anger management strategies:

- Listen & check that you understand what is said
- Look at the other person
- Remember your anger thermometer, monitor your arousal levels
- Use self statements and arousal reduction
- Congratulate yourself if you stay cool
- Take time to decide if the criticism is justified or not

If the criticism is justified:

- Agree and admit to your mistakes (be assertive)
- Explain your reasons if you wish (NOT lengthy excuses)
- Apologise if necessary

If the criticism is unjustified

- Politely but firmly disagree
- Give an explanation, if there is another reason
- Ask what makes them think that
- Express how you felt – upset etc.

Being on the receiving end of anger

Being on the receiving end of anger can stir up a range of angry thoughts. These thoughts will depend on past experiences, memories and expectations. It is common to feel fear, a need for revenge, worry or insecurity. We may respond with attack, defence or avoidance. Things you can do if you find yourself on the receiving end of anger include:

- Listen
- Give the angry person space
- Relax, concentrate on slow deep breathing
- Don't make sudden movements, these can be perceived as threatening
- Use self talk to keep yourself calm
- See it from their point of view
- Talk when you are both calm
- Don't take it personally
- Apologise if you are at fault

- Ask if there is anything you can do to make person feel better

Grudges

Examples of this include:

- Being upset by another person saying nasty things about you but still having to live very close to them
- Being lied to or let down
- Having a long-term dispute with someone that has never been resolved.

Carrying a grudge against someone can mean that we get easily stressed when we see that person. We may be more likely to get angry or aggressive. Things we can do to reduce this include:

- Firmly and calmly tell the person that you do not like what they are doing
- Remember you may wind the other person up
- Don't let the person wind you up
- Use stress reduction

How to have less aggressive rows

Arguments and rows are part of all relationships. The key is to be able to get your point over to someone without causing them hurt or fear. Unfortunately people with anger difficulties often struggle to argue in a non-aggressive manner. Therefore the following strategies based on ideas by Bell (1995) are suggested:

Exercise 2: what happens when you argue or row?

How do you behave when you have a row or argument (be honest with yourself)

What effect does your anger have:

- *On the other person* (do they become angry, afraid, upset) _____

- *On your state of mind* _____

- *On your relationship* _____

Notes

Ready & willing to change

- ◆ Are you willing to take responsibility for changing your part when you row?
- ◆ If so, how could you row more fairly?
- ◆ Think about what you could do differently during each stage as a row gets worse?

HELPFUL WAYS

Hurt-free tips for rows & arguments

TRY

- ◆ Speak one at a time.
- ◆ Try to listen to the other person and think about their point of view.
- ◆ Don't think 'I've heard this before' & then switch off.
- ◆ Don't give someone the silent treatment or talk non-stop.

- ◆ Pause before you speak or act → Stop, think of consequences and then act
- ◆ Own your feelings, especially anger (I feel angry.... I feel as if....) and reason (because....)
- ◆ Change accusations into requests (Instead of saying: You don't do the washing-up → Can you do the washing-up?)
- ◆ Use 'I' statements and fewer 'you' statements (Instead of saying: you don't care about me → I feel hurt when I feel unimportant to you)

- ◆ Say what you would have *liked* them to have done rather than attacking or criticising them
- ◆ If you get aggressive, walk away & calm down
- ◆ Try to maintain respect for the other person. When you attack or criticise say sorry sooner rather than later when you feel guilty

UNHELPFUL

AVOID, AVOID, AVOID

- ◆ Avoid generalisations be specific (You always
- ◆ Avoid blaming or judging
- ◆ Avoid jumping to conclusions
- ◆ Avoid mind reading

- ◆ **TRY NOT TO:**
 - ◆ Shout. It will make the other person defensive and possibly angry so they won't listen but will attack you instead. → Quiet voice
 - ◆ Claim to know what the other person feels or thinks. → Ask them instead & listen. Ask for clarification or more information (Are you saying...?) You may be assuming one thing when the opposite is true.
 - ◆ Bawl them out, attack or criticise

- ◆ **TRY NOT TO:**
 - Drag up old grievances or keep scores → keep to current problem/issue & be specific
 - Go for the jugular, using something that you know will hurt them
 - Make threats of any kind (end relationship, hurt them, hurt yourself)

Remember

- ◆ Everyone's trying to survive life as best as they can
- ◆ People aren't against you, they are only for themselves
- ◆ It's ok to have difference of a opinion

TIME FOR CHANGE?

Exercise 3: Time for change?

Look back through the list of helpful and unhelpful ways of rowing.

- ◆ Which helpful ways could you do now?
→ Place a tick or underline the idea(s) that you need to try and plan to put into action.

- ◆ Which of the unhelpful ways could you stop doing now?
→ Place a tick or underline the idea(s) that you need to stop doing and plan to put into action.

Summary

This week we have looked at anger and relationships. We have seen how relationships can be helpful and supportive or unhelpful and toxic regarding anger. Some relationships can be supportive, whereas others can be the cause of someone's anger. We have considered different styles of communicating and more helpful ways of communicating and arguing.

Next week we will look at how our thoughts and beliefs about ourselves, others and the world in general can lead us to feel angry. We will also consider how to develop more helpful ways to think about things that trigger our anger so that we can cope more effectively with events that usually cause anger.