

## CONTROLLING UNBRIDLED ANGER: Through Effective Anger Management

Anger is an emotional state experienced by everyone. Anger, which is a natural response to those situations where we feel threatened, rejected, or humiliated, may result from frustration when our needs, desires, and goals are not met. We believe harm will come to us, or we believe that another person, someone close to us, is being threatened or harmed. I learned from my personal experience in conducting workshops in Anger Management, that the basic management of anger is an undeveloped skill in our society. In some cases, the individuals in these workshops were court-mandated; and the events that triggered the anger varied depending on the individual's culture or gender. Additionally, I experienced, during my five-year volunteerism in prison ministry, that not everybody in jail is bad. Some inmates learned that their anger just got out of control; in some cases, unbridled anger due to injustice and inhumanity. Unfortunately, the built-up hostility and anger came too late for the victims, as well as for the inmates serving the time for their crimes.

### Looking at Anger from a Health Perspective:

- **Anger is the leading cause** of misery, depression, inefficiency, sickness, accidents, lost work time, and financial loss in industry (Layden, Milton, 1977).
- **Physical Cues:** One of the four cues identified with anger is physical cues. Feeling anger too intensely, or frequently, places extreme physical pain on the body. During prolonged and frequent episodes of anger, certain divisions of the nervous system become highly activated. Consequently, blood pressure and heart rate increase and stay elevated for long periods. This stress on the body may produce many different health problems, such as hypertension, heart disease, and diminished immune system efficiency. Psychosomatic Disorder can be triggered by psychological conflicts or stress. Thus, from a health standpoint, avoiding physical illness can be a motivation for controlling anger.

As mental health therapists, it is important to have an understanding of anger, as well as our own anger, for effective counseling. Here are a few constructive approaches to anger reduction utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):

### Breaking the Anger Habit:

- **Acknowledging Anger** is an important first step in treatment. One must admit that such feelings exist. (An "Anger Toolkit" can help the individual identify specific feelings.) The first step in resolving an anger problem is to identify it as "anger." No one can manage anger that is vague and camouflaged as euphemisms. The therapist can ask, "What kinds of things do make you angry?"
- **Becoming Aware of Anger** — that is developing an awareness of the events, circumstances, and behaviors of others that "trigger" the anger. This awareness also involves understanding the negative consequences that result from anger. The clients learn that their anger management styles are learned behaviors from complex series of influences and events, including role modeling, family, and the subculture and culture in which they live. (Using "The Anger Meter" helps the individual monitor behavioral and emotional cues. The Aggression Cycle Scale provides an awareness of the aggression

phases — Escalation, Explosion, and Post-Explosion). The individual can be taught to ask himself some basic questions when he is feeling angry. The therapist can explore cues associated with the anger-provoking events. (Albert Ellis' The A-B-C-D or rational-emotive model is a constructive tool in this area).

- **Anger Control Plans:** In addition to becoming aware of anger, clients need to develop strategies to effectively manage it. These strategies can be used to stop the escalation of anger before one loses control and experiences negative consequences. An effective set of strategies for controlling anger should include both immediate and preventive strategies.
- **Examples of Immediate Strategies:** A timeout; deep-breathing exercises; and thought stopping.
- **Examples of Preventive Strategies:** Developing an exercise program; and changing your irrational beliefs. (Cognitive restructuring can be used to help the individual challenge hostile self-talk and irrational beliefs).
- **Identifying the Cues:** The individual is helped to identify the cues (physical, behavioral, emotional and cognitive) that occurred in response to the anger-provoking event, and help him classify these cues into the four cue categories.
- **The Conflict Resolution Model:** Which contains the following steps: (1) Identifying the problem that is causing the conflict; (2) Identify the feelings that are associated with the conflict; (3) Identify the impact of the problem that is causing the conflict; (4) Decide whether to resolve the conflict; and (5) Work for resolution of the conflict. (It is helpful to have the individual practice the Conflict Resolution Model by role playing — only if he is comfortable role playing the situation.)

As an APA site tutorial says, “Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive — not aggressive — manner is the healthiest way to express anger.” We must teach our clients (and ourselves) that what one does with those hot emotions is completely under their control with some practice.

Source: NJPA