PULLING PUNCHES
A Video Curriculum for Rage Management

Counselor's Guide
and Client Worksheets

With discussion questions and activities
for use with the 3-part video series

A comprehensive anger-management curriculum
for recovering addicts, correctional inmates and
anyone with anger problems

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ANGER MANAGEMENT

An overview:

Anger is a strong, sometimes overwhelming emotion. It can be felt physically as well as emotionally. Think of some of the terms used to describe someone who's very angry:

- Hot under the collar
- Hot and bothered
- Fuming
- Blew up
- Exploded
- Went ballistic
- Blew his top
- Simmering

- Boiling
- Hit the roof
- Had a fit
- Flew off the handle
- In a blind rage
- Seeing red

Because anger is so intense, so capable of "taking us over," it takes skill to handle this emotion. Unfortunately, not everyone has had the proper "training" at home growing up. Many of the people interviewed for this video grew up in families where at least one of the adult role models was "out of control" with anger. In some families, the angriest person was the one with the "power," signaling to children that it is through anger and rage that a person gets what he wants.

Another common background for those with anger problems is trauma. Many of those interviewed had also experienced some form of abuse growing up—physical, emotional or sexual. One of the after-effects of trauma, of course, is anger. This is especially true if the person has not had the opportunity to resolve the trauma in counseling. That immense, unresolved anger then becomes kind of "free-floating," and ready to attach itself to any provocative situation that arises. Long-term anger work, then, often requires addressing these traumatic experiences of the past, so as to reduce the "rage load" with which a person walks around.

Who needs anger management? This curriculum is based upon the assumption that our anger style is a problem when it has negative consequences—yet we keep repeating the same pattern anyway. Examples of negative consequences can include:

- Hurting people we love
- Scaring people we love
- Hurting ourselves
- Arrest
- Incarceration
- Embarrassment, shame
- Lost jobs
- Strained relationships with spouse, children, parents, siblings
- Health problems
- Lost friends
- Kicked-out of school and other places

Some examples of the kinds of destructive angry behaviors that create these kinds of consequences include:
- Becoming physically violent
- Putting down or humiliating others
- Child abuse, extreme corporal punishment
- Shouting obscenities
- Damaging property
- Intimidating others
- Pushing, shoving
- Throwing things
- Breaking, smashing things
- Chronic “nasty” attitude

Most anger management problems stem from feelings of powerlessness. Often, people who have not learned more effective ways of controlling their environment (or who have grown up in environments where they had no control) resort to the only way they know how to retain some sense of power: physical and emotional violence. But, of course, because of the consequences of this approach, it becomes a vicious cycle: feel powerless and helpless; act-out aggressively; enjoy perhaps a temporary sense of control; ultimately continue to lose power over one’s life. Because life can become more and more unmanageable as the result of anger problems. Jobs can be lost, kids taken away, education cut short, relationships ended, and addictions fueled. Yet the person remains unable to change. That’s why we developed Pulling Punches, this comprehensive curriculum for anger management: to help people break this vicious cycle.

Anger management is not about getting rid of anger, or even squelching it. Anger is a natural emotion, with a positive purpose in our lives. It lets us know when something is “wrong” (though this barometer can be thrown off by our life experiences, and we can come to believe something is “wrong” when it really isn’t.) Anger—used correctly—can also provide us with the impetus to change something in our environment.

Anger management, then, is about learning to express anger in constructive ways that benefit ourselves and others, rather than hurting ourselves and others. It’s about building awareness of our anger problem, acquiring skills to control it, and doing long-term work to reduce the amount of “built up” anger we carry.

Anger management naturally divides into three segments:

1. Understanding your short fuse, where it comes from, and why you should change it.
2. Tools for controlling anger in the heat of the moment (the "nuts and bolts" of anger management).

3. Long-term anger-reduction work: Changing the beliefs that fuel your anger and learning positive conflict-resolution techniques so that you feel more powerful and effective that way.

There is a clear and multi-level connection between anger problems and chemical addiction. The two feed each other in myriad ways. People we interviewed for this project described the connection in some of these ways:

- Using drugs/alcohol to stuff down or "numb" anger so it won't come out.
- Using drugs/alcohol to explode the anger out or get "false courage" to express oneself.
- Getting angry with someone as an excuse to use drugs/alcohol ("You pissed me off, I'm going out drinking.")
- Using drugs/alcohol as an excuse to act-out anger ("I was drunk, sorry.")
- A cycle from rage, to guilt, to using. ("I've done it again, I'm bad, I might as well drink and drug to forget the pain.")

Naturally, if you use drugs/alcohol often enough to numb your feelings, or as an excuse to act them out, you're likely to develop an addiction to those substances. Likewise, if the only way you can express your anger is when you are under the influence, you're going to want to use frequently, setting yourself up for addiction. So anger problems and chemical addictions feed each other.

There is also an obvious connection between anger problems and incarceration. A very high percentage of those incarcerated have histories of destructive anger patterns, and often it was some manifestation of rage which led to incarceration, including assault, spousal abuse, child abuse, murder or attempted murder, weapons charges, etc.

That's why we designed this curriculum with those two (often overlapping) populations in mind. But the truth is that anyone with an anger problem—even if he or she has thus far not acquired substance abuse or legal problems—can benefit from this same curriculum. Because the issues are essentially the same, namely:

- Negative consequences from one's anger style
- Destructive anger patterns usually learned or acquired early in life.
- A need for realistic, practical tools with which to control anger "in the heat of the moment."
- A need for long-term positive conflict resolution skills to replace the negative, and provide feelings of personal effectiveness and power.
- A need to change some of the underlying beliefs that fuel rage.
- A need for a broader "emotional palette," to learn to express other emotions besides anger, since anger is often the cover-up for feelings we're less comfortable with (hurt, fear, sadness).
Content

Part 1, "Understanding Your Rage," contains an important overview of anger problems. Viewers are helped to identify themselves as people with anger problems, understand how they may have developed such a problem, increase motivation to change, and receive hope that change is possible. The main teaching points include:

1. Anger problems occur when anger is out of proportion, out of control, or violent.

2. Some people with anger problems have "anger blackouts," when rage becomes so intense they feel like they're in another state of being.

3. Some people with anger problems get a "high" from anger. This high consists of both an adrenaline rush and feelings of power and control.

4. Anger and using drugs and alcohol often go together—in various ways. Examples are given. That's why dealing with one's anger problem is essential to avoiding relapse in recovery.

5. Many people with anger problems learned their anger style from role models who also had anger problems.

6. Other people with anger problems were victims of some trauma as children and developed a lot of chronic anger from that, which comes out as over-reactions to everyday incidents now.

7. What "triggers" people with anger problems often has to do with past experiences which get re-played in the present.

8. There are many negative consequences that result from having an anger problem.

9. There is hope for learning better ways of managing one's anger. Many other recovering people have learned these ways and have improved their lives as a result.

Part 2, "Tools for Managing Anger," teaches the specific tools for controlling anger in the heat of the moment. This is the "nuts and bolts" of anger management. Viewers learn 8 specific anger-management tools, including:

1. Know your triggers—those people, places and situations that often provoke you, and—as much as possible—avoid being around them. When you know you're going to encounter a particular anger trigger—and you can't avoid it—have a "game plan" for handling it.
2. **HALT.** Know when you're especially vulnerable (physically and emotionally) to having a short fuse—and avoid those conditions. The HALT slogan (often used in 12-step programs to stand for “hungry, angry, lonely, tired”) applies here, because those with anger problems are often more “on edge” when they are too hungry or tired, or feeling lonely (left out, rejected). We added PMS (premenstrual) to the “vulnerable conditions” as well. With awareness of these conditions, a person can “halt” and do whatever is necessary to take care of themselves so they don't become irritable.

3. **Know your warning signs**—so you can interrupt yourself before you fly into that “place of no return.” Most people have physical and behavioral warning signs (clenched fists, racing heart, hot face, etc.) that they can learn to recognize in order to stop themselves from going further.

4. **Take a Time-Out** when you feel yourself on the verge of “going off.” If you recognize your warning signs and know that you’re about to lose it, remove yourself from the situation immediately—no matter how awkward this is. It’s better to get out of there than do something you’ll regret later.

5. **Use Self-Talk** to calm down and encourage yourself to back-off from a fight. In the heat of the moment, tell yourself soothing, encouraging things, such as “it’s not worth it,” or “Calm down, it’s OK,” or “She’s not worth losing your job (kids/freedom) over,” etc.

6. **Use your support system.** This is paramount for the person new to anger management. As with addiction recovery and maintaining abstinence, remaining abstinent from rage-outs requires always having someone that you can call when you’re in that state, someone to talk it through with, who can help you think more “sanely.”

7. **Find healthy ways to “discharge” the anger and calm down.** There will be times when no one from your support system is available and you’re “boiling over” with rage. It’s crucial to have regular ways you “discharge” the anger, get it out of you, release that adrenaline surge. Some examples cited in the program are working out, pumping weights, pounding drums, etc. Sometimes what’s needed is something more soothing, like a bubble bath, or meditation, and these examples are cited too.

8. **Say the Serenity Prayer** over and over to yourself when you feel yourself getting “hot under the collar.” After all, “serenity” is what we’re after in that situation. And reminding ourselves that there are things we “can’t control” is key to anger management.
Part 3, "Anger Reduction and Long-Term Changes," introduces long-term strategies which can help viewers become less chronically angry and more effective in confronting everyday situations. Content includes:

1. **Faulty beliefs can contribute to angry over-reactions**, so it's important to change how we think in the middle of situations which are triggering anger. Some things to remember include, "It's not that important," "You can't always get what you want," "It's not personal," "By blaming others you give up your power," and "Backing down can be the right thing."

2. Do the long-term "work" on healing childhood wounds. Otherwise that built-up anger is like a "pool of combustible fuel" inside, just waiting for a match to ignite it.

3. **Learn to express other feelings besides anger.** Many people with anger problems have trouble expressing other feelings, so everything (hurt, sadness, fear, etc.) comes out as anger. If you learn to express the full range of emotions, it will cut down on your need to do this.

4. **Learn to assertively resolve your conflicts.** When we learn to handle conflicts firmly, clearly—but without "blowing up," we gain that sense of control we so crave.

5. **Self-forgiveness** is key to anger reduction. Once you can forgive yourself for the things you've done in the past, you can also become more forgiving of, and compassionate toward others.

6. **Learning to take care of ourselves** and "live well" also helps reduce our potential for "blowing up." The better we care for ourselves—eat well, get enough sleep, meditate, relax—the more manageable our stress and anger levels become.

7. **Learning to manage anger better can improve all aspects of life.** Examples are given of how the people featured in this series have improved their relationships, work life, schooling, and creative pursuits—all simply by learning to manage anger better.
How to use this curriculum:

This curriculum is best used over a period of 6 to 8 group sessions, rather than in “one shot.” Although clients will benefit from even a one-time viewing and discussion of each part, they will be best able to personalize the skills, integrate and practice them in their lives, if the content is covered over a number of sessions. For this reason, we have laid out the following guideline, which you should feel free to adapt to your needs:

Session #1:

1. Show Part 1 all the way through to your client or group.

2. Follow the viewing of Part 1 with a general discussion. Ask clients who and what they identified with. Some specific discussion questions might be:
   - What does your anger problem "look like?"
   - Has anyone here ever experienced a "high" from anger?
   - Has anyone here ever experienced an "anger blackout?"
   - Has there been a connection for you between anger and wanting to use drugs/alcohol? What is it?
   - How was anger handled in your families? Who did you learn your style from?
   - Does anyone here think that a childhood trauma left them with "extra" anger inside that comes out destructively?
   - Do you think males get the message from our culture that anger is the only feeling they should express?
   - Can anyone here see a connection between their childhood or family experiences and what triggers their anger today?
   - What have the consequences been from the way you handle anger?
   - Who here feels they are ready and motivated to change the way they handle anger?

Session #2:

1. Begin the session with a review of how clients have been doing with their anger since last session. Have they been able to apply anything from the video and discussion of the previous week?

2. Pass out Worksheets for Part 1 activities you want to use. Keep in mind that if your group of clients works better verbally than doing written exercises, each of the activities in this program can be completed verbally, as a group discussion or go-round.

3. Have clients complete those activities. Share as a group and discuss results.
Session #3:

1. Start session by reviewing how clients did since last meeting vis a vis their anger management. Reinforce any positive insights they've integrated and/or changes they have made.

2. Show Part 2 all the way through to your client or group.

3. Follow the viewing of Part 2 with a general discussion. Ask clients who and what they identified with. Some specific discussion questions might be:
   - Which tools in particular struck you as very useful?
   - Who here can name some of his or her triggers?
   - Who here feels more vulnerable to “going off” when they are under certain emotional or physical conditions? Which ones?
   - Who here knows their own “anger warning signs”? What are they?
   - Has anyone here ever tried taking a “time-out”? How did it work?
   - If you were going to use “self-talk,” what might be useful to say to yourself in a rage situation?
   - Who here can imagine themselves using people in their support system to talk through their anger rather than acting on it? Who would you contact, and how?
   - Does anyone here already use some physical release for anger? What about ways to calm yourselves down, any ideas?
   - Does everybody here know the Serenity Prayer? Does someone want to repeat it for us?

Sessions #4 and #5:

1. Show Part 2 again, just through video segment on Tool #1: Know Your Triggers.

2. Pass out Worksheet titled “What are YOUR triggers? And how can you AVOID THEM?” Have clients complete worksheet. Share as a group about their discoveries.

3. Show video segment on Tool #2: Beware of HALT again.

4. Pass out Worksheet titled “When are YOU most likely to “lose it?” Have clients complete worksheet. Share as a group about their discoveries.

5. Show video segment on Tool #3: Beware of Your Warning Signs.

6. Pass out Worksheet titled “What are YOUR Anger Warning
Signs?” Have clients complete worksheet. Share as a group about their discoveries.

7. Show video segment on Tool #4: Take a Time-Out.


10. Pass out Worksheet titled “Self-Talk” and have clients complete it during the group. Discuss the results.


12. Pass out Worksheet titled “Use Your Support System” and have clients complete it during the group. Discuss the results.

13. Show video segment on Tool #7: Find Healthy Ways to Get the Anger Out.

14. Pass out Worksheet titled, “Healthy Ways to Get My Anger Out and Calm Down” and have clients complete it during the group. Discuss the results.

15. Show video segment on Tool #8: Say The Serenity Prayer.

16. Pass out Worksheet titled, “The Serenity Prayer” and have clients complete it during the group. Discuss the results.

Session #6

1. Start session by reviewing how clients did since last meeting vis a vis their anger management. Reinforce any positive insights they’ve gotten and/or changes they have made.

2. Show Part 3 all the way through to your client or group.

3. Follow the viewing of Part 3 with a general discussion. Ask clients who and what they identified with. Some specific discussion questions might be:
   - Did anybody here identify with any of the “faulty beliefs” that contribute to anger problems? Which ones? What better way of thinking did you learn from the video?
   - What did you think of the concept of “justifiable anger,” anger leftover from childhood that now needs to be felt and expressed in some constructive way? Does anyone think they have that kind of “leftover” anger? What do you plan on doing about it?
• Did anyone identify with having all their feelings come out as anger? Did you learn that in your family? Your neighborhood? Do you think males are more prone to this?
• What is assertiveness? What is an “I statement?” How can learning these things reduce one’s likelihood to “rage out?”
• How can forgiving yourself help make you a less angry person? Does anyone here think they need to work on self-forgiveness?
• The video went over some ways to “Live well.” What were they? Did you feel inspired to introduce any of those ideas into your own life? How could that help with anger?
• Did anyone feel inspired by the life improvements people in the video described? Do you feel more motivated to change now than before you watched this video series?

Session 7:

1. Begin session with a review of how clients have been doing with their anger since last session. What have they applied from the videos and discussions of previous weeks?

2. Pass out Worksheets for Part 3 activities you want to use.

3. Have clients complete those activities. Share as a group and discuss results.

Session 8:

1. Begin session with a review of how clients have been doing with their anger since last session. What have they applied from the video and discussion of previous weeks?

2. Finish any important activities that you didn’t have time to complete on other days.

3. Have clients go-around in the group and reflect on what they’ve learned during this anger management course, what has been most valuable to them, etc. Have each client name at least one thing he plans on applying consistently in his own life.

4. Reinforce the concept that change is a process. What we are looking for is progress—not perfection. Also reinforce the fact that it is very hard to change without support, and that each person should engage people in his or her life to help with this.
Client
Worksheets
How do I know if I have an “anger problem?”

Since anger is a normal emotion that everyone feels, how can a person tell if he/she has an “anger problem?” While there is no easy, quick way of defining who has an “anger problem” and who doesn’t, there are some characteristics which could help you explore it for yourself. Go down the following checklist and check those which apply to you.

1. ___ I often over-react to little things that people say or do that get me mad. My reaction is often out-of-proportion to what they did.

2. ___ I sometimes feel “high” from anger. I can actually enjoy a fight.

3. ___ I sometimes feel really powerful and physically strong when I get mad, like I can do anything.

4. ___ When I get really mad, I can lose control and not be able to stop.

5. ___ I have had negative consequences from my anger, including (check all that apply):
   ___ legal problems (arrest for assault, probation, PINS, etc.)
   ___ incarceration
   ___ injuries
   ___ lost friendships
   ___ lost or strained intimate relationships
   ___ family affected
   ___ suspensions from school in the past for fighting
   ___ lost jobs for temper problems
   ___ financial problems because of lost jobs or legal expenses from anger
   ___ low self-esteem, embarrassment, shame about my outbursts
   ___ scare people away from me
   ___ lost children to foster care
   ___ Other consequence: ____________________________
   ___ Other consequence: ____________________________

6. ___ I have vowed to change the way I act when I’m angry. But no matter how many times I promise myself or somebody else, I can’t seem to change it.

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” to 2 or more of the above questions, you probably have a problem with anger.

Discuss your answers with the group or with your counselor. What do your answers indicate to you? What is the group’s or your counselor’s feedback?
Why Am I So Angry?

As we learned in the video, there are a number of factors in one’s background that can contribute to an explosive way of reacting with anger. Check any of the following that apply to you:

___ One or both of my parents had an explosive temper.

___ Another close family member (sibling, grandparent, uncle, etc.) had an explosive temper that I was exposed to while growing up.

___ As a male, I feel uncomfortable expressing feelings other than anger.

___ I grew up in a neighborhood or area where it was not acceptable for me to express feelings other than anger.

___ I often had to fight to protect myself while growing up.

___ I was physically beaten as a child (even though it may have been thought of as “discipline.”)

___ I was often verbally put-down as a child.

___ I was abandoned by one of my parents while growing up. (He/she has not really “been there” for me as a parent.)

___ I come from a home where there was addiction or alcoholism among one or more of the adults.

___ I was molested or otherwise sexually abused as a child.

___ I was often bullied as a child.

___ Other reason that I think contributed to my anger problem.

Discuss your answers with the group.

Note: On one hand, you could say “it doesn’t matter why” I’m so angry. On the other hand, once you understand where it comes from, you might be more compassionate with yourself. In any case, whatever contributed to your anger problem, it is not an excuse to continue behaving this way now. Now you are responsible for your actions.
What are YOUR triggers?
And how can you AVOID THEM?

In the video, we talk about knowing your triggers, so you can avoid them whenever possible. Use this worksheet to identify what some of your biggest triggers are.

Remember, a “trigger” is something or someone—a particular person, place, or situation—that often tends to “provoke” your anger. In other words, the people or circumstances that always tend to “piss you off” or get you really “tight.”

PEOPLE: Are there particular people (a relative, a co-worker, someone in treatment with you), or categories of people (bosses, cops, etc.) that “get to you” easily? Who are they? What is it about them?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

PLACES: Are there particular places (certain people’s homes, certain neighborhoods, certain kinds of establishments), where if you go there, you are more likely to get mad? What are they?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

SITUATIONS: Are there certain kinds of situations, where if you get into them, your “fuse” is likely to be shorter? (For instance, if you feel “dissed,” or “rejected” or yelled at, or threatened) What are the situations that push your buttons?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

OK, so which of these people, places and situations can you avoid? For instance, if you are triggered by being in bars, obviously you can avoid going into bars. If you are triggered by encounters with police, you can avoid breaking the law in any way that puts you in conflict with police. If you are triggered by a particular relative, are there ways that you can avoid him or her?
What are YOUR triggers? (cont.)

Think about your triggers (named on the other page of this worksheet), and write down which ones you CAN avoid, and how. (Ex: “I can avoid my brother Joe by not going to his house for family gatherings.”)

1. I can avoid __________________________________________
   By _________________________________________________

2. I can avoid __________________________________________
   by __________________________________________________

3. I can avoid __________________________________________
   by __________________________________________________

Now name a trigger (or two) that you CAN’T AVOID: (For instance, if you’re an adolescent, and you have to go back to live with a family member who triggers you, this may be something you can’t avoid. Or, if a co-worker triggers you, this may be unavoidable.)

1. I can’t avoid this trigger: _______________________________

2. I can’t avoid this trigger: _______________________________

GAME PLAN FOR HANDLING TRIGGERS I CAN’T AVOID:

OK, when you DO encounter this trigger, or know you are likely to encounter this trigger, come up with a “game plan” for handling it. (Examples: “When I have to go home for a holiday meal, I will take someone with me.” Or, “When I feel someone putting me down, I will leave the room.” etc.)

My game plan for handling Trigger #1 above:

My game plan for handling Trigger #2 above:
When are you MOST LIKELY to “lose it?”
What are your more “vulnerable” physical and emotional states?

Have you ever noticed that there are certain times when you are more likely to “go off” in a rage than you are at other times? These are the same states when you’re most vulnerable to “picking up,” relapsing to drugs or alcohol as well.

In Alcoholics Anonymous they say “HALT,” beware of when you are too “hungry, angry, lonely or tired.” And the same warning applies to anger management, except that the “angry” part is a given.

Use this worksheet to identify your most vulnerable states. In this video, people gave examples of how being hungry, lonely, tired, or even PMS (premenstrual or menstruating), affects their ability to control their anger. Are these similar for you? Note the ones that affect you most:

**Hungry:** When you’ve gone too long without food and you’re over-hungry, does this make your anger “fuse” get shorter? Write a little about the connection for you, or give an example: ____________________________

__________________________________________

**Lonely:** When you’re feeling “left-out,” rejected, alone, are you more likely to cover it up with anger, like Carol did in the video? If so, write a little about this, or give an example from your life: _________________

__________________________________________

**Tired:** When you are physically—or even emotionally—tired or “worn out,” do you get angry more easily? Write a little about this Connection for you, or give an example: ____________________________

__________________________________________

**PMS:** For females, when you are premenstrual, or menstruating, are you quicker to anger than you are at other times? If this has been true for you, write a little about this: ____________________________

__________________________________________
When Are You Most Likely to Lose it? (cont.)

OK, so now that you've identified your most vulnerable physical and emotional states, what can you do to help yourself control your anger?

Obviously, try to avoid letting yourself become too hungry, or too tired, or too alone. Tune in to your body and emotions, and when you feel yourself getting into one of those states, DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT! Don't just ignore it and "push on."

If you feel yourself approaching that “too hungry” state, take a break, take charge—and make sure you get something to eat.

If you realize you're over-tired, go home and get some sleep! If you're at work or someplace where you can't just go home, at least be aware of your vulnerability to anger right now, and "take it easy," don't try to resolve any conflicts in this state.

Same with loneliness. If you tune into yourself and realize you're feeling left-out, or isolated, rejected... reach out to someone in your support system. Don't just stay like that, or you will be more likely to flash into anger.

And for females, if you know you're PMS, do like Hillary: Try not to take on anything that's likely to make you mad in that state. Avoid conflict for the time-being.

**Action Plan:** Using the examples just given, write about your action plan for handling any of the vulnerable states you have: What is your commitment to yourself? (Ex: “I commit to getting to bed earlier so I'm not always so tired.”)
What are YOUR anger warning signs?
How do you know when you’re in “the danger zone?”

Before we can control our anger, we first have to know when we’re about to “lose it.” We have to be able to catch ourselves. Most people have some physical signs or behaviors that occur right before they go off. In the video, some people spoke of having their fists clench, or a vein pop out in their forehead, etc.

Use this worksheet to identify your anger signs. Here’s a list of some ways in which people can “feel” their anger physically. See if you identify with any of these, or can come up with some of your own.

___ A sensation of getting hot all over, or hot in the face.
___ Shaking (knees? hands? arms? all over?)
___ Muscles get tight
___ Muscles twitch
___ Sense of adrenaline pumping
___ Heart racing
___ Clenched fists
___ Clenched teeth
___ Veins in forehead pop out
___ Veins in neck pop out
___ Tight chest
___ Pacing
___ Nose flares
___ Cheeks get red
___ Tightness or “knot” in throat
___ Sensation in back or spine
___ Sweating
___ Dry mouth
___ Shoulders tensed up
___ Other (describe what happens to you):

SO WHAT? What’s the point of being able to recognize your “danger zone” anger signs? It’s so that you can INTERRUPT yourself, apply some anger management tools BEFORE YOU GO OFF. We’ll get into those tools next.
Taking a TIME-OUT

As you learned in the videotape Pulling Punches, a “Time-Out” is an important tool to use when you recognize that you are about to “blow.” You leave the situation BEFORE you do something you’ll regret.

But what if the other person (a boss, a teacher, a girlfriend) doesn’t want me to leave? Like Scott and Vern both said in the video, for people with major anger problems, it’s better to leave and have to apologize for that later, than to stay and lose your temper violently, and end up losing the job, hurting someone, or getting arrested.

Think of a situation you could be in where the other person might not agree with your decision to leave. Describe the situation here:

What’s the “worst thing” that could happen if you left in that situation? (The other person could be mad at me, I could get in trouble at work, maybe even lose the job, etc.)

What’s the “worst thing” that could happen if—knowing your anger problems—you didn’t leave and “went off” instead? (I could hurt someone, damage property, get arrested, go to jail, etc.)

Which consequences are worse?

But how can I get out of the situation? What should I SAY? In the video, Tony, Tammy and others gave some good suggestions for what to say when you have to take a “time-out.” Some suggestions were:

• “I have to leave. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”
• “I have to get out for a few minutes, but I’ll come back and finish this conversation when I’m cooler.”
• “Listen, I’m very angry right now, I have to leave for a few minutes.”
• “I’ve got to take a Time-Out. I’ll be back.”

Or, if you can’t say anything, JUST LEAVE. GET OUT. TAKE OFF. It’s better than the alternatives.

YOUR TIME-OUT SCENARIO: Try to imagine yourself in a situation where you’re using “Time-Out.” What might you say to the person? What if he or she doesn’t want you to leave, or gets mad that you’re leaving, what should you do or say? Remember, don’t get dragged into more conversation about it. Just leave!
**Taking a Time-Out (cont.)**

**THEN WHAT? Once I’ve left, what do I do??**

Taking a Time-Out is only the first part of this tool. Then you have to DO SOMETHING TO COOL YOURSELF OUT. Only when you’re calm and centered should you return to the trigger situation. Here’s some examples of what to do to “chill out:” Check the ones you could imagine yourself using:

- Go outside and get some fresh air
- Walk around the block a few times
- Call someone in my support system
- Think about what I can do differently when I go back in
- Do some deep breathing or meditation
- Read something soothing or uplifting
- Exercise
- Go to a meeting
- Other: (Specify: ___________________________)
- Other: ___________________________

Remember, whatever you do, DON’T DRINK OR DRUG. Also, don’t call someone who’s only going to “talk you up,” encourage you to fight, and get you even more “worked up.” If you call or speak to someone about it, make sure it’s someone who can really HELP you calm down and be reasonable.

**What should I do or say when I return?**

First of all, don’t return until you feel calm enough to handle the other person’s anger at you. He or she may still be upset that you left, and you have to be prepared to accept that fact. The other person may never understand your need for a Time-Out, and you shouldn’t expect him or her to understand. *Just know within yourself that you did the best thing under the circumstances.*

When you do return, apologize—if possible—for having to leave (still knowing inside that it was the best thing to have done.) Then use whatever conflict resolution skills you have to resolve whatever caused the dispute in the first place. You’ll learn some conflict resolution skills in another part of this series. Make sure you’re prepared *before* you go back.

*Is Time-Out the same as “running away?” Isn’t it being a “punk?”*

OK, let’s look at this question. It’s true that for people “from the streets,” using this anger management tool takes extra courage—because of the street code of fighting and never “backing down.” But, as the narrator said, there just might be another way of looking at things.

When you—as a person with an anger problem—“go off” and fight, what do you risk? (Arrest, jail, hurting someone, getting hurt, upsetting my family more, etc.)

When you—as a person with an anger problem—control your anger, what is the result? (Stay out of jail, stay unhurt, don’t have so many regrets, make family prouder of me, etc.) **Which one leaves you with more personal POWER?**

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Self-Talk

Another anger management tool is “positive self-talk.” In the heat of the moment, to keep yourself from going-off, you can say calming, encouraging things to yourself—to remind you to back off.

Some examples of self-talk given in the tape included saying to yourself,

“It’s not worth it.”
“I’ll go to jail.”
“She’s not worth it.”
“He’s not worth it.”
“This is not worth losing my job over.”
“This is not worth losing my kids over.”
“Don’t do this.”
“You’re not any of the things this person said about you, so don’t feed into it.”
“Calm down.”
“It’s OK”
“Find another way to handle this situation.”
“Be careful, be careful.”
“Shut up and walk away.”
“Don’t even get into it, just walk away.”

Of these suggestions, are there any that might work for you? Which ones? (Put a star * next to them above.)

Can you make-up any other self-talk phrases or statements that might be especially good for you to use? (Try thinking of the particular consequences you’ll face if you keep fighting, and try making a self-talk statement that reminds you.) Write them down here:

•
•
•

Now make a list either from those given, or from your own made-up ones, of the best self-talk phrases for you to use in the future:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

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Use Your Support System

Many people in the video talked about how they used their support system to help them calm down. Tony said that to have a support system in dealing with anger “is an absolute must. It’s paramount.”

Some examples of how people interviewed used their support system are:
- “to talk this stuff through”
- “It was somebody else who could ‘think clearly’ when I couldn’t.”
- “To do role-plays with regarding how to handle a situation”
- “Express things and ‘get it out of me.’”
- “Remove myself from the situation and go talk to somebody about it”
- “Rant and rave, and get it all out.”
- “Sound off and verbalize it, that way I don’t have to carry it.”

Of course, to use a support system, you first have to have a support system. Name the positive people who you can use to help control your anger: (Some examples might include certain relatives, friends, counselors, other people in treatment, members of your support group, etc.)

MY SUPPORT SYSTEM:

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
6. __________________________________________

What are some of the ways you can use the people in your support system? (Use examples from the top of this page, or think of some of your own.)
- __________________________________________
- __________________________________________
- __________________________________________
- __________________________________________
- __________________________________________
Healthy Ways to Get My Anger Out
And Calm Down

What if nobody from your support system is around? As Carol said in the video, "Sometimes there isn’t anybody to call, there’s no meeting to go to, and there’s nobody to hear you." What do you do then when you’re “on the verge” of losing control of your temper???

You find a physical way to release the anger, to work it out. Or, just some way to soothe yourself into calming down. Some examples given in the video include:

**PHYSICAL WAYS TO RELEASE THE ANGER:**
- Work out in the gym
- Skateboarding
- Biking
- Play basketball
- Play baseball
- Punch pillows
- Bowling
- Play congas
- Pump weights

**OTHER WAYS TO SOOTHE YOURSELF AND CALM DOWN**
- Take a bubble bath
- Rent a comedy video
- Play Chess
- Listen to soothing audiotapes
- Take deep breaths
- Meditate

**MY LIST:**

Using the examples above, *and adding some of your own*, make a list of the ways that you will release your anger, and soothe yourself:

1. __________________________ 6. __________________________
2. __________________________ 7. __________________________
3. __________________________ 8. __________________________
4. __________________________ 9. __________________________
5. __________________________ 10. __________________________
THE SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Many people interviewed for this video said that they use the Serenity Prayer, a simple prayer often used in recovery programs, as part of their anger management plan. In a stressful situation, when they feel their anger rising, they start saying the Serenity Prayer over and over to themselves.

Take a few minutes to read over the Serenity Prayer and think about how this simple statement might help you control your anger. What are the key words in the prayer that apply to anger management?

• ________________
• ________________
• ________________

Use the space below to write down your thoughts about the Serenity Prayer, what it means to you, and how you might use it when you’re upset and ready to “lose it.” When finished, share your thoughts with the group.
**Faulty Beliefs vs. Positive Beliefs**

Look at the lists of beliefs below. Imagine someone does something to trigger your anger. What is the “faulty belief” that usually fuels your anger inside?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faulty Beliefs</th>
<th>Positive Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“This is the worst thing that could happen.”</td>
<td>“This is not that important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I should get what I want.”</td>
<td>“You can’t always get what you want.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He’s (she’s) doing this to hurt me.”</td>
<td>“It’s not personal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s all his (her) fault. I didn’t do anything.”</td>
<td>“By blaming others, you give up your power.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If I back down, I’m a punk.”</td>
<td>“It’s OK to back down.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have no choice but to hurt this person.”</td>
<td>“I do have a choice here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pick one of the Positive Beliefs above and write about it.

- What do you like about this new, positive, way of thinking?
- How is it different from the way you usually think?
- How could remembering this belief help you manage your anger better?
JUSTIFIABLE ANGER: A Pool of Combustible Fuel

"Justifiable anger" is anger leftover from the past, from old traumas and childhood hurts. It’s anger we carry around inside because we haven’t yet healed from these old wounds. This “leftover” anger then makes us quick to “go off” from relatively small things people may do to us today, because it taps into those old hurts.

What angry feelings do you still have inside—leftover from old hurts?
Some examples of the things that can result in leftover, or “justifiable” anger include:

- Childhood beatings
- Growing up with an addicted parent—and all that goes with that
- Sexual abuse
- Being the target of severe bullying in childhood
- Verbal abuse by parents or others

Write about your own “pool of combustible fuel.”

- What might you still harbor anger about, leftover from your childhood or early adulthood?
- Is it possible that this “justifiable anger” from the past is getting played out through your reactions in the present?
- What steps could you take to reduce this built-up anger inside? (talk about it in groups, go to counseling for it, etc.)
Learning to Express Other Feelings  
--Besides Anger

Look at the list of feelings below.
- Circle the feelings you generally feel comfortable expressing.
- Put an “X” through those feelings that you usually DON’T feel comfortable expressing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Angry</th>
<th>Embarrassed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>Amused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealous</td>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>Tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>Ashamed</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HAVE A GROUP GO-ROUND.
When it is your turn,
- Identify one emotion that you are currently feeling—other than anger.
- Discuss with the group which feelings are hard for you to express.
- How were these feelings handled (expressed or kept inside) in your family?
- What about in your peer group of friends, is it “OK” to express these feelings with them? Why or why not?

Discuss with the group what you have learned about yourself from this activity.
STANDING UP FOR MYSELF

One of the hardest things for people in recovery from addiction and anger to do is stand up for themselves appropriately—firmly, clearly—but without “going off.” When someone’s doing something to us that we don’t like, we tend to either go into our “victim” mode and let it happen, or we blow-up in a violent or destructive way. In either case, we are also vulnerable to relapse to drug/alcohol use.

Managing your anger doesn’t mean you have to become a doormat! ABSOLUTELY NOT! Just the opposite. The better you learn to stand up for yourself—in a calm, assertive, clear manner—the less likely you are to either lose control of your temper—or relapse to drugs!

Guidelines for standing up for yourself:

- Stay in the “here and now.” Remind yourself that you’re not a powerless child anymore. You can take care of yourself today.

- Trust your own instincts. There is no “right” or “wrong” when it comes to setting your boundaries. If something doesn’t feel OK to you, you have the right to say so—no matter what anyone else thinks.

- Give yourself time. Rather than blowing-up on the spot, retreat, talk to people in your support system, prepare what you are going to say.

The Steps:

- Ask the person you’re angry with if you can speak to him or her (try to maintain eye contact).

- Start your discussion with some positive acknowledgement of the other person, if at all possible. For example, “We’ve been friends for a long time, and I really respect you....” Or to a co-worker, “I think you’re really good at what you do....”

- State what it is you feel is problematic. Do this by using an “I statement.” Rather than accuse the other person of something, focus on stating what you’re feeling—and what you want from the other person. For example, “I’m feeling upset about something you said earlier...” “I’d appreciate it in the future if you would not compare me to him.” Etc.

- If the person starts to argue, don’t engage. Don’t get “hooked.” Just repeat how you feel and what you would like, in as pleasant a manner as possible.

- Ask the other person if he or she understands what it is you want. (In most cases, if you haven’t become combative and visibly angry, the other person will at least acknowledge that they “hear you” or “understand what you’re saying.”)

- End the conversation by thanking the other person for listening to you. “Thanks for hearing me out,” etc.
Prepare:

Think of a situation you have in your life right now, in which you have a need to set a boundary with someone, or stand up for yourself in some way. Use the above guidelines to prepare what you could say to that person.

1. “Can I speak to you for a minute?”

2. (Say something positive:)

3. (State the problem, what you are feeling upset about)

4. (State what you would like to change:) “In the future, I’d really appreciate it if…”

5. “Do you understand what I’m saying?”

6. “Thanks for hearing me out, I appreciate it.”

Practice:

Practice your assertiveness confrontation with someone in your group. Have people in the group give you constructive feedback about how you did and how, if at all, you could stand up for yourself even better or more effectively.

* Learning how to stand up for yourself is a process. It doesn’t happen overnight. Don’t worry if you don’t do it “right” the first time. And don’t worry even if the other person is uncooperative and refuses to change. You are doing this for you. Just expressing yourself this clearly will give you a greater sense of power and effectiveness. Just keep practicing!
LEARNING TO FORGIVE MYSELF

Addicts—especially those of us with anger problems—usually carry around a lot of guilt and self-hatred—which actually adds to our anger and keeps us locked in that destructive cycle. The more we hate ourselves, the more we push others away with our anger. It makes more sense to forgive yourself today for things you’ve done—and focus on doing the best you can TODAY!

Make a list of some of the people, relationships, jobs, anything you’ve damaged with your anger and addiction: (Don’t forget the ways in which you’ve hurt YOURSELF!)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Now stand up (altogether as a group) and repeat the following statement:

I, ____________________, do hereby acknowledge that I, like everyone else, have done some things wrong in my life. But I also stand here today and declare that I FORGIVE myself for the past—one moment at a time. I love myself, I forgive myself, and I owe it to myself to focus on creating the best future I can, and to being the best possible person I can today.

Talk to your group counselor about designing some sort of group activity or ritual you can do as a group to signify letting go of the guilt from the past so it doesn’t bring you down into rage and addiction again. The past is the past. You can’t change it. Today you are forgiving yourself and focusing on the present.
Living Well

"Treating ourselves nice," as Tony says, is key to reducing our anger load. Why? Because the better we are for ourselves, the lower our stress and anger levels become, making it more...manageable!

Consider the following areas, and make a note about what you might change to take better care of yourself.

EATING WELL


DEEP BREATHING


MEDITATION AND/OR PRAYER


RELAXATION (Bubble baths, lighting candles, taking walks, listening to soothing music, etc.)


3 things I commit to start doing:

1. _____________________________

2. _____________________________

3. _____________________________
Counselor's Guide written by
Donna Boundy, C.S.W.

For more information about
PULLING PUNCHES: A Video Curriculum for Rage Management

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