



BACKGROUND NOTES: MANAGING STRESS, ANGER AND CONFLICT

Affects of Anger and Conflict

Unresolved anger or conflict can cause people to feel indifference, resentment or rage. It can lead to physical or verbal violence, withdrawal, depression and self destructive behaviour. When anger and conflict are unresolved, relationships can be damaged and youth can suffer social consequences such as rejection, teasing or humiliation. It is important to be able to manage anger and conflict effectively.

Managing Anger

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems. Anger is an emotion that ranges from mild irritation to intense rage. Like other emotions, it causes physical changes. When you get angry, your heart rate, blood pressure and energy hormone levels go up. Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person or event or your anger could be caused by worrying about personal problems. Memories of traumatic events can also cause you to feel angry. Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats and inspires powerful, often aggressive, feelings and behaviours, which allow us to defend ourselves when attacked. A certain amount of anger is necessary for survival. We cannot, however, physically attack every person or object that irritates or annoys us; laws, social norms and common sense place limits on how far our anger can take us. People use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with their angry feelings.

The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing and calming:

Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive-not aggressive-manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.

Anger can be held in by not thinking about it or focusing on something positive. The purpose is to convert your anger into more constructive behaviour. If anger is not allowed out it can cause physical and emotional harm. People can become hostile and critical which can negatively affect their relationships with others.

You can calm down inside by controlling your behaviour and your internal responses. Try to take steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself down and let the anger go away.



The goal of anger management is to reduce both your emotional feelings and the physical responses that anger causes. You cannot get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that make you angry, nor can you change them, but you can learn to control your reactions.

Psychologists now say that it is dangerous to express all of your angry feelings because it can actually make you angrier and does not help resolve the situation. It is best to find out what makes you angry, and then develop ways to keep those things from making you angry.

Sometimes, our anger and frustration are caused by very real, unavoidable problems in our lives. Not all anger is wrong, and often it is a healthy, natural response to difficult times. Not all problems have a solution. In these situations, try not to focus on finding the solution, but on how you handle the problem. Make a plan, and check your progress along the way. Try your best, but do not punish yourself if an answer does not come right away. If you can approach the problem with your best intentions and efforts and make a serious attempt to face it, you will be less likely to lose patience and become angry, even if the problem does not get solved right away.

Resolving Conflict

Conflict is natural and happens in almost every relationship. Since conflict is unavoidable we must learn to manage it. Conflict is a sign of a need for change and an opportunity for growth, new understanding and improved communication. Conflict cannot be resolved unless it is addressed with the person or people involved. We face conflicts with people who think and act differently than we do or in ways that are different from our values and beliefs.

You will face conflicts with friends, siblings, parents, teachers and other adults. It is normal for people to disagree, but it is important to resolve these disagreements in a constructive and healthy way. **Respond; don't react.** If you keep your emotions under control you have a better chance of hearing what the other person is trying to say. Listen carefully without interrupting. Ask questions and wait for and listen to answers. Even if you "know" what the other person is going to say, resist the temptation to interrupt. Acknowledge the other person's thoughts and feelings. You do not have to agree with the other person to acknowledge his or her feelings and why he or she may feel that way.

Give respect to get respect. Separate the people from the problem. Treat people the way you would like to be treated if you were in the same situation. Communicate clearly and respectfully so your viewpoint can be understood. If you do not, you may not persuade anyone that your ideas are worth listening to. Identify points of agreement and points of disagreement. Agree wherever you can. Your underlying interests may be more alike than



you imagine. Be open to change. Open your mind before you open your mouth. Remember the rule: one mouth and two ears and use in that ratio. Look forward, not backward. Stay in the present and plan for the future, do not think about the past. Move to resolving the situation and away from justifying your position. Stay focused on the topic at hand. If there are a number of issues, talk about them one at a time. Work together. This requires that each person stop placing blame and take ownership of the problem. Make a commitment to work together and listen to each other to solve the conflict. Aim for mutual satisfaction, not victory. Conflicts don't have to end with a winner and a loser. Try to find a solution that is acceptable to both parties. Be creative. Finding a resolution to the problem that satisfies everyone requires creativity and hard work. Be careful not to give in simply to avoid conflict or maintain harmony. Agreements reached too early usually do not last. Be specific. Write things down and clarify unclear words that may be understood differently.

Anger Management Tips

Ask yourself if this will matter in ten years. You may see things from a calmer perspective.

Acknowledge that it is frustrating, and it's understandable that you would be upset about it. At the same time it is not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix anything.

Think about whether you have ever done the same thing to someone else, even if by accident. Did you get angry at yourself? Ask yourself if the person did it on purpose. In many cases, you will see that they were just careless or in a rush, and really did not mean you any harm. Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything and will not make you feel better (and may actually make you feel worse). Try counting to ten before saying anything. This may not address the anger directly, but it can minimize the damage you will do while angry. Or try counting to ten with a deep slow breathe in

between each number. Deep breathing helps people relax. Imagine a relaxing experience.

Close your eyes, and travel there in your mind. Non-strenuous physical activities, like walking, can relax your muscles and help you feel calmer. Give yourself time and space alone.

Physically move away from situations that make you angry.

Expressing Feelings

An "I" statement is a useful way to share your opinion or perspective without placing blame on someone else. For example, instead of saying, "You made me feel angry" you can say, "I feel angry." Using an "I" statement is a constructive way to convey your message without making any demands. "I" statements should be clear, concise and free of judgment