

HOW TO HANDLE YOUR ANGER MORE EFFECTIVELY AND RESPECTFULLY: The Short Course

- 1) Slow down, “step back,” and become aware of your anger cues and triggers and start to notice when you are actually escalating (i.e. get to know your “personal escalation process”).

- 2) Acknowledge your anger to yourself and accept the fact that you are angry; screaming “*I am not angry*” at the other person only indicates clearly that you are, in fact, angry and escalates you even more. It can be both safe and growth-producing to accept and embrace your anger (after all, it is a part of who you are). Remind yourself that anger is an important part of being human and is not supposed to be “*a four-letter word.*”

- 3) Stay aware of the fact that you are continually making clear **CHOICES** related to how you experience and express your anger and work actively to make different and more positive decisions.

- 4) Take a respectful “time out” to get away and cool down whenever you need to do this (a time-out can be an absolutely critical “first step” in learning to handle your anger in a more productive way). Learning to effectively and respectfully deal with your anger takes both time and practice.

- 5) Separate the intensity of the anger (e.g. the “pent-up” feelings and energy inside you seeking release) from the person, the issue, or the situation directly related to what you are feeling angry about at the moment.
 - Identify the other possible sources of your anger by asking yourself some questions:
 - ...Is your anger coming from hurt and pain you experienced in your childhood or other past life experiences that is somehow related to the current situation?
 - ...Often, especially when anger is intense and you escalate rapidly, you may be literally re-living a past experience in a present situation, generally in a subconscious way. It is as if you are no longer seeing and reacting to the person in front of you, but rather someone else from your past (e.g. a parent, sibling, or peer).
 - ...Does your anger involve other current stressors that don’t really have much to do with the situation that is occurring in this moment?
 - ...It is critical to start to notice the “build-up” of stress and tension in you over time.
 - ...What negative, controlling, hostile, and vengeful thoughts are you experiencing and how do they contribute to the build-up of intensity? Are you doubting yourself or feeling incompetent, inadequate, worthless, unimportant, powerless, or unloveable?
 - ...Does this negative self-talk involve unrealistic and/or perfectionistic expectations of yourself or others that “set you up” to escalate and become explosive or punishing?
 - ...What other emotions are being hidden by your anger that might make communication more effective if you decide to share your anger (and these other feelings) with the person involved with the anger you are experiencing?
 - ...Are you feeling hurt, sad, fearful, rejected, disappointed, abandoned, shameful or other more “vulnerable” emotions similar to these?

- ...Is your anger truly “justified?,” i.e. is someone or something really “out to get you?”
- ...Generally, this is not actually the case.
- ...If your answer to this question is “yes,” how did you decide this to be true?
- ...Even if you have clear, specific, and “indisputable” evidence that your anger is “justified,” however, this still does not give you the right to become explosive, disrespectful, or abusive with other people.
- ...Start to ask yourself in the moment: *“Am I just looking for a reason to ‘blow up’ right now?”*

- 6) Calm yourself by identifying and using de-escalation strategies (short-term skills in an acute situation where you are headed to becoming explosive and disrespectful and longer-term skills to build preventative maintenance activities to reduce the stress that you experience in your ongoing life).
...e.g. deep breathing, relaxation skills, positive self-talk, going for a walk, exercising, getting enough sleep, talking with a friend, using effective communication and conflict resolution skills,
- 7) Determine what you want to do with your anger.
 - you may or may not choose to share your anger directly with another person
- 8) If you decide to express your anger directly to the other person involved with the situation:
 - choose how, when, and where you will do this
...pick an appropriate time and place
 - share your anger **AND** your other feelings in an open, direct, assertive, and respectful way
 - use “I” statements and take clear responsibility for your self-talk, your anger and all your other feelings, and your expectations; avoid the temptation to blame someone else for “making” you get angry
 - actively listen to the other person’s point of view and recognize and accept that their perspective may not be the same as yours and that they have a right to see things differently from the way that you do
 - stay aware of your expectations and your intentions in sharing your anger
... avoid the temptation to try to “win” the argument and force the other person to accept and agree with your point of view at any cost
...this is just another version of **BEING CONTROLLING** with other people!
 - rather, try to view your sharing your anger (and the feelings underneath it) as an opportunity to better understand one another, to explore alternatives and problem-solving, to address the issue that has triggered your anger, and to potentially get closer as a result
- 9) If you decide not to share your anger with the person directly involved, work at “letting go” of and learning from it so that you can handle the situation more effectively the next time it occurs.
- 10) If necessary, take the ultimate responsibility for yourself and your anger and figure out what you need to do to take care of yourself in similar situations in the future.
 - then actually **DO IT!**

11) In evaluating how you have handled your anger in any situation, start to ask yourself the following questions:

- *Was your anger useful or helpful to you in this particular situation?*
- *Did your anger lead to an effective response or a constructive action?*
- *In looking back, do you feel proud about how you handled the situation?*
...Do you feel better about yourself as a result of this experience...or do you feel worse?
- *If you had the chance to handle this situation again, would you do anything differently?*
...If so, why would you respond differently and what exactly would you like to do?