

# **GOT ANGER?**

## **PRACTICAL ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR DAILY LIVING**

— *BY* —

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## INTRODUCTION

- Do you have an anger problem?
- Do others say that you get angry too often and too easily?
- Are you tired of the emotional and physical toll that your anger takes upon yourself and others?
- Do you have problems in your personal relationships because of anger?
- Would you like to learn practical ways to cope with your feelings of anger?

This workbook is intended for people who are concerned about their feelings of anger and how it impacts their daily lives. It teaches individuals how to have less anger in their relationships and ways to express wants and needs more directly. It gives practical information to help individuals manage conflict and solve problems in various situations. Unlike many anger management books that are too theoretical and difficult to apply in everyday situations, this information can be applied to real events in your daily life.

This workbook is a self-help book. The more time and effort you invest into the lessons, the more you will increase your ability to handle your anger and resolve conflicts more effectively. For those people who are also seeing a psychotherapist, the lessons in this workbook can be even more effective if you talk with your therapist about them.

Psychotherapists in private practice or working in clinics, as well as group facilitators of anger management programs may find this workbook helpful, as most of the lessons are short, succinct, and easily applicable to common, everyday situations. The book is applicable for individuals who voluntarily seek treatment and for those who are court-ordered due to issues of anger. It can also be helpful for couples and family members. The book also addresses emotional and verbal abuse, as well as domestic violence.

The authors of this workbook are all certified by the *Los Angeles County Probation Department's Domestic Violence Monitoring Unit* to conduct Batterers' Treatment Programs for court-ordered clients. Mark S. Miller, MFT, is the founder and executive director of *Emerge from Anger*, which offers batterers' treatment programs and anger management groups for men and women in the Santa Clarita Valley. Kendall Evans, MFT, is a clinical staff member at *Emerge from Anger* and a teacher at several graduate schools in the Los Angeles area. Patricia Patton, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and a clinical staff member, with *Emerge from Anger*. All three have private practices, in addition to offering various workshops on the subject of anger management and domestic violence.

If you would like more information about the *Emerge from Anger* program, contact Mark Miller at his Newhall office at (661) 255-6634 or his Sherman Oaks office at (818) 783-0781. *We also offer continuing education workshops for licensed psychotherapists and group facilitators of domestic violence programs.*

## **Anger Management – An Overview**

### **What is Anger?**

A normal feeling, (or emotion, or affect) that signals that something is wrong and prepares the body to fight. Anger is important. It is part of how we protect ourselves.

### **What Causes Anger?**

Many situations, thoughts and feelings can lead to anger. Anger always has another feeling underneath that it is covering or protecting. Frustration, fear, hurt, shame, guilt, disappointment, and helplessness are examples of feelings that are often covered by anger. Situations that often facilitate anger usually are frustrating, stressful, frightening, hurtful or shaming.

### **Components of Anger**

Anger is a composite of physical events and sensations, thoughts, feelings (or affects), and the person's expression of anger, or their behavior.

Physiological events and sensations of anger include sweating, increased heart rate, quickened breathing, trembling, brainwave pattern changes, face flushing, increased arousal, and increased energy. There is also a narrowing of perceptual focus, but increased sensitivity within that focus.

Angry thoughts usually are ideas such as, "I can't take anymore," or "She can't do this to me," or "He would not do that if he cared." Angry thoughts are often controlled by feelings, and if examined calmly, seem distorted or irrational.

Feelings include anger itself, but also whatever feeling is under the anger, which could include hurt, depression, fear, helplessness or shame.

Angry behavior includes physical and verbal attacking, violent behaviors such as pounding, slamming and throwing, stonewalling or rejecting behavior, and passive-aggressive behavior.

### **Angry Behavior is not the same as Anger.**

Angry behavior can serve more than one function. It can express a person's feelings, relieve the tension of the feelings, or be used to control someone else.

When angry behavior is used to control someone else, it is abuse. In theory, it is OK for angry behavior to be used to express the intensity of feelings or relieve tension, but it can easily be misunderstood as being intimidating or controlling.

Often "Anger Management" is used to mean controlling or stopping angry behavior. Angry behavior can be controlled, but if it is not, it can cause problems. People who act angry can hurt others and themselves.

### **Possible Effects of Angry Behavior**

Any behavior that people do repeatedly has some benefit.

- Angry behavior does express the feeling in its intensity, and it can release tension.
- Angry behavior also covers the negative feelings underneath, and can help a person feel powerful, active and right.
- Angry behavior often also does result in the other person giving in and being controlled. Angry acting people get their way sometimes.
- Often enough that angry behavior gets rewarded.
- In addition, because angry behavior has some functional effects, it is hard to give it up, especially if you do not know what else to do.

Angry behavior also has negative effects.

- It makes other people hurt and unhappy, particularly with the angry person.
- Angry behavior creates resistance and opposition.
- Some angry behavior results in damaged property, broken leases, ending relationships, lost jobs and so on.
- Angry behavior makes the angry person feel badly about his or her self.
- In addition, angry behavior usually adds to the anger rather than reducing it.
- Angry behavior can lead to "catharsis," but not before it burns itself out.
- You cannot control anger with angry behavior; you can only express it.

### **Additional Effects of Anger on the Angry Person**

When anger is chronic, or held in, or when it is frequent, it can have negative effects on the angry person's body.

- Angry men have been shown to have an increase in the likelihood that they will have a stroke or a heart attack within two hours of a temper outburst.
- Anger is associated with higher blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks, and intestinal problems.
- Part of the problem is that the preparations the body makes to be ready to fight are hard on the body, particularly if there is no physical activity to work them out.

### **When is Anger Appropriate?**

Anger, like any other feeling, is always "appropriate," if that is what the person feels. We can influence our feelings, but we do not control them. The issue is what to do with anger.

### **What do you do with Anger?**

Use it as a signal to know that you need to find out what is wrong, and plan what to do about it.

## **IS YOUR ANGER GETTING OUT OF CONTROL?**

How can you determine if your anger is becoming a problem?  
Evaluate your own level of anger by using the following guidelines:

- You overreact with hostility to minor annoyances
- You display aggressive body language, such as, grimacing, clenching your fists, "staring down" someone else, etc.
- You use verbally abusive language, e.g., frequent swearing, name-calling, threatening statements, etc.
- You often make critical, judgmental comments to others
- You often challenge authority figures because you'd rather be in charge
- You show a pattern of explosive outbursts, such as, destruction of property, throwing objects, grabbing other people, or even hitting them
- Use of passive-aggressive behaviors, e.g., procrastination, "forgetting," social withdrawal, or deliberately promising to do something just to get the other person to leave you alone
- Your boss or other co-workers have complained about how you demonstrate your anger at work
- You use alcohol or drugs to calm down from an angry outburst
- You react in a few seconds with a harsh display of anger

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CONTROL YOUR ANGER?**

- Identify specific ways where you have previously handled angry situations that resulted in negative consequences
- Identify specific causes/triggers for your anger
- Practice forgiving yourself and others in angry situations
- Identify past or current hurtful situations that add to your level of anger
- Identify ways to be empathic instead of angry
- Practice being assertive instead of aggressive
- Write a letter to the person you are most angry with. Then write a letter of forgiveness to that person. (Don't send the letter – it's just for your own benefit)
- Exercise on a regular basis for stress management
- Practice deep breathing to relax and let go – even when you are not angry
- Talk to a trusted friend when you are angry
- Journal your thoughts and feelings when you are angry
- Try to see the other person's point of view when you are angry
- Ask yourself – is this issue worth getting angry about?
- Pretend you are being videotaped the next time you are angry.

## Anger Management Guidelines

*Never take it – or make it – personal (even if it is).  
Make it a problem to be resolved, not a conflict you have to win.*

### **STOP, THINK, OBSERVE and PLAN - (STOP)**

- STOP** – Do not REACT..... Know what you are doing.  
**THINK** – Engage your mind. If you can't, take a time-out.  
You, not your feelings, should control your behavior.  
**OBSERVE** – Gather information. Do not act in ignorance  
Do not read minds or guess – check it out!  
Look for the other person's point of view, or a different way of seeing the situation.  
**PLAN** – Look at possible consequences before you decide what to do. Do not react without thinking.

**Commit to making No Attacks** – no name calling, no insults, no sarcasm, and no intimidation. If you cannot, take a time-out!  
The process – how you behave – is as important as the result.

**Express yourself** (if it is safe to do so) in “I” statements – (“When this behavior or event happens, I feel ....”) - say what is underneath your anger – this approach avoids both stuffing and attacking.

**If you feel you have to DO something physical** – take a Timeout.

**When you are verbally attacked, DO NOT DEFEND.** Do not agree to dance that particular dance. Focus on understanding their upset, and not on arguing with their point. If you can find a way, agree with something the other person has said. Comment on the other person's feelings, and if not inflammatory to do so, their behavior. Ask what they want from you. Repeat back to them what you think they are feeling, and how they came to feel that.

**Keep calm.** If the other person, or the situation, escalates, get calmer. Use silent positive self-talk to counter any thoughts or impulses you may have leading you to attack. Focus on calming yourself down, and keeping calm. Take deep breaths. Sit down. Relax.



## **ANGER MANAGEMENT: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN FEELINGS, THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOR**

We all have feelings and learn to handle them in different ways. Sometimes, especially when the feelings are strong, we make the mistake of believing that feelings directly lead to or control our behavior.

Feelings  $\Rightarrow$  Behavior (Mistake!)

When that happens, we behave our feelings. If angry, we attack; if sad, we cry; if afraid, we run; if sexually aroused, we try to have sex; all without thought for the consequences. In a sense we let our feelings control us. It is healthier to control our behavior with our thinking.

Feelings  $\Rightarrow$  Thinking  $\Rightarrow$  Behavior

Notice that I do not suggest ignoring feelings, only not letting them be in control. It is important to pay attention to and to understand what we are feeling.

In general, feelings are the signals that let us know what is important to us, how we are doing, what our relationship is to our environment. Feelings often signal that action needs to be taken, and also push us to take action. Feelings are a combination of physiological sensations and psychological experiences.

Hunger is a signal that the body needs food, it can also be the somatic experience of emotional need. Fear is a signal that there is danger near, and the physiological preparation to flee. Anger is a signal that something is wrong combined with the physiological preparation to fight.

The problem with this arrangement is that sometimes the feeling is in reaction to internal or psychological events, and does not represent reality. Also, some forms of danger in today's world do not require a physical response. One cannot beat up a paper and pencil test. Attacking your computer because it is not working only makes it worse. Running from emotional problems of which we are afraid only allows them to fester and worsen.

On the other hand, ignoring feelings leads to stress related diseases, dissatisfaction with life choices, and building up hurt and frustration until they become overwhelming. Overwhelming feelings are more likely to lead to irrational and extreme behavior. Therefore it is necessary to manage or regulate feelings.

The following outline on the next page can be a good process for managing feelings in general.

## **Steps to Anger Management**

1. Notice and identify what you are feeling. If you are overwhelmed, take a time-out. Never make decisions while in the middle of a strong feeling.
2. Explore why you might be feeling this way. Is it in response to your surroundings? Your mood, or physical condition? Is there a problem? Is there an opportunity to do something productive? If necessary, talk to others, meditate or journal to get clarity.
3. If the problem is that you are feeling overwhelmed still, find ways to relax, take a break, get assistance, and in general take care of yourself.
4. Is this a situation that requires action? If not, just stay aware.
5. If action is needed, what actions might you take? (Brainstorm, be creative).
6. Evaluate the possible consequences of possible actions.
7. Pick an action that leads to positive consequences.

## **Steps to Regulate Feelings in General**

1. Pay attention to how you are feeling. Do what you can to avoid or minimize being stressed, hungry, tired, or lonely.
2. If you cannot avoid these problems, be extra careful with others and with yourself, while you are feeling these things. (See above for in the moment management).
3. Plan self-care activities such as relaxation exercises or breaks. Make time to talk to supportive friends. Make time for recreation.
4. Remember that you cannot take care of others if you do not take care of yourself.
5. Be gentle with yourself, even when you are trying to improve in some way.

## WHAT TRIGGERS YOUR ANGER?

Rate the following triggers or causes of your anger on a scale from 1 – to – 5, with “1” being the least anger provoking, to “5” being the most anger provoking.

- \_\_\_\_\_ People who are late
- \_\_\_\_\_ Waiting in line
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who are rude or inconsiderate
- \_\_\_\_\_ Traffic jams
- \_\_\_\_\_ Women
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who are prejudiced
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lying
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who falsely accuse me of lying
- \_\_\_\_\_ Men
- \_\_\_\_\_ Co-workers who aren't doing their jobs
- \_\_\_\_\_ My children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tailgaters
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who cheat
- \_\_\_\_\_ My boss
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who cut in line
- \_\_\_\_\_ Criticism of me
- \_\_\_\_\_ My partner/spouse
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of appreciation
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who ignore me
- \_\_\_\_\_ My in-laws
- \_\_\_\_\_ Taxes

\_\_\_\_\_ My parents

\_\_\_\_\_ The amount of my paycheck

\_\_\_\_\_ My pet

\_\_\_\_\_ Slow drivers

\_\_\_\_\_ Bad service

\_\_\_\_\_ My brother or sister

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

The anger triggers I want to work on include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When I notice these anger triggers I can do the following things to calm down (e.g., breathe deeply, take a walk, listen to music, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Some sources of support that I can use to help me cope with these anger triggers include (e.g., talking to my partner, calling a friend, petting my dog, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## THE ANGER JOURNAL/TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Expressing anger directly to someone is just one way to get relief from the stress of feeling angry. The key to expressing anger effectively is to ask yourself if you expressed the anger in a way that helps to bring about a solution or resolution.

There are a variety of ways to express anger effectively, other than merely expressing it directly to another person:

### ANGER JOURNAL

Write down the steps or events that led up to your anger and how you dealt with your feelings. Include the following:

- What stresses or feelings did I feel in my body prior to my anger?
- What thoughts did I have when I was angry?  
(E.g., Did I blame others? Did I believe that the other person did something deliberately? Did I have unrealistic expectations?)
- Was I experiencing any other stressors?
- Did my anger give me relief from any other emotions, such as sadness, fear/anxiety, depression, etc.?
- Are there any positive ways to get what I want?
- Is there a way I can do something for myself to satisfy my needs?
- What other support systems can I use to help me deal with my anger or solve my problem?
- Should I have said "no" and set better limits for myself?
- Can I negotiate for what I want?
- How can I "let go" of my anger?
- What can I do about the situation?

### TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Angry people often blame others for their feelings and do not take any responsibility for their own actions. But we all need to take responsibility for our own feelings and actions, no matter what the other person did or said. Here are some other tips for taking responsibility:

- Positively reinforce desired behavior in your partner or children  
(E.g., praise your child when s/he does something "right")
- If your partner does not meet your needs, seek other ways to satisfy them - instead of getting angry with your partner. (E.g., rather than being angry with your partner for not painting the house, hire painters to do the job)
- Set limits and reduce your stress by saying "no" to others' requests. You can only do so much. You can say "no" to others in a positive way.
- Ask assertively for what you want. Negotiate for these goals and objectives.
- Learn to "let go" – accept that you will not get what you want sometimes from certain people. Some relationships are too negative and toxic and must be ended completely.

## SELF- HELP IDEAS FOR ANGER MANAGEMENT

- First deal with your emotional reaction (your frustration, anger, rage, etc.) before attempting to handle your situation (the event or person with whom you are angry).  
Do some deep breathing, count to ten, take a walk, listen to relaxing music, watch TV, etc., to calm yourself down BEFORE you try to solve the problem or deal with the other person.
- Replace anger and rage with healthier feelings, such as annoyance or irritation.  
Re-label your intense angry feelings with less severe labels, such as being inconvenienced or frustrated. These new labels help us to understand our feelings in a different, more manageable way.
- When deciding whether to continue to be angry with another person or to forgive them, try this written exercise.  
Make two columns – in one column, list the advantages of giving up your anger about a particular person. In the other column, list the disadvantages of letting go of your anger toward that same person. Possibly the biggest advantage of letting go and forgiving is that you will feel much less stressed by not carrying around such a “big weight” of anger.
- Replace aggression and anger with assertiveness.  
Instead of trying to bully or intimidate another person into doing something, ask for your wants and needs in an assertive way. By being assertive, instead of aggressive, you are showing respect for both yourself and the other person. And the other person is more likely to be less defensive if you use assertiveness instead of aggression.
- Realize that your beliefs and self-talk are the main causes of your anger – instead of the actual frustrating events, problems, or wrongdoings of others.  
Our beliefs may be so unrealistic that we are sure to be disappointed and then angry. By decreasing your demandingness toward yourself, others around you, and the world, your anger level will decrease. The next time you are angry be aware of what you tell yourself about others, about events and situations, and about yourself.
- Beware of your critical and judgmental attitudes toward others. Decrease your condemnation of the world around you. Work on building up your frustration tolerance and your self-acceptance. Instead of criticizing someone, try to identify ways of being more understanding, forgiving and empathic. We often “nourish” our anger by repeatedly telling ourselves irrational or unrealistic beliefs, and dwelling on the mistakes and negative actions of others.

## PULLING THE PLUG ON ANGER

Anger is often made worse or escalated by certain things that we say or do. Instead of staying on the “ground floor” of an argument, we jump on the “anger escalator” and quickly ride up to the top floor – you know, the one that says, “World War III.”

Also, our tone of voice, body language and facial expressions can increase the “heat” of an argument. By understanding how this escalation occurs, we can prevent a simple argument from turning into a disaster.

Consider the following ways in which an argument can escalate. Which ones have you used in the past? What were the results? What can you do in the future instead of using these “anger escalators?”

### Ways to Escalate an Argument

- **Sudden limit setting:** “That’s it! I’m out of here!” “I can’t take it anymore! I’m done!” “I’m calling my attorney and filing for divorce! There’s nothing more to say.”
- **The silent treatment:** “There’s nothing wrong.” “There’s nothing to discuss.”
- **Using curse words/swearing:** “Damn you!” “Fuck you and your mother!”
- **“Not-so-innocent” observations:** “I noticed that you didn’t clean the house today.”
- **Dismissing Comments:** “I’m sick and tired of living with a loser like you!” “Do me a favor and get out of my life!”
- **Ultimatums:** “Either you have sex with me or I’ll have an affair!” “This is your last chance or I’m leaving you.”
- **Accusations:** “You went behind my back and spent that money, didn’t you!”
- **Manipulating with guilt:** “I can’t believe you did that!” “You know better than to have done that!”
- **Embarrassing statements:** “You were so attractive when I married you – how did you let yourself go so much?” “I hate to be seen with you in public!”
- **Using nonverbal, critical sounds:** Loud sighing, audible groaning, judgmental sounds like “tsk, tsk”
- **Tone of voice:** cold, sarcastic, harsh, judgmental, whining, mumbling
- **Body language:** shaking a clenched fist, shrugging your shoulders, leaning forward in an intimidating way, shaking your head, tapping your foot
- **Facial Expressions:** Grimacing, sneering, frowning, rolling your eyes, biting your lip, narrowing your eyes in a threatening manner

## USING ANGER AS A DEFENSE

Anger is often used as a “psychological defense” – in other words, anger can be used to cover up or distract from other painful feelings or experiences. Anger can block such painful feelings as:

- guilt
- shame
- fear or anxiety
- frustration
- grief & loss
- embarrassment
- unworthiness & low self-esteem
- helplessness or hopelessness

Anger becomes a defense when it is used over and over again to avoid experiencing other uncomfortable feelings. Over time, we lose touch with these uncomfortable feelings and we continue to avoid them by staying angry. After awhile, the only feeling we express is anger.

The good news is that we do not have to use anger as a way to express ALL of our feelings. The goal is to learn to identify and express various feelings BEFORE they turn into anger. This can be difficult and even anxiety-provoking.

Answer the following questions to help you learn more about your own anger and how it may be covering up other feelings:

Anger is more comfortable for me to express because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The emotions I feel most awkward or embarrassed about showing include \_\_\_\_\_  
because I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Anger lets me ignore such uncomfortable feelings as: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When I am angry, I usually receive the following attention from others: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The things that usually make me the most angry are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What other feelings could I be experiencing other than anger in these situations? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## THE "ADDICTION" OF ANGER

Anger is such a powerful, overwhelming feeling that it can be misused in many ways. As a result, we can become "addicted" to anger because it can serve many dysfunctional purposes. Anger can make us feel powerful, while other emotions may make us feel "weak" or vulnerable. It is no wonder that many people would rather feel angry than afraid, sad or embarrassed. The more we avoid experiencing these painful feelings by being angry, the more likely we are to become "addicted" to anger.

Answer the following questions to help you learn more about your own connections to anger and how it may be an emotional crutch or "addiction":

- How does your anger keep you from dealing with constructive criticism or feedback from others? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you show anger so that you can avoid hearing the other's person's opinions or feelings? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How does your anger keep you in the same dysfunctional relationships or situations? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does your anger keep you from looking at how you are not living in the way that you would like to be living? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does your anger help you say what is hurting you – but it comes out in an angry manner? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How does your anger prevent you from making changes in your own life because you are too focused on blaming the other person? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How does your anger keep you from dealing with your fears? With losses? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How does your anger prevent you from facing your own doubts or criticism about yourself? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ANGER, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

For most people, our feelings and expressions of anger increase dramatically when we are drinking or using drugs. We do not have to be "falling-down drunk" to have substances negatively influence our anger. Any alcohol or drug use – no matter how slight – can turn a small argument into a raging four-alarm fight. If the person who is with us is also drinking or using, the argument then has the potential to get even more out of hand.

Just as with driving under the influence, where we are legally responsible for all of our actions, we are also responsible for our anger even when we have been drinking or using. Being under- the- influence is no excuse for aggressive behavior toward others.

Consider the following questions about your use of substances and how it may be related to your display of anger. You may decide to change your patterns of substance use after you answer the following questions.

Describe any negative or dangerous choices you have made while using alcohol or drugs: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In your family, who has or had problems with alcohol or drugs? How did their behavior impact you when they were under the influence? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Give some examples of how using alcohol or drugs increased your anger. How would you have responded differently to the same situation if you had been sober? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What have you done while drinking or using drugs that you later felt sorry about? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who have you hurt emotionally while drinking or using drugs? Give an example. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What feeling(s) does your drinking or use of drugs numb? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The next time I am drinking or using drugs and feel that I am beginning to get too angry about a situation, I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## THE "SECRET CONNECTION" BETWEEN ANGER & DEPRESSION

Anger and depression are often easily confused with one another. In fact, some types of depression have been described as "anger turned inward." In this way, we may be directing anger at ourselves instead of toward the person or situation that we are really angry with.

Depression can also include feelings of loss or grief. This often includes feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, or feeling unworthy, "stuck" or a "failure."

Some people may not consider anger an "acceptable" feeling – especially in women. An angry woman may be stereotyped as a "bitch" or a "shrew." Thus, some women internalize their feelings of anger and end up feeling helpless, hopeless and depressed.

Depression can actually be a substitute for anger or an escape from it. Some people use depression as a way of not letting others know what is going on with them or for not being emotionally or physically available. Other people allow their feelings to build up to the "boiling point," where they only express their feelings when they are angry.

Answer the following questions to help you learn more about your own feelings of depression and how it may be a cover up for anger:

Depression or sadness is more comfortable for me to express because: \_\_\_\_\_

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Depression lets me ignore such uncomfortable feelings as: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

When I am depressed, I usually receive the following attention from others: \_\_\_\_\_

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---

The things that usually make me the most depressed/sad are: \_\_\_\_\_

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What other feelings could I be experiencing other than depression in these situations? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does society think about a woman who is angry? A woman who is depressed?

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## ANGER & STRESS MANAGEMENT

When under stress, we can experience many different symptoms, such as, stomach upset, headaches, heart palpitations, insomnia, and appetite changes. Stress can eventually lead to the development of ulcers, high blood pressure and even heart attacks. We can also experience panic attacks, anxiety and depression while under stress.

Usually we get angry more easily and quickly when under pressure – and our anger is usually more intense. Identifying the stressors in our lives and learning how to cope with them can actually help us manage our anger.

Consider the following questions about your stress level. Then review the “Stress Reduction Skills” on the following page.

What are the biggest stressors in my life currently? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I am under stress, my body reacts by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I am under stress, the emotions I usually experience include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I am feeling stressed, I usually take it out on the following people (my partner, my children, my co-workers, my family, myself, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What have I done in the past to cope with my stress that *has not been helpful* – or – how has it made the situation worse? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What have I done in the past to cope with my stress that *has been helpful* – or – how has it made the situation better? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What messages do I tell myself when I am experiencing stress (for example, “I can handle this,” or “This is hopeless,” etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Since stress is part of all of our lives, it is a good idea to find stress management techniques to help us cope. Review the following stress management skills and make a specific plan to include them into your life.

- **Physical exercise:** Schedule time on a regular basis to take a walk or get some physical exercise.
- **Sleep:** Be sure to obtain adequate sleep. When we are rested, stressors do not seem as difficult.
- **Monitor alcohol and caffeine intake:** When under pressure, caffeine can actually increase our physical response to stress because it is chemically a stimulant. Alcohol is chemically a depressant and can increase one's feelings of depression, especially while under stress.
- **Deep breathing:** Deep, slow breathing can help to ease the body's response to stressors. Breathe from the diaphragm/abdominal area, while counting to five.
- **Healthy Eating:** Many people experience mood swings when they eat too much sugar. Consult with your doctor or a nutritionist about how to plan a well-balanced diet.
- **Relax & unwind:** Make time in your schedule to relax on a daily basis – at least 10 or 15 minutes each day. Put your feet up and listen to relaxing music, or go for a walk and enjoy the fresh air. Your spouse and children can “get by” without you being with them for these few minutes – and the short break can make you a happier, more serene partner and parent.
- **Positive imagery:** Take a “mental vacation.” Imagine yourself relaxing at a peaceful scene. Maybe you are visualizing yourself walking along the beach or hiking in the mountains. Focus on your five senses for a more intense experience – in other words, imagine what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. Breathe slowly and deeply.
- **Be realistic:** Sometimes we get stressed because we try to change people or things that we have no control over. Part of coping with stress is determining what we can change - and what we cannot. For instance, we can not change our partner's gambling or use of alcohol. But we can change our responses to our partner's behavior. By learning to “let go” of our hopes to “change” others, our stress level will decrease significantly, as well as our anger and resentment.
- **Leisure activities:** Be sure to schedule some time for recreational or leisure activities. If you do not have a hobby or particular interest, take the time to find something you are interested in pursuing. Would you like to take an art class? What about learning a musical instrument? Do you like to sew? Are there any clubs that you would like to join? Leisure activities are not luxuries, but necessities in coping with the many stressors that we all face.

## ANGER AND PARENTING YOUR CHILD

Being a parent is one of the most difficult – if not *the most difficult job* – in the world. While bringing up a child is very rewarding, it also challenges your patience, your knowledge and your flexibility. When you consider the many challenges of being a parent, it is no wonder that parents are often overwhelmed, stressed and angry.

A father was once heard to say to his child, “Don’t act so childish!” Yet, children are supposed to act “childish” because they are children! Sometimes our stress and anger come from having inappropriate expectations about our children – especially if we were abused in our own childhood. Unfortunately, most of us do not take parenting classes or read books about child development. We have no role model for parenting, other than what our parents did or did not do to us.

Parents also have many “shoulds” or expectations for their children. For example, “children should be able to do household chores,” or “children should be able to make all A’s on their report card.” The key to parenting is to set appropriate expectations based upon a child’s age and maturity level. If our “shoulds” are inappropriate, then we inadvertently set our child up for failure and we as parents get angry and frustrated. Then we end up disciplining our child for something that we should not have expected in the first place!

Consider the following to help you develop more realistic expectations about your child:

- **Children are self-centered:** Children are focused on their own needs and wants. It takes years before they gradually develop empathy and understanding for other people, including their parents. They often do not see that mom is exhausted or that dad is under a lot of stress.
- **Children need time and attention – and lots of it:** Part of growing up includes giving much guidance, support and encouragement to our children. As parents, we can choose to give that time and attention in positive ways (verbal praise, rewards, time spent in activities with our child, etc.) or in negative ways (where our child gets in trouble to get our attention).
- **Children require much “clean up” time:** Most children are messy and disorganized. A lot of a parent’s time is spent cleaning up and picking up, over and over again. Even when a child is old enough to do some cleaning, he or she usually requires much guidance and supervision by the parent.
- **Children test your boundaries and limits:** In what seems like an endless push for independence, children push for more autonomy. They question your rules, your judgment and your decisions – especially when it comes to parenting them. This natural push for autonomy is an important part of the child growing up and eventually becoming an independent, functional adult.
- **Parenting is a 24-hour job:** Being a parent requires you to be responsible for that child every minute of the day and night. Parents lose sleep when the baby cries or when a child is sick or has a nightmare. Even when you are at a job, you must arrange adequate childcare and still be available for emergencies. And when you come home from work, your second job begins – that is, taking care of your child.

## FALSE BELIEFS THAT PARENTS HAVE ABOUT CHILDREN THAT TRIGGER ANGER

Many adults forget what it was like being a child. They may think they were “model children” who seldom caused their parents trouble – when in fact, they were probably as challenging to bring up as every other child! For those adults who were abused as children, they might have been terrorized into behaving and therefore acted as little adults to avoid a beating. Just because we were “perfect children” because our abusive parents intimidated us does not mean we should expect our children to be perfect, too.

Parents often have inappropriate expectations or false beliefs about their children. When these false beliefs are not met, parents become stressed and angry. Eventually, parents may dislike their own children and the children realize it. A child’s self-esteem is then hurt and the parent feels overwhelmed and frustrated. All this pain can be avoided if parents are willing to challenge their own beliefs about children and be open to parenting information from child development specialists.

Below are some of the more common false beliefs about children that trigger anger in parents. Which of these expectations do you have?

- **The pressure is all mine:** Many parents believe that if they just pressure a child enough – day after day, month after month – that the child will eventually change and be different in some way. But children, like adults, resent this type of pressure, disapproval and manipulation. In fact, under sufficient pressure, children may act out negatively. Instead of trying to pressure a child to change, it is best advised to use a behavioral modification plan that acknowledges positive behavior and sets fair consequences for undesired behavior.
- **If you loved me... then you’d....:** Some parents “play the guilt card” with their children and tell them, “If you really loved me, then you would do...” (whatever the parent wants). For example, “If you loved me, you’d break up with that awful boyfriend of yours,” or “If you loved me, you’d get all A’s on your report card.” This is an unfair and hurtful set up because a parent’s love for a child is not conditional. Children have the right to their own independent thoughts and actions – it does not mean that they do not love their parents.
- **Children should be punished and not heard:** Some parents become so angry with their children that they do not discipline them for their misbehavior – instead, they yell, rage, overreact, and lose all control. They want the child to hurt as much as they are hurting. But this type of expression of anger can be terrifying to the child. It can cause severe psychological damage to the parent-child relationship. And parents who act out their anger toward their children usually end up having resentful, angry children who eventually act out even more.
- **Children should be more like adults:** Many parents expect their children to behave like miniature adults. They expect them to demonstrate impeccable table manners, to show empathy towards their parents when they are exhausted, and to behave appropriately in public. But children are supposed to be messy, noisy and playful human beings. It takes years for them to develop the type of social skills that allows them to interact in the world successfully. Their own wants and interests motivate children’s behavior – they do not have the same perspective on the world as adults.

## HOW MY BODY RESPONDS TO EMOTIONS

Sometimes our bodies recognize that we are experiencing a particular feeling before we identify it for ourselves. For instance, your heart might begin to race, your perspiration may increase, your might develop tightness in your chest, as well as a headache – are you coming down with the flu? Or could you be experiencing anxiety? Or maybe you are excited, afraid or angry?

Our bodies naturally react to all types of emotions. It is up to us to identify these bodily cues and to acknowledge the feelings behind them. By reading our own body language, we can help to determine what we are feeling, and then what to do about that feeling.

For example, some people become so angry so quickly that they do not realize they are angry – they lash out with verbal abuse even before they recognize the anger that is behind it. If we learn to read our physical cues, it can give us a forewarning about our emotions. Then we can decide how we want to respond – not just react – to these feelings.

Answer the following questions to help you get more in touch with how your body reacts to these emotions:

My body reacts to anxiety by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to anger by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to sadness by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to happiness by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to danger by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to criticism by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts to guilt by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## COMMUNICATION

Communication happens at least two levels all the time:

- verbal, direct and overt
- non-verbal and indirect.

Unfortunately, miscommunication at both levels is as common, and as "normal," as accurate communication.

Verbal communication has several steps:

- thought, and deciding to communicate.
- speaking
- hearing
- interpreting
- reacting (which spills over into nonverbal communication)

Nonverbal communication is even more complicated. It includes:

- tone of voice
- timing
- volume
- posture
- gestures
- expressions

### **"WHAT YOU THINK I SAID MAY NOT BE WHAT I MEANT."**

Good communication is about being clear, but also being patient with the process of noticing and clearing up inevitable misunderstandings. Communication also can have multiple purposes, including expression of feelings to be understood (expressive), conveying information, and demanding compliance with directions (instrumental).

Men frequently are used to instrumental uses of language, and, at least consciously, often do not use expressive language or understand it well. Men often experience women's expressions of feelings as demands for action that the woman does not acknowledge. Such men need to learn to listen for the sake of listening and understanding instead of getting something done, or asking for or giving advice. Women often need to learn how to communicate instrumentally, and to do so consciously.

It is more effective for a woman to be up front about asking for what she wants - if she is in a situation where others treat her with respect & consideration. When women or men are afraid of mistreatment and retaliation, they tend to communicate indirectly, and not clearly.

It is also true that most relationships work best when all persons involved perceive the others as feeling unconditional positive regard and accurate empathy, and as being truly genuine and present. This requires that all parties, that is both persons of a couple, be able to communicate effectively on both verbal and nonverbal levels. Their messages need to usually contain some compliments or other expressions of positive regard and appreciation, which help the receiver stay open. Anger and criticism create the need to defend and react, unless they are carefully balanced with positives.

## **BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION**

The biggest barrier to communication is motivation, or “attitude.” If one person is not really interested in interacting with or understanding the other – if they are focused on controlling or manipulating the other person, or on dumping their own feelings, or on controlling their own internal chaos – then two-way, interactive communication will be impossible.

Communication includes both “content” (what is said or written) and “process” (how it is said or written). There are both process and content barriers to communication.

### **CONTENT BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION**

- Attacking, blaming, accusing, shaming, etc. (“you” statements)
- Name calling, insults, swearing, sarcasm
- Threats, especially implied or indirect threats
- Placating, seducing, cajoling etc.

### **PROCESS BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION**

- Raising one’s voice, using sarcastic intonation or timing
- Moving in a threatening manner, standing up, hovering, getting in the other’s face etc.
- Interrupting to change the subject or take over the “floor”
- Monopolizing the conversation, not making room for others
- Refusing to talk, refusing to listen
- Changing the subject before it is done
- Pushing one’s own topic when the other is not interested in it
- Changing the focus or level of discussion
- Insisting on “winning” or being “right” – and the other “wrong”
- Not recognizing, admitting, or clarifying normal misunderstandings – treating them as attacks
- “Mind-reading” or expecting the other to “read” your mind (i.e., knowing what the speaker “means” even when they haven’t said it directly)
- Saying one thing and doing another

## COMMUNICATION BLOOPERS

COMMUNICATION STOPS AND ARGUMENTS START WHEN THESE  
"COMMUNICATION BLOOPERS" ARE USED.  
CHECK-OFF THE BLOOPERS THAT YOU HAVE USED, THEN ANSWER THE  
TWO QUESTIONS BELOW

\_\_\_\_\_ **Name-calling, judging, & criticizing:** Attacking a person's character.  
"You won't amount to anything!" "You're such a loser." "You're an idiot!"

\_\_\_\_\_ **Lecturing, teaching:** Talking down to someone, as if they are not very  
intelligent. "My way is the right way." "I'm telling you this for your own  
good." "Blah, blah, blah ...."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Ordering another person to do something:** "Just do what I tell you to  
do." "Stop crying." "Don't be afraid."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Warning or threatening the other person that negative  
consequences will happen if s/he does a particular action:**  
"If you go out with your friends, you'll regret it." "If you file for divorce, I'll  
take the kids."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Preaching and moralizing:** Using words like "should" and "ought."  
"Women shouldn't dress like that." "Women ought to understand that men  
should be the head of the house."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Giving unsolicited advice:** Giving suggestions or advice without being  
asked. "If you're so unhappy in the marriage, just get a divorce." "If you  
didn't let the kids walk all over you, they'd respect you more."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Interpreting, analyzing:** Telling other people why they are saying or  
doing something. "You criticize me because you like to hurt my feelings."  
"You push my buttons on purpose so I'll get angry in front of the kids."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Withdrawing, denying, isolating:** Avoiding the problem or the issue.  
"I'm just tired, I'm not really angry with you." "No, there's nothing the  
matter, so stop asking me."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Sarcasm, humor:** A passive-aggressive way to express angry feelings. "I  
was just joking when I said it looked like you had gained weight."

Give examples of conversations where you have used these bloopers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How did these communication bloopers hurt your relationships? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## PRACTICING NEW COMMUNICATION RESPONSES TO COMMON STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

When you start to get into a conflicted situation, it is a good idea to have some new communication responses that you have practiced ahead of time. It is helpful to memorize these communication responses. The more you practice these new responses the easier it will be to use them when a discussion starts to heat up.

### Active Communication Responses

- Ask for what you specifically need by saying, "I feel (mad, sad, afraid, anxious, etc.) about this situation. What I think I want in this situation is.... (give just one behavioral request)."
- Negotiate with the other person. Ask, "What is your idea about solving the problem?"
- If none of the negotiation ideas are useful, you might decide to "meet halfway" – in other words, do it your way this time, and the other person's way the next time. Or agree that, "If you do something for me, I'll do something for you."
- If the conflict persists, identify ways to take care of yourself. Say, "If this situation continues, I'll have to do (self-care) in order to take care of myself. Examples of self-care include paying someone to do it, doing it yourself instead of spending time with your partner, withdrawing temporarily or permanently from the relationship, or getting the need met elsewhere.

### Passive Communication Responses

- Get additional information from the other person. Ask, "What do you need in this situation? What concerns do you have? What is bothering you in this situation?"
- Acknowledge the other person's needs or feelings in a sincere, genuine way. Say, "So what you need is \_\_\_\_\_." "So what concerns you is \_\_\_\_\_." "So what hurts you is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Be sure to say the above without being sarcastic or judgmental.
- If all else fails, withdraw temporarily or use time out. Say, "It seems like we're starting to get upset. I want to stop and cool off for awhile."

### Helpful Hints:

- If anger begins to escalate, you can repeat responses such as asking for more information, summarizing what the other person feels as well as their wants and needs, and negotiate further.
- Be sure that your tone of voice, facial expression and body language convey that you truly care about the other person's feelings.
- If you are still feeling stuck and angry, go to the self-care response or withdraw or use time-out.

### How do you practice these new communication responses?

- You can practice these new communication responses by visualizing yourself getting angry.
- Next, imagine yourself relaxing, dealing with the stress, and being in control of what you say and do.
- Use statements to calm yourself down.
- The goal is to problem-solve and to try and maintain the relationship.
- These communication responses are not intended to be used for revenge or manipulation.

## Two Different Communication Styles / Language Cultures / World Views / Value Systems

<b>Instrumental</b>	<b>vs.</b>	<b>Expressive</b>
- Identified with Male Stereotypes		- Identified with Female Stereotypes
- Often identified with Power-over or authority		- Often identified with or used by less by less powerful / oppressed
- Low context dependence content focused clear, specific logical direct concise, efficient hierarchical creates boundaries facilitates action gets things done focused on right/wrong adversarial, seeks either a single authority or "majority" rule "clock time" is important, precise values status, possessions, accomplishments values independence		- High context dependence process focused (feelings) evocative, global a-logical, emotional pictorial takes time sharing creates connection facilitates feeling, relating maintains relationships focus is both/and co-operative,  seeks consensus  time is fluid, emotional, relative values relationships, people, experience values interdependence

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Communication problems and arguments can easily occur when people use two different styles of communication known as "instrumental" and "expressive." This style of communication is logical, direct, and action-oriented. In contrast, expressive communication is feeling-oriented, emotional and focuses on maintaining relationships. Both styles of communication have usefulness in the appropriate circumstances, and people ideally would be able to use both.

One problem with gender stereotypes is that men are more often taught instrumental communication and women are more often taught expressive. A person communicating instrumentally and a person being expressive do not easily make sense of each other. For example, a woman may use expressive communication when she "vents" about her difficult day at work by describing every detail about her problems. A man may become impatient and seem non-supportive of her because he expects the woman to use instrumental language that would "get to the point" about her problems on the job.

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## THE EIGHT COMMANDMENTS OF FAIR FIGHTING

Write 8 of your own "fair fighting" rules. If you have a partner it is best to do this assignment together. Although some people argue to "win" their partner "loses" and so does the relationship. If you want to maintain a happy relationship, it is best to argue fairly. Many people use the following ideas as examples of fair fighting.

### Set a mutually agreed upon time and place to discuss the issue or problem.

- Focus on one problem at a time or it gets too confusing
- Don't bring up old arguments or problems from the past

### Maintain your dignity and the dignity of your relationship.

- No name-calling
- No threats ("If you don't do it my way, I'll leave you!")
- No violence
- Don't attack your partner's character ("You're a lousy wife.")
- Don't criticize your partner's family or friends
- No verbal abuse

### Listen to the other person without interrupting.

- Don't tune-out the other person by thinking about something else
- Don't tune-out the other person by thinking about what you want to say next
- Be open to feedback from the other person – maybe you can learn something from them

### Identify and verbally discuss what you feel.

- Genuinely listen to your partner's feelings.
- Don't judge your partner's feelings or try to talk your partner out of feeling a certain way.

### Use "I" messages.

- Don't blame your partner.
- Avoid saying statements that start with, "You .....
- Don't use "hot button" words such as, always, never, ought, should, etc.

### Discuss possible solutions.

- Ask for what you want. Don't expect your partner to read your mind and automatically know what you need.
- Ask your partner what s/he wants
- Identify ways to compromise and negotiate

### Take a time-out if things start to become too heated.

- Separate and cool down for awhile
- Take a walk, listen to music, or do deep breathing to relax
- Return at an agreed upon time and resume talking

Use teamwork.

- Work together to fight fairly and to follow the fair fighting rules
- Don't use your partner's problems as weapons to strike back at him or her
- Don't trade insults for insults.

My Own Fair Fighting Rules Include:

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

My Unfair Fighting Habits I will Work on to Change:

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

## IN THIS CORNER...DIRTY FIGHTING

Communication that is disrespectful can easily escalate a simple argument into a huge battle. Instead of resolving a disagreement, dirty fighting techniques cause further hurt through manipulation and control tactics. Review the following "dirty fighting" techniques. Which ones have you used? What was the outcome?

- **Ignoring** – If you truly listen to your partner, you might be seen as valuing and respecting your partner's thoughts and feelings. Instead of showing your partner the common courtesy of respectfully listening to him or her, pretend to be watching TV, reading some thing, or falling asleep while your partner is talking. The more serious the topic of conversation, the more you should ignore your partner. Eventually, your partner will give up talking to you, and you'll finally get the quiet you deserve.
- **Tit-for-tat** – When your partner complains about something you have done or said, immediately complain about something your partner has done. For example, if your partner complains that you are flirting with other women, respond by saying some thing like, "If you hadn't gained 20 pounds since the birth of the baby, I wouldn't have to look at other women!" If you trade off complaint against complaint, you never have to take responsibility for your own actions and nothing will get resolved.
- **Labeling** – By labeling your partner in a negative way, you can lower his or her self-esteem dramatically. Eventually, your partner will truly believe he is an "idiot" or that she is a "loser." If you use such psychological labels as "neurotic," "borderline," "codependent," or "alcoholic," you will seem superior to your partner, while also obscuring the real issues where you may be at fault.
- **Everything including the kitchen sink** – The next time your argue with your partner, don't stick to the topic at hand. Talk about as many problems as you can think of, especially those from the past, so that you can convince your partner that she or he has always been wrong in the relationship. If your partner doesn't remember the past offenses, so much the better, because he or she will also look like her memory is also going bad.
- **Woe oh, woe is me** – Play the martyr role by recounting every slight injustice or hurt you have ever suffered in the relationship. Include plenty of details so your partner can't get a word in edgewise. Be sure to sound hurt and self-righteous. This technique can be used to justify almost any selfish action of yours. For instance, "Since you are back in school, I bought the big screen TV to keep me company."
- **Bad timing** – As they say, "timing is everything." When you want to argue, pick the best time to go for your partner's throat – e.g., late at night, when your partner is sick or tired, during your partner's favorite TV show, just before your partner is leaving for work, or especially after a few drinks. Start an argument when your partner least expects it so he or she will be too shocked to respond very well.
- **The "Why" Inquisition** – Bombard your spouse with meaningless "why" questions – e.g., "Why were you late?" "Why didn't you take out the trash?" By asking "why" you are implying that something is terribly wrong with your partner (instead of a simple problem behavior). You also sound like an authority figure - and your partner has to answer as if he were a child explaining his naughty behavior to his parent.



## IN THIS CORNER...MORE DIRTY FIGHTING

- **Attacking one's character** – Don't focus on the current problem or issue for too long, otherwise, you may have to admit some responsibility in the matter. Instead quickly shift into attacking your partner's personality or character. For instance, use inflammatory statements like, "If you weren't such a bad mother, our son wouldn't be hooked on drugs," or "If you were a better wife, I wouldn't spend so much time drinking with the guys at the bar." Focus the attacks so that your partner's most sensitive or vulnerable areas are brought up.
- **Pulling rank** – You can stop an argument fairly quickly before you have to admit any responsibility by pulling rank – remind your partner that you are smarter, more experienced, older (or younger, if that helps your cause), or that you make more money. Remind your partner that she or he had "nothing" before you entered the picture – say this quickly before your partner realizes it makes no sense. Don't hesitate to exaggerate or lie as much as possible to enhance your status at your spouse's expense.
- **Fortune-telling** – Protect yourself from having to make any real changes or taking responsibility for solving problems by predicting the future. Statements like, "You will never change," or "You will always be a lousy lover" make the situation seem hopeless and your spouse seem like a loser. If you predict that you will abandon your partner at some future point, e.g., "One of these days, I'll get so fed up that I'll pack my bags and leave" you can instill fear and insecurity in your spouse. This will scare your spouse into appreciating you more.
- **Humor and Sarcasm** – This method is a great "sneak attack" where you can say any cruel comment to your partner without getting in trouble because "you were just kidding." If your partner reacts in anger to your comments, then accuse him or her of "being too sensitive." You can also insult your partner's intelligence by pretending that you didn't really intend to insult them by being sarcastic - yeah, right!
- **Turning up the fire** – Heat up an already heated argument by exaggerating the importance of an issue with inflammatory statements like, "If you really loved me, you'd do what I asked," or "This goes to show that you don't care about me or the kids." Make every issue in the relationship, no matter how small, seem absolutely a life-and death matter. This technique is even more effective if you demand immediate attention to the issue.
- **Mind-reading** – Pretend to be wise and all-knowing by deciding you know the *real* reason behind your partner's actions. By taking on this superior attitude, you can avoid having to take responsibility for your own actions. Statements such as, "You only said that to hurt my feelings," or "You did that to embarrass me in front of my family" put your partner on the defensive. While your partner is struggling to explain his or her actions, you look cool, calm and collected.
- **Blame, blame, blame** - No matter what terrible thing you did or said, always hold your partner completely responsible for the problem. Don't admit your behavior had any part whatsoever in the conflict. Never apologize and never admit that you will change any thing about your behavior. Pretend to be the innocent victim, once again.

## THE POWER OF SELF-TALK

- "SELF-TALK" MEANS THE COMMENTS WE SAY TO OURSELVES WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS TO US.
- WE USE SELF-TALK EVERYDAY BUT WE ARE OFTEN NOT AWARE OF WHAT WE ARE TELLING OURSELVES.
- SELF-TALK CAN COMPLETELY CHANGE OUR OUTLOOK AND EITHER HELP US *THINK* OUR WAY THROUGH A SITUATION OR *HURT* US BY INCREASING OUR ANGER FOR NO REASON.
- SELF-TALK CAN BE *POSITIVE* OR *NEGATIVE*.

### NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Negative self-talk is when our emotions do the thinking for us. It's similar to what AA calls "stinking thinking." Fear often causes negative self-talk, although it usually is seen in our actions as anger. When we come across someone who is not using good anger management skills, our *own negative self-talk* about that person can lead to violence or even an arrest. The following are examples of negative self-talk:

- I can't believe they did that!
- Who does she think she is!
- He doesn't care about me at all!
- Nobody is going to take advantage of me like that!
- I'll show him!
- I won't back down!
- If I walk away, he'll think I'm a wimp!
- They did that on purpose just to make me mad!
- I'll teach her a lesson!

### POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Positive self-talk helps us to look at the situation and the other person involved and think about alternative ways of understanding what happened – and different ways of handling the situation. Positive self-talk can slow down our anger and help us think about constructive ways of coping with the circumstances. It can help to stop violence and prevent an arrest. The following are examples of positive self-talk:

- I can stay in control of myself even when the other person is out of control.
- I don't have to prove myself to this person.
- I can take a time-out.
- I don't have to win this argument.
- I've survived through many difficult times – I'll get through this.
- I don't need to feel threatened by this person.
- I can take some deep breaths and calm down.
- This is not worth the hassle.

## CHANGING THOUGHTS, ATTITUDES & BELIEFS

Sometimes things happen in our lives and we have no control over them. But we always have *control over how we respond* to these situations.

The first step in learning how to respond rather than react is to look at your thoughts. There is no such thing as, "It just happened." There is always a thought process that happens prior to every action.

Whether you choose to use drugs, yell at your children, have an affair or give money to a charity, these are all choices that you make. The way that you decide to respond to a situation is based upon your thoughts or self-talk messages.

When we are stressed, our thoughts or self-talk can be stressed, too – and we usually make poor decisions. When we have positive self-talk messages, we are more likely to respond rather than react.

Look at the following examples of negative self-talk messages and write a new response that is positive.

Negative self-talk messages: "That driver cut me off on purpose. He knew I was in a hurry, and he deliberately forced me to slow down.

Reaction: Honk the car horn, yell at the driver, flash my high beams, throw something at the car, tailgate the other car, make a rude hand gesture, etc.

My new positive self-talk message is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My new response to this positive self-talk message is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Negative self-talk messages: "My son failed his math class because he is a lazy, good-for-nothing loser. He just wanted to make me angry. I'll show him!"

Reaction: Verbally or emotionally abuse the son; Scare, intimidate or physically abuse the son;

My new positive self-talk message is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My new response to this positive self-talk message is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## THE DISTORTED DOZEN: TWELVE STYLES OF DISTORTED THINKING

It is not just the situation or how another person acts that contributes to our anger. *How we think* has a big impact about whether we feel angry and just what we do with that anger. Sometimes our way of thinking becomes distorted – it's like wearing a pair of glasses that is too strong for our eyes and our vision becomes blurry. Distorted thinking can lead to angry feelings that are unreasonable to a situation. Consider the following 12 styles of distorted thinking:

- 1. Fortune-telling** – Assuming a negative outcome to a situation as if you were “mind-reading” the thoughts of others; E.g., you assume your boss will turn you down for a raise so you get angry even before you ask him for it.
- 2. Personalizing** – You believe that everything people say or do is personally directed at you. E.g., you assume that a slow driver ahead of you is driving that way on purpose just because he knows you are late and wants to make you angry.
- 3. All-or-Nothing Thinking** – You think in absolutes, i.e., everything is “black or white.” There is no middle ground. You have iron clad rules about how you and other people should behave. E.g., you get angry with your three-year-old child for wetting the bed because he “should know better” – yet, you do not take into account that the child wet the bed because she was feeling ill.
- 4. Overgeneralization** – You come to a negative conclusion about someone or something based upon just one incident. Then, you expect it to happen over and over again. E.g., just because your husband once wrote a check that bounced, you now believe he can never be trusted again with the family finances.
- 5. Magnification or Minimization** – Also known as “making a mountain out of a molehill” syndrome. You blow things out of proportion or diminish their importance and ignore the positive. E.g., your son makes all A's on his math tests and you do not praise him for his accomplishments. Yet, when he fails one math test, you tell him he is “stupid” and “lazy.”
- 6. Emotional Reasoning** – Reasoning that is based on feelings vs. reality-based evidence. E.g., you are angry with your spouse because you have a feeling she is cheating on you, yet all the evidence indicates that she is faithful. Thus, if you *feel* your wife is cheating, then she *must* be cheating.
- 7. Assuming Inappropriate Blame** – You accept too much responsibility in a situation, or you blame others for your own problems. Either way, you feel angry, frustrated and burned-out. E.g., you accept too much responsibility for taking care of your aging, ill parents and do not delegate responsibility to other family members. Then you feel angry and used because you have no support.
- 8. Catastrophizing** – You assume that there will be unrealistic and overly negative outcomes in most situations. E.g., you assume that going to a marriage counselor with your wife will only lead to divorce, and that you will lose your children and home. So, you get angry with your wife when she makes an appointment with a counselor.
- 9. Myth of Fairness** – You get angry and resentful because “life isn't fair” at all times, in every situation. You believe you alone can judge what is “fair” and that other people are deliberately being unfair just to make you angry.

**10. Anxiety-Provoking Language** – You often use judgmental words like “should, shouldn’t, must, ought,” etc. You get angry when others (or yourself) don’t live up to or agree with your expectations.

**11. Myth of Always Being Right** – You act like an attorney, always trying to prove your point to yourself and others. You will go to any length to deny or hide that you have made a mistake. You get angry when others give your feedback or disagree with your point of view.

**12. Myth of Change** – You believe that if you just pressure someone enough they will eventually change to make you happy. E.g., you nag your wife for months to buy a new car that you can’t really afford. You then ignore how stressed she feels trying to make the car payments.

Give examples of how you used any of the above styles of distorted thinking. How did you feel? How do you believe the other person involved felt?

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If you could go back in time and redo any of the above examples, what would you do differently?

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## **How Myths, False Beliefs, and Self-Talk Trigger Anger**

Our beliefs and what we tell ourselves (called, "self-talk"), are the main causes of our anger – rather than the actual frustrating events, our problems or the misbehavior of others. Anger is not a direct result from what has happened to us but how we choose to react to what has happened.

Society often has certain false beliefs that can contribute to our anger. Some families also teach and role model these same false beliefs. Consider the following myths that often trigger anger in many people.

**1. People must always agree with me, otherwise, it is a sign of disrespect.**

This expectation is unrealistic as people naturally have different opinions. Just because someone disagrees with you doesn't mean they disrespect you – it just means they have a different point of view about something. Sometimes an argument can start because you tell yourself that you are being "challenged" by the other person. For instance, a wife would debate with her husband every time he disagreed with her because she did not want to "lose." Some people misperceive disagreements as a competition - when they are just differences of opinion.

**2. I must be perfect, and I expect everyone else to be perfect.**

With this false belief, you can end up feeling angry at yourself when you make a mistake, and angry at others when they do not live up to your unrealistic expectations. For example, a husband gets angry with his wife because she is late – he doesn't consider that a bad accident on the freeway slowed the traffic.

**3. I must know everything, and I expect everyone else to know everything.**

This false belief can lead to frustration, anger and low self-esteem because it is impossible to "know everything." An example of this false belief is when you expect an employee of a store to know about a particular item, but he does not have the information that you want. Instead of telling yourself that it is unrealistic for any employee to know about every item in the store, you get angry and call him "stupid."

**4. I must be "strong" at all times.**

This false belief leads to anger, especially when someone is feeling sad, anxious, afraid, or vulnerable in some way, because the person tells himself he should not show "weak" emotions. He or she might cover up these "weaker feelings" by getting angry. For example, a husband was sad when his wife left him, but he appeared angry to everyone else because he did not want them to think he missed her.

**5. I have to win at all times, otherwise I am a loser.**

Some people tell themselves that life is one big competition. They see common daily events as personal "challenges" to their self-esteem. For instance, a person always tries to be first in line or ahead of other cars on the road. He would not consider letting someone else cut in front of him or he would feel judged by others as a loser. He brags to his family how he never gives anyone else a break.

## YOU MAY BE RIGHT...YOU MAY BE WRONG: TAKING A SECOND LOOK AT NEGATIVE ASSUMPTIONS

Sometimes we automatically assume things about other people or situations that just are not true. After all, we do not all think alike or "size up" a situation in the very same way. We don't all have the same values, learned rules, beliefs, experiences, wants and needs.

So, the next time you think that something "should" be done in just the way you want it to be done, reconsider that there may be no one 'right' or "wrong" way. When we keep this in mind, we are not as likely to get so angry when others don't do things like we expected.

Consider the following negative thoughts that can lead to misunderstanding and anger:

- **I WANT TO DO IT MY WAY**

Some adults truly believe that the "world should revolve" around their every want, need and wish. This is known as having a sense of entitlement. The attitude behind this is, "If I want something very much, I should have it, no matter the cost to others.

Examples of this include: expecting appreciation from others, expecting never to be alone, and demanding that other's know your needs without you saying them.

Anger management tip: Remember that others have the right to set limits and say "no" to your wants and needs.

- **FAIR IS FAIR?**

One of the most important lessons of life for children to learn is that "life is not fair" – and then, how to deal with the various unfair situations in their lives. But many adults still have the false belief that "life must be fair" – and that *only their expectations* are "fair." These adults often believe that if someone disagrees with what they think is "fair" then the *other person is wrong or unfair*. But sometimes "fair" is just a cover-up for the selfish belief that "my needs are more important than yours".

- **NAG, NAG, NAG TO SUCCESS?**

You can't expect to change people through angry pressure, excessive criticism, nagging and complaining to them. People genuinely change when it is rewarding to them and they choose to do so.

Anger management tip: Remember that criticizing or pressuring your partner into having sex makes the situation worse – not better. Criticism of your mate is not an aphrodisiac!

- **THE TEST OF LOVE**

A common negative thought is that your partner should be willing to do ANYTHING for you if he or she "truly loved you." Statements such as, "If you truly loved me, you would do ..... (whatever I want) are manipulative and controlling.

Anger management tip: Your partner has the right to disagree with you. This is not a sign that your partner does not love you.

- **YOU EARNED IT, YOU DESERVE IT**

Another false belief that leads to anger is that if someone hurts my feelings, then he or she deserves my anger – even if my anger hurts or destroys the relationship. As the old saying goes, "two wrongs don't make a right." In other words, just because someone "blasts" us in anger, we do not have the right to "blast" back. We can choose better ways to respond - not react – to their angry outbursts.

## **YOU MAY BE RIGHT...YOU MAY BE WRONG: TAKING A SECOND LOOK AT *MORE* NEGATIVE ASSUMPTIONS**

Consider the following negative thoughts that can lead to misunderstanding and anger:

- **BLAME AWAY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**

When we blame others we are taking away our own ability to make choices or to have any sense of control in a situation. When we blame others, we are assuming that they purposefully did something to hurt us. When we blame, we see the world as "black or white" – but in the "gray" area of life, we can admit the part we have in the situation and do something about it.

Anger management tip: If we spend more time looking at how we could have changed our own behavior in a conflicted situation, instead of blaming the other person, we will feel more in control of ourselves and future difficult situations.

- **PSYCHIC ABILITY?**

Sometimes we assume that the people around us are mindreaders. We assume that they did something on purpose just to annoy or hurt us. For example, if you are late to work, you might assume that the driver in front of you psychically knows you are in a hurry and is just driving slowly to make you angry. Often times, people irritate us by accident or for some unrelated reason. Expecting others to be "magically" aware of our wants and needs at all times is unrealistic and will certainly lead to anger, as people are not psychics.

Anger management tip: When you first begin to notice that you have an expectation about someone else, ask yourself, "Am I expecting this person to be a mindreader?"

- **MAGNIFYING GLASSES**

Life is filled with difficult situations. Yet, some people take these situations and make them even worse, as if they were taking a giant magnifying glass and making small events look bigger. Phrases like, "I never get," "You always," "You should," and so on make a "mountain out of a molehill." When we make a minor problem or disagreement into a major one, we are developing our own catastrophe – and that usually leads to frustration and anger.

Anger management tip: The next time you begin to get really upset, take a deep breath and ask yourself, "Is this situation really that awful? Is my anger way out of proportion to the situation?"

- **IF THE SHOE DOESN'T FIT, TRY TO WEAR IT ANYWAY**

Many arguments could be easily resolved or even avoided if we put ourselves in the other person's shoes and tried to look at the situation through their perspective. Maybe we have not considered an important aspect of the disagreement or have jumped to a conclusion too quickly. When we are open to feedback from others, we are in a better position to resolve a conflict in an intelligent and fair way.

Anger management tip: Write a conversation about yourself and another person. Try to put yourself in the other person's place. This exercise, known as role reversal, can be helpful in understanding the other person's perspective.



## THINGS THAT PEOPLE CONFUSE

### **Respect is NOT the same as Fear:**

Some people try to force others to “respect” them using intimidation and threat. Violence and the threat of violence create fear, not respect. Spanking, for example, creates fear, not respect. Fear often leads to submission, but it also eventually leads to shame, anger and rebellion. If an angry person is also afraid, they may express their anger indirectly, but they will express it. True respect, on the other hand, leads to cooperation, admiration, pride and emulation.

### **Understanding/Listening is NOT the same as Obedience:**

Some people accuse the other person of “not listening,” when they really mean that the other person is not following directions. Some people say they have a “communication” problem when they really mean that there is no agreement about who makes the decisions – who has the power.

### **Being “Right” is NOT the same as Winning:**

Some people damage their relationships by insisting on being “right,” having the last word, or having their way. Ultimately, they push others away and fail to get their own needs met.

### **Strength is NOT the same as Dominance:**

Some people feel that compromise and cooperation show weakness. Always having to have one’s own way actually shows fragility, not strength.

### **Caring is NOT the same as Control**

Many people confuse caring with control. Sometimes, caring does require some control; parents, for example, have to control small children. But parents also have to gradually relinquish their control and focus on the child learning self-control. Sometimes it is love to allow others to make their own mistakes.

### **Love is NOT the same as Jealousy**

Jealousy is not love. It is possessiveness. Jealousy is an expression of insecurity. Love does not seek to control. Love does not seek to cage.

### **Love is NOT the same as Need**

Many people say, “I love you,” but mean, “I need you.” Jealousy, for example, is based in need, not love. Need also exists and should be respected, but it is not love. If you need someone, you will be tempted to try to control and manipulate them. If you know you need them, you have the option to control yourself. If you love someone, you want him/her to be happy, even if what s/he wants does not make you happy. Love gives support and admiration. Need is controlling and demanding.

## BASIC CONDITIONS FOR A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

1. **SAFETY (EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL)**
2. **CARING, POSITIVE REGARD, ACCEPTANCE, APPRECIATION, LOVE**
3. **NON-JUDGMENTAL RESPECT**
4. **UNDERSTANDING, ACCURATE EMPATHY**
5. **ATTENTION, BEING EMOTIONALLY PRESENT OR "REAL"**
6. **HONESTY, GENUINNESS, "CONGRUENCE" (WORDS AND BEHAVIOR MATCH)**
7. **STABILITY, PREDICTABILITY**
8. **PLEASURE, FUN, SATISFACTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP**
9. **OPPORTUNITY TO EXERCISE COMPETENCE**
10. **BELONGING, MEANING**
11. **TRUST**
12. **BALANCE OF TOGETHERNESS AND SEPARATENESS**

These conditions apply to any relationship:

- Children need these from parents and caregivers to grow up to have strong egos, good self-esteem, good judgement, and a sense of emotional balance.
- Students learn more when they perceive their teacher as providing these conditions.
- Workers who feel this from supervisors produce more.
- Clients in psychotherapy heal best if these conditions are present, and have difficulty or fail if they are not.
- Husbands and wives need to feel these from their partner, and provide them for their partner to make a partnership work.

Without these conditions, people in any situation do not function well. People become what they can be; they "maximize their potential," most effectively in environments that provide these conditions.

## COMMUNICATION THAT MAKES OR BREAKS A RELATIONSHIP

Many arguments start because there is a huge communication gap between what one person says and how the other person responds. This communication gap can hurt or destroy relationships with your partner, children, friends, co-workers, and so on. Dr. Shelley Gable, an assistant professor of psychology at UCLA, has identified four ways in which we respond to others. Her method is simple, but very informative. She asks, "How do you respond when..... your wife tells you that she's just been promoted, or when your child tells you he just won the "Most Improved Player" award, or your co-worker tells you he just finished his college degree by going to school on weekends and evenings?"

Dr. Gable divides the possible responses into four main categories:

- Do you "react enthusiastically"? (*Active-constructive*) E.g., "That the best news I've heard all day! I am so proud of you! You've really worked hard and deserve the best!"
- Do you immediately "point out the potential problems or the possible negative outcomes of the positive event"? (*Active-destructive*) E.g., "Are you sure you can handle that promotion?"
- Do you "say little, but convey that you are happy to hear the news"? (*Passive-constructive*) "Oh, that's nice."
- Do you "seem uninterested"? (*Passive-destructive*) "Looks like we're going to get an early winter this year with the change in temperature."

Dr. Gable calls the first category, "capitalizing" – this is where you "react enthusiastically" and amplify the joy of the good situation. In this way, you contribute to an upward spiral of positive feelings. According to Dr. Gable, capitalizing turns out to be the key to having strong relationships with those around us.

### How would your partner, child, family member, co-worker or friend rate your responses to their good news?

#### Active-constructive

- My mate usually responds to my good fortune by being very positive & excited for me.
- Sometimes I think my partner is even more excited and happy than I am when something good happens to me.
- My mate shows genuine concern and asks questions about my good news.

#### Active-destructive

- My partner usually finds a problem right away with my good news.
- My mate says not to get too happy - most good events have their down sides, too.
- My partner points out the potential problems of the happy event.

#### Passive-constructive

- My mate doesn't make a big deal about it, but is happy for me.
- My partner silently supports me when good things happen.
- My mate doesn't say very much, but I know he/she is happy for me.

#### Passive-destructive

- My mate doesn't pay much attention to me when good things happen.
- Often times, my mate doesn't seem to be interested in me.
- At times, I get the feeling that my partner doesn't care all that much about me.

### What's the pay off for being active-constructive?

The pay off of being "active-constructive" ("react enthusiastically") versus the other categories is many. Dr. Gable found that couples with an active-constructive partner report being more in love, more committed to the relationship, and more marital satisfaction.

## STICKS AND STONES CAN BREAK ONE'S BONES - BUT WORDS CAN REALLY HURT, TOO

When we call someone a name, especially in scorn or anger, we are pushing that person into the tiny box of that name. We are implying that they are nothing more than a "----". When that name is a body part or an animal, we are further saying that the person is a thing or an animal - less than human. We are trying to act as if - and make them feel as if - they are nothing more than an object. After giving them a label, we begin to think that they are just like that label. That is "objectification." Another way of saying it is, when we "objectify," we "thing-ify." We all know that being made to feel less than human hurts, especially if the person calling us names is our parent, relative or lover. In addition, women and minorities are especially vulnerable to name-calling. Many of the names they are called are used everywhere they go in society to put them down. They are often more vulnerable to name-calling in private as a result. Adults who were abused as children are also more vulnerable.

Many people were abused as children and react very strongly to being called names. Unfortunately, many people are not aware of how name-calling hurts their partners. Men often hide behind the superficial social acceptability of insulting women as women. The purpose of this essay is in part to emphasize that calling women names such as "pussy," "bitch" and "cunt," - or calling men "prick," or "bastard" - is abusive, and not acceptable or appropriate behavior. The same is true for using "idiot," "asshole," "fat slob" or any number of other negative labels. It is worse when the partner is literally afraid to respond appropriately.

The other way that "thing-ifying" hurts is that it limits the thinking of the person who uses the insult. If we label our partner by a body part, we start thinking of them as less than human. We think of them as being the label, and all the things associated with the label, and we no longer see the partner clearly. We give ourselves permission to ignore their feelings and to forget about all the other things they are, do and have. That essentially handicaps our ability to feel empathy, or to tell accurately what is going on between them and us.

In some ways, "objectification" hurts the "name-caller," the perpetrator, more than the victim. Name-calling makes the name-caller look bad. A victim who has good self-esteem can choose to ignore the insult and the "name-caller." However, the "name-caller" cannot escape the distortions in judgement and perception caused by their own behavior. Anyone who doubts that names change how we feel about others, should remember that part of basic training for soldiers during wartime is to train them to call the enemy by derogatory, dehumanizing names. It is easier to kill a "gook" than it is to kill a man, and easier to hit a "bitch" than a lover.

## Talk/Listen/Repeat Technique

One way to explore a difficult situation or problem without escalating or creating new conflict is the "Talk/Listen/Repeat" Technique. It is an "artificial" structure that helps reduce the barriers to good communication.

The process of the technique goes as follows:

- Step 1      One person is the Talker, the other the Listener.  
The Talker may hold an object to remind both that s/he has "the floor." The Talker covers one subject at a time, a few sentences at a time.
- Step 2      The Listener only listens until the Talker asks for a "check-out" - then the Listener repeats what they think they heard. The Talker confirms or corrects the Listeners' repeat.
- Step 3      If the Talker is finished with the one topic, then the Talker and Listener switch roles - and the new Talker holds the object that represents having the floor.

- Notice that the Listener is not allowed to correct, challenge, evaluate or defend against what the Talker is saying.
- The Talker can say what they might like, but they are not allowed to ask for a problem solution during this technique.
- The goal is understanding, not resolution.
- This technique makes it easier to listen fully, because the Listener does not have to, is not allowed to, formulate a response while the Talker is talking. The need to defend is lessened.
- Misunderstandings are also minimized by repeating back and checking-out frequently during the process.
- This technique also makes it easier for both people to get equal, or at least equivalent, time to express their own point of view.
- Slowing down the conversation also allows each person to think more carefully about what they are going to say, without fear of being interrupted, or challenged.

This technique requires some time and a safe location to be of maximum benefit. It is hopefully not necessary for dealing with most of the things people need to talk about, but for something really heavy or potentially explosive, it is very helpful.

(This is my version of a commonly suggested technique)

## "I" STATEMENTS

- "I" statements are a way of communicating that reduces the likelihood of fighting.
- "I" statements describe a problem without blaming or accusation, and give the other person the room to respond without defensiveness.
- "I" statements are unlike the usual complaint (made in the form of a "you" statement) which sets the other person up to either admit fault and feel bad, or argue back, which almost always escalates the problem.

"I" statements focus on the speaker in content and attitude. In learning to use this approach, it is helpful to follow this format:

"I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_" (description of event).  
(E.g., "I felt hurt and disappointed when you did not keep your promise.")

Alternatively: "This is how I saw what happened \_\_\_\_\_,  
and this is how it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_."

(E.g., "I thought you said you would take out the trash, and it is still here. I feel used and let down when this happens.)

- The more specific and concrete the description, and the more it is given as a potentially fallible personal opinion or experience, the more useful it is.
- Overly general or extreme descriptions and generalizations often lead to arguments such as "It is not true that I never keep my word".

It is often very useful to follow this up with a specific request for a reasonable change. For example:

"I would like it if you would not make a promise unless you can keep it."

- The ideas that lead to your feelings may be in error, but your feelings are always valid and important. They cannot legitimately be argued with.
- "I" statements open the way for problem solving instead of fighting.

## ACTIVE LISTENING

### "What you think I said may not be what I meant"

Understanding and being understood is the core of communication. Feeling understood is also important in knowing communication is working. "Active Listening" is the process of letting the other person know you are listening by showing that you are listening with obvious behavior, and by clearing up misunderstandings. People show they are listening by maintaining frequent eye contact, nodding occasionally or saying "mmmmm," responding to what is being said, and repeating what is being said to "check out" any misunderstandings.

"Active Listening" is important because it is common to misunderstand each other in everyday communication. The way around misunderstandings is to "check out" what the other person seemed to say. For example:

- "What I think you said is ".....", am I right?"
- "Let me check this out. You think that ".....". Right?"

If you are talking about something that might be a problem, it is helpful to ask about feelings as well as thoughts.

- "Lets see, this is what happened, and it makes you feel "....." - right?"

Repeating the other person accurately does not necessarily mean that you agree with what they have said, or that they are correct.

- You may still disagree. It only means that you understand their position, not that you agree.
- Even when you disagree, you can both be cooperative in the process of understanding each other.
- Both people need to understand also that you have not done something wrong if you misunderstand and repeat incorrectly.
- You are giving the other person the opportunity to correct your understanding.

If the other person gets frustrated or angry with you for not understanding more easily, it may be helpful to say something like "you are right, I am having trouble understanding you. Please help me understand better."

Of course, how you check it out - tone of voice and kind of words used - is important. It is also important for the other person to give productive feedback. Sarcasm and criticism are almost never helpful in increasing understanding. It is important for both people to feel completely understood before going on to try to solve any problems or soothe any feelings identified. Often solutions do not work because they were based on incomplete understanding.

## Antidotes to Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the (Relationship) Apocalypse"

John Gottman identified four things that kill otherwise adequate relationships:

- Criticism
- Defensiveness
- Contempt
- Stonewalling

Criticism could be called "accusatory complaint."

- Often in the form of "You" statements.

Defensiveness is a natural response to criticism.

- It is also useless, and escalates fights.
- It often takes the form of counter-criticism, and usually involves admitting NOTHING.

Contempt is the opposite of respect.

- It is almost never present in successful relationships.

Stonewalling is shutting the other person out.

- Usually people stonewall because they feel overwhelmed by their own emotions. It is a way of escaping emotional flooding.
- It is also something to do when a person feels that there is nothing they can do.
- Many successful relationships have some, but not too much, of any of the above except for contempt.
- Successful relationships have much more positive than negative interactions.

### ANTIDOTES

The antidote for criticism is "Positive complaint".

- To make a positive complaint, you first give compliments and appreciation.
- Then, in "I statement" form, you ask for something to change.
- The appreciation has to be sincere and "bigger" than the complaint.
- The appreciation protects the relationship by reducing the likelihood the other person feels insulted or rejected.

The antidote for defensiveness is to not defend, but instead to admit to some part of the other person's complaint.

- Respectfully acknowledging the other person's feelings is also useful.

The antidote to contempt is RESPECT.

- Always assume the good will and competence of the other person.
- If they do not agree with you or do what you want, it is not because they are bad or stupid. They see it differently, that is all.

The antidote to stonewalling is "time-out".

- With time-out, you take a break and get the space to calm yourself, but the other person knows you will come back soon.
- This reduces the feelings of abandonment that simply leaving or not responding can cause.



## CONFLICT NEGOTIATION WORKSHEET

Conflict can be so difficult to handle that sometimes we need a guideline to follow. The following information is like an instruction manual for conflict negotiation that can be applied to any situation. Can you think of an example in your own life where these guidelines can be applied?

### Describe the problem situation:

- Who is involved in the problem situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What events led up to the problem situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Why is this situation a problem for me? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### What results do I want to see in this situation?

- What do I want to see changed in the problem situation? (Be specific) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What changes am I willing to make in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What changes would I like the other person(s) to make in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### What does the other person want to see changed in this situation?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How do I want to feel about myself after I negotiate these changes?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How do I want the other person to feel about me?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### In this problem situation, how do my wants clash with the other person's wants?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CONFLICT NEGOTIATION WORKSHEET (Continued)

What are some different ways that the problem can be negotiated?

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In order to find a compromise in this situation, I will (e.g., change my demand about....., delay my request for....., change my views about....., etc.):

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In order to find a compromise in this situation, the *other person* will (e.g., change my demand about....., delay my request for....., change my views about....., etc.):

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What are my "bottom lines" in this situation (wants I cannot give up)?

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What are the "bottom lines" in this situation for the *other person* (wants the other person cannot give up)?

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The other person(s) and I have decided upon the following compromises for this problem situation (be specific about what is expected from everyone involved):

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The compromise was successful/unsuccessful because:

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If the compromise was not successful, what are some ideas for re-negotiating?

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## The Cycle of Feeling Avoidance (Please review this information with your counselor)

By Kendall Evans

There is widespread belief that abuse derives from a sexist culture that teaches men to devalue and dominate women.

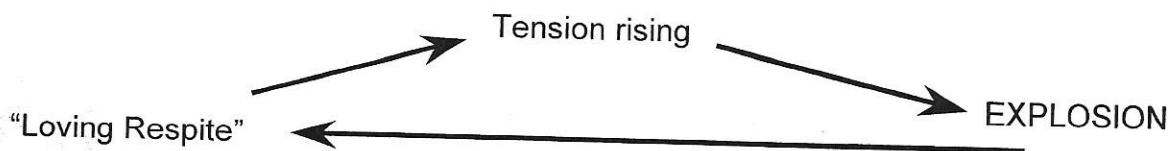
- This necessary but incomplete view leads to re-education or re-socialization approaches, and a very important emphasis on social change.
- Socio-educational techniques are a part of most batterer's intervention programs.
- This approach leaves out explaining lesbian domestic violence, and is weak at explaining gay domestic violence.

Some research has been done on the idea that character or behavior traits of individual people may influence abusive behavior, (Holzworth-Munroe and Stuart, 1994).

- No one profile of an abusive person has been found.
- Studies seem to be finding three sub-groups – family only abusers, generally violent and criminal abusers, and emotionally disturbed abusers.
- Additionally there have been studies looking at other correlates of abuse, such as alcohol and drug abuse, and a history of having been abused as a child or having seen their mother be abused, (Strauss and Gelles, 1992).

The model I am proposing is derived from asking how an abuser experiences Lenore Walker's Cycle of Violence. (See illustration below).

### LENORE WALKER'S CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



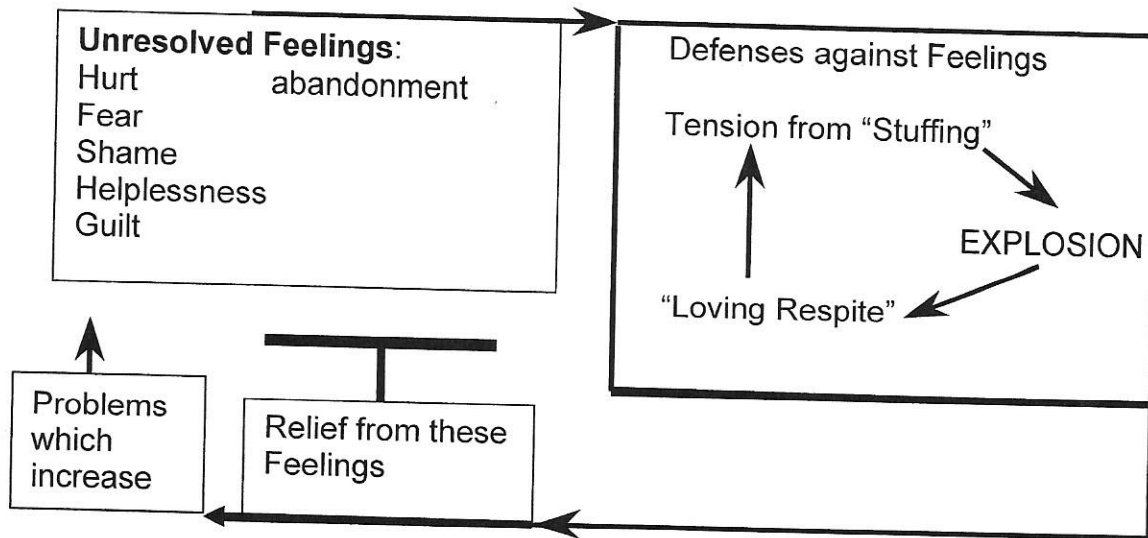
Lenore Walker's Cycle of Violence is very useful in helping survivors, but is less useful in helping abusers. It does not always match the abuser's experience very well, in part because the abuser's experience is distorted to defend the notion that they are the victim. Nor does the cycle of violence suggest treatment goals other than stress reduction and punishment for abusive behavior.

Research suggests that the majority of abusers were abused as children, and clinical experience suggests that the vast majority were abused.

- This suggests, and clinical experience confirms, that abusers have significant unresolved feelings of shame, fear, hurt, abandonment, helplessness, guilt and so on that they have had to cope with defensively all their lives.
- In the context of a society that teaches men in particular to "act-out" their feelings, that reservoir of unresolved feelings becomes a driving force in the dynamics of abusive behavior, and other forms of "acting-out" such as addictive behaviors.
- "The Cycle of Feeling Avoidance" describes how the "acting-out" covers up the feelings, and thereby gets reinforced.
- This reinforcement guarantees further "acting-out," which creates problems that have to be handled by further "acting-out."

The cycle of violence is one small part of a larger cycle that happens inside the abusive person. The abusive person stuffing their feelings causes the "tension" rising part of the cycle of violence. The "explosion" is the release of those feelings in behavior. The period of "loving respite" which follows the explosion is the period during which the abuser is focused on minimizing the damage of his explosion, especially the threat of abandonment or rejection.

## THE CYCLE OF FEELING AVOIDANCE



All three points along the cycle are ways that abusers cover up their own internal chaos: their own pain, hurt, shame, fear, loneliness, guilt, helplessness and so on.

The process occurs roughly in this kind of order.

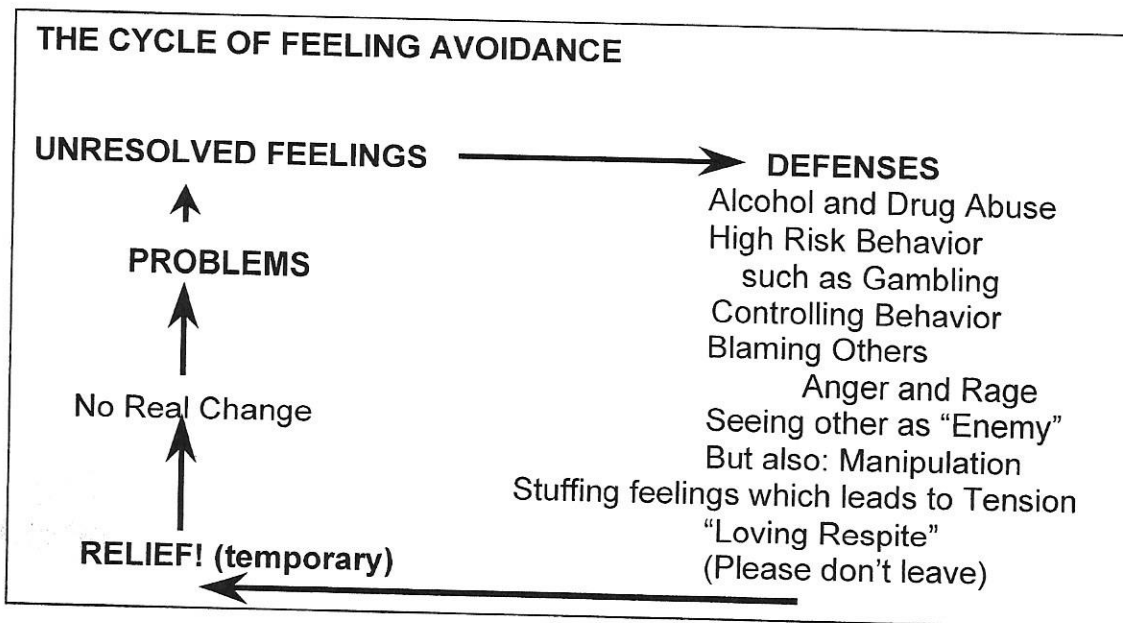
- A child is abused, and then neglected in that they are not healed or taught how to handle the damage of being abused.
- As the child grows up, they learn to stuff their feelings and act as if everything is "ok."
- If that does not cover the feelings well enough the child/adult turns to other ways of covering and avoiding experiencing feelings. Therapists call this "acting-out."

Anger by itself is a healthy emotion.

- Anger signals that something is wrong, and provides energy to do something about it. However, in the context of blaming outside agents for one's own distress, anger leads to perceiving the outside agent as the "enemy," even if the identified outside agent is a spouse or lover.
- Anger justifies attacking the identified outside agent in the name of survival, even when a neutral observer would assert the identified outside agent is innocent. The attack process itself brings relief, however temporary, from the feelings inside.
- If you are angry and attacking, you feel righteous and powerful, instead of hurt, afraid, helpless and/or ashamed. This relief reinforces the anger, the attack and the blaming and controlling behaviors.
- This reinforcement increases the likelihood that the chain of behaviors will repeat, even though the ultimate result is often increased feelings of hurt, fear and shame, because of the consequences of the attacking behavior.

Some people use alcohol and drugs for the same reason: to gain relief from their inside feelings.

- I believe that addictive and compulsive behaviors share this property and this cyclic pattern.
- Getting drunk, or high, or excited, or aroused, can all have the effect of changing one's consciousness; it covers up inside feelings.
- Working too hard, taking care of others too much, and even being ill can cover up the inside feelings.
- The idea that there is a common dynamic pattern for this wide range of behaviors helps explain why they are correlated.
- Individuals, who have not learned how to properly process feelings, and have a history of trauma or family dysfunction, have a variety of "acting-out" behaviors to choose from as tools to handle their unprocessed feelings. If one tool gets taken away, there are others.



This model can be seen in typical histories of abusive individuals.

- Raised in abusive families with significant dysfunction, abusive individuals seek partners who they expect to take away the pain and make them feel better. The greater the pain, the more likely the abuser is to have an "obsession" with their chosen.
- When they feel pain anyway, which is a normal part of life, abusive individuals blame their partner. They try to make the partner do things the abuser believes will solve the problem inside. "Just make my lunch, honey, and it will all be ok."
- Of course, it does not work, so the abuser has to escalate. Often the abuser has other ways to control their internal pain, such as drinking or working too hard, and sometimes the other behavior can become the scapegoat for unacceptable behavior in the abuser. "I was drunk. I'll never do it again." Or, "I do not know what came over me. I guess I have just been working too hard."
- Alternatively, the partner can be blamed for the acting out, "If you were better in bed, I would not have to cheat on you."

Ironically, it is abusers who are the most focused on their partners who are the most dangerous. The ones who are the most intensely romantic are most likely to kill.

- This is because their connection is based on covering up their need, not on actual caring for their partner.
- Their romantic behavior is a manipulation and part of their acting-out.

The "apology" itself is only an attempt to avoid abandonment, guilt and punishment, and does not result in real change.

- Acting-out becomes necessary again, and again, and so on. Efforts to change that do not address the core issue of covering up bad feelings are often not successful.
- Until the core hurt feelings from the core trauma are dealt with, there has to be ways of coping with them. Mere promises to change eventually break down.
- Stopping drinking or drugs does not necessarily stop violence. (It can result in increased violence if relapse prevention work is not done. The core of abuser treatment is very similar to relapse prevention. They both focus on coping appropriately with past and present feelings).

Another facet of acting-out behavior is that it "works" best if the person is not aware of doing it. Abusers do not easily become aware of what they are doing.

- In addition to the shame and fear of punishment is the problem that knowing that you are covering up feelings by attacking someone else reduces the relief you get from the attack.
- It is most effective to maintain that the target deserved the attack. Abusers therefore resist self-awareness for several reasons.

In summary, the "Cycle of Feeling Avoidance" puts together different facets of abuse to show how they connect, and it suggests treatment strategies that may be necessary in intervening in abuse.

- It illustrates why legal interventions are also treatment because they help abusers stop abusive behavior.
- It shows why abuse of others correlates with self-destructive behaviors such as addictions – and why both need treatment.
- The cycle suggests that more than one form of intervention is needed to break the cycle completely.
- The acting out has to stop, for feelings to become available for treatment.
- The best interventions to stop acting out tend to be cognitive behavioral and legal.
- For the reservoir of negative feelings that drive the acting out to be dealt with, methods of trauma treatment and psychotherapy need to be used.

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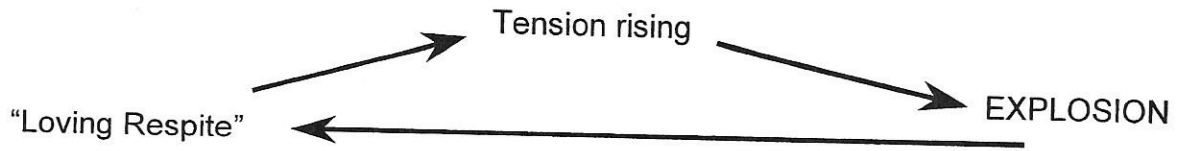
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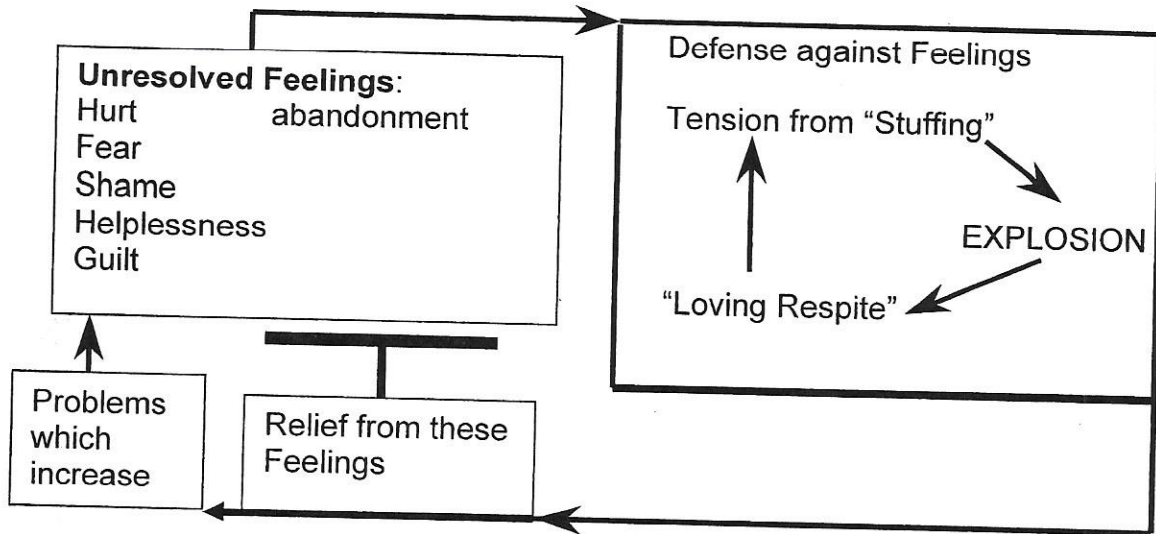
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# LENORE WALKER'S CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

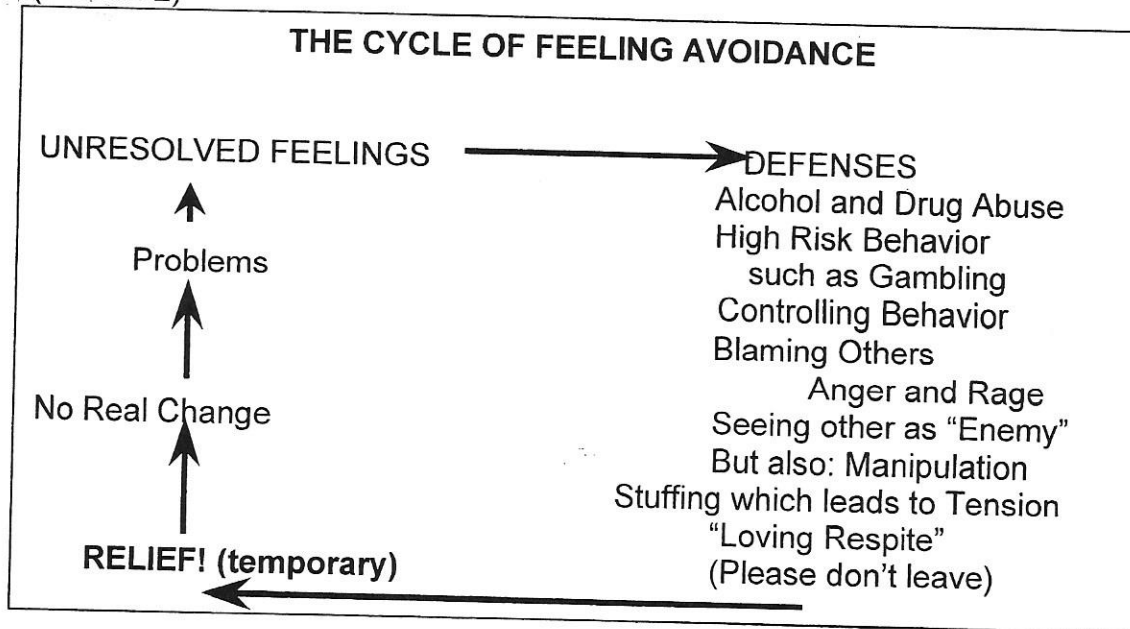


(version 1)

## THE CYCLE OF FEELING AVOIDANCE



(version 2)



## TIME OUT

Time out is a tool to interrupt the escalation of anger and to prevent further problems. You cannot be abusive, or say the wrong thing, if you are not there. Sometimes you can cool down more easily if you are not there. You take time out because you care about your partner - and about yourself. You take time out because you care about safety, about good communication, about the relationship.

Time out is simple: You say: "I NEED A TIME OUT" - and you leave.

- You go for a walk, listen to music or whatever else helps you calm down.
- You do not drink alcohol or use drugs. You do not drive.
- You do not go over all the reasons you are angry.
- Instead, you remind yourself of your love for your partner, and of your own self-control. You relax.
- Within an hour you come back.

You always come back.

- Time out is not a threat to abandon. You try to deal with whatever problem there was.
- If you are still too angry - if your partner still seems to be the "enemy" - then you take another time out.
- You have to return or "check-in" within an hour so that your partner knows what is happening, but you do not try to talk while you are still angry.
- You may have to schedule a discussion of the problem for a later time that both of you agree on.

Time out is hard.

- It feels artificial. It requires self-control while you are upset.
- If it is used as a weapon, it will not work at all.
- It requires ignoring who is "wrong," and focusing on safety first.
- Often people will ask "Why do I have to be the one to leave?" The answer is simple. You leave because you are bigger. Because it is your responsibility to make the situation safe, whatever the cost.
- Because if you argue about who is to leave, time out will not happen, and problems will. It is not because you are wrong or less important.

Other people complain their partner will stop them from leaving.

- It is important to talk this over with your partner first, so that they know that you will return.
- It will help them let you go.

If you are committed to safety first, time out will work.

- If your pride is more important, it may not.
- If you use it, time out will give you a way to prevent problems.
- With it, you can be proud of being safe.



## TIME OUT CONTRACT

Whenever I notice that my anger or my partner's anger is starting to get to an uncomfortable level, I will do the following:

### **Step 1**

Give an agreed upon, non-blaming signal for time out.

-OR- Say a statement such as:

"I need some time to cool off, so I'm taking a time out."

"I don't want us to get into a big fight, so I'm going to take a time out."

"I don't want to lose my temper so I am going to take a time out."

### **Step 2**

I will leave the area immediately.

I will do something to calm down, like take a walk, exercise, deep breath, listen to music, or I will do \_\_\_\_\_.

I will not think about ways to get even with my partner.

I will not do anything that increases my anger level.

I will not use drugs or alcohol.

I will not drive or do any activities that could be dangerous to others or myself.

### **Step 3**

The time out will be \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in length (usually no less than an hour).

### **Step 4**

When I return from time out, I agree to check with my partner to see if she/he is ready to talk or if we need to extend time out.

If we both feel ready to talk, I agree to accept responsibility for my actions and work with my partner to find an acceptable resolution to the problem.

I will use fair fighting techniques.

### **Step 5**

Whenever my partner wants a time out, I will respect his/her needs and agree not to prevent the time out in any way.

Signature of both partners: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## IS IT LOVE.... OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

When you love someone, it is a safe, caring experience where two people freely give and receive. But sometimes "love" can be confused and misused to hurt others, to manipulate and control them and to abuse them emotionally.

**Read the 3 stories below and then circle the TRUE statements about each story.**

- 1. A man telephones and pages his wife dozens of times each day. He demands to know her whereabouts every minute of the day. The man says he wants to prevent his wife from cheating because *he loves her* and couldn't handle losing her to another man.**
  - A. The man is confusing excessive jealousy and possessiveness with love. Too much attention is not love – it is control. The man is trying to control his wife – but love does not try to control another person.
  - B. The wife should save the receipts and other pieces of evidence to prove her whereabouts at all times. This will prevent her from cheating and will help to build trust with her husband.
  - C. If the wife is so untrustworthy the man should forbid her to have friends or see family members who might influence her to do wrong. If the wife truly loved him, she wouldn't mind doing what her husband wants.
  - D. Love is built on trust. If the wife is really so untrustworthy that the husband must try to control every minute of her life then she does not yet have the relationship skills to handle a committed relationship.
  
- 2. A man tells his girlfriend, "I lied to you because I love you and didn't want you to get hurt. Get over it ... I have let it go."**
  - A. The girlfriend deserves to hear the truth from her boyfriend – no matter how bad the truth may be. Lying ends up hurting the partner much more than telling the truth in the first place.
  - B. If the man is lying to his partner, he is probably covering up something. The man is only fooling himself if he thinks he's lying to protect his partner. You don't lie to someone you love and respect.
  - C. The girlfriend should trust that her boyfriend lied because he was looking out for her best interests. She should just "get over it" because he has put it behind him.
  
- 3. A man says to his wife, "I was just kidding when I said you looked like a beached whale in that dress. I love you and would never hurt your feelings."**
  - A. The wife is probably being too sensitive and is over-reacting.
  - B. The man is being passive aggressive by denying that he was using sarcasm to hurt his wife's feelings.
  - C. The man is showing his love for his wife by teasing her.
  - D. Emotional abuse is often aimed at the areas in which we are the most sensitive.

(Answers: 1. A & D; 2. A & B; 3. B & D)

## Abusive Behavior Checklist

### A PERSON IS ACTING ABUSIVELY IF HE OR SHE:

- Knowingly hurts the other to win or punish** – physically or emotionally.  
Hurting can include:
  - Any attack or threat of attack, including non-verbal,
  - Destruction of property as revenge or as threat,
  - Name-calling, insults and/or sarcasm,
  - Withholding love, attention, or affection,
  - Interfering with contact or relationship with children, (except when protecting the children),
  - Withholding money or appropriate cooperation,
  - Alternatively, any other intentional or repeatedly careless behavior that hurts.
- Always has to win an argument** – has to be RIGHT. Never says, "I'm sorry."
- When hurt or disappointed**, has to attack or get revenge.
- Ignores the other person's needs** (even during an argument).
- Will not let the other's requests or complaints** influence their behavior.
- Blames everything on the other person**, or on other outside influences. Usually has an excuse or reason he or she is not really responsible.
- Can only see his or her own point of view**, and acts as if any other point of view is stupid, clearly wrong, or immoral. Takes most things personally.
- Reacts to disagreement** as if the other person is attacking or being defective for not agreeing.
- Acts as if he or she believes that he or she **has the right to tell the other** what to do, where to go, how to think, what to wear, who to be with and so on.
- Acts as if he or she believes that **cooperation and listening mean obedience**.
- Resists or **punishes physical separation** or **differences of opinion**.
- Expects to be catered to without having to give back.
- Shows severe disrespect or contempt** with behavior or language. (Even during an argument, contempt is never ok).
- Sees everything in "**either-or**" or "**all-or-nothing**" terms.

## COMMON COERCIVE/ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS CHECKLIST

- Physical violence
- The threat of physical violence
- Verbal attacks, insults, name-calling, sarcasm, exaggerated or frequent criticism, accusations, and so on
- Emotional attacks such as ignoring or stonewalling, being nice to others but not the partner, or "gaslighting"
- Sexual abuse (including the threat of physical violence if the partner does not cooperate with sexual behavior the partner does not want)
- Sexual insults, exaggerated jealousy
- Physical intimidation through violence against property
- Violence and abuse against pets
- Violence and abuse against children, threats to hurt the children
- The "Look"
- Lecturing
- Threats to harm self
- Making one's partner responsible for one's own welfare, feelings and so on
- Punishing partner for not "obeying". Refusing or failing to cooperate
- Keeping partner dependent / Preventing partner from independent activities such as getting a job or going to school
- Restricting the partner's access to money and other resources
- Isolating the partner from others such as family and friends
- Using direct and indirect insults, criticism, and mind games to undermine the partner's confidence and self-respect
- Making partner feel like a bad parent or partner
- Reporting or threatening to report to DCFS, welfare, Police or INS (except in real self-defense or in defense of a child or children)
- Interfering or threatening to interfere with a parent-child relationship when the child is not endangered by partner, turning child against partner
- Using legal system to distract, coerce and punish partner (e.g., through custody battles)
- Controlling partner's behavior by asserting entitlement (due to gender, age, religion, culture, jealousy, income, illness and so on)

## 7 STEPS TO SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE ARGUMENTS

1. NO ATTACKS - PHYSICAL OR VERBAL
2. FOCUS ON FEELINGS & USE "I STATEMENTS
3. LISTEN RESPECTFULLY AND ACTIVELY TO THE OTHER'S FEELINGS AND IDEAS
4. STAY ON ONE TOPIC OR ONE PROBLEM AT A TIME; STAY IN THE PRESENT (DON'T BRING UP PAST ARGUMENTS
5. CONTROL YOURSELF -  
NOT THE OTHER PERSON  
NOT THE SITUATION
6. LOOK FOR RESOLUTION -  
NOT FOR WHO IS RIGHT  
NOT TO GET EVEN
7. MAKE NO ONE THE ENEMY

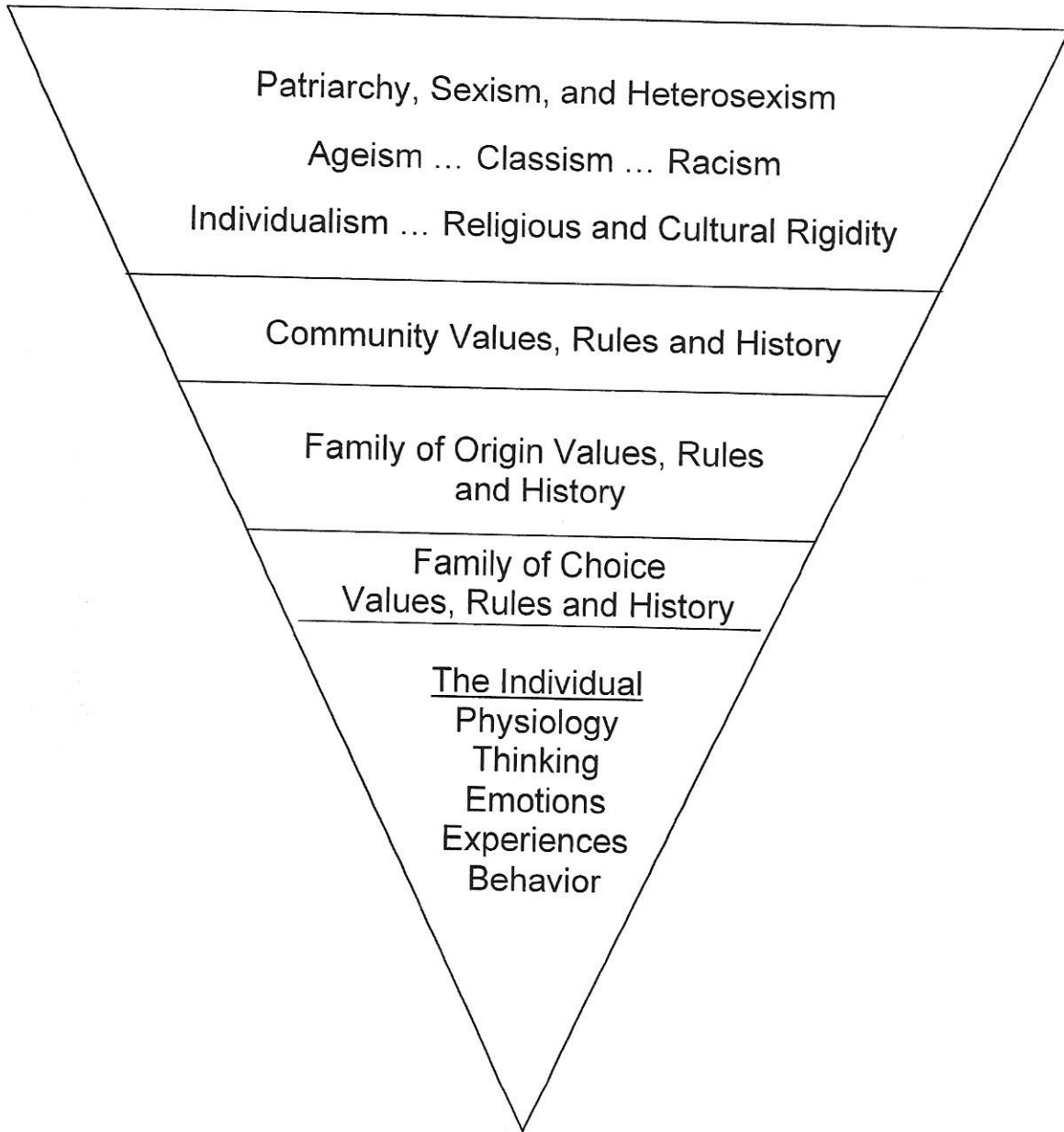
## TRUE OR FALSE? 7 COMMON BELIEFS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ANGER

READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS AND DECIDE IF THEY ARE TRUE OR FALSE. BE SURE TO DISCUSS YOUR ANSWERS WITH YOUR COUNSELOR.

- **ANGER CAUSES VIOLENCE.**  
FALSE! Anger does not “cause” violence. Violence is just one of many responses to anger. There are many ways to deal with anger besides violence. You can ignore a situation, you can talk or write about your feelings, and you can exercise, to name a few.
- **THROWING OR BREAKING OBJECTS IS NOT ABUSIVE – AS LONG AS I DON’T HIT ANYONE.**  
FALSE! Throwing or breaking objects is a sign that your anger is out of control. It is emotionally abusive and very scary for others to see you throw or break objects. The most effective way to express anger is to *respond* to a situation. How you show anger is a deliberate choice that you make – not a *reaction where* your emotions control you.
- **WHEN MY PARTNER DOESN’T LISTEN TO ME, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO BE VIOLENT.**  
FALSE! If your partner is not “listening” or agreeing with you, there are many choices that you have besides violence. You can see a counselor, you can talk to a priest, rabbi or minister, you can write a letter expressing your wants and needs, you can ask for advice from a friend, you can read books about relationships, and you can take a time-out. You can also leave the relationship.
- **IT IS OKAY FOR MEN TO BE VIOLENT BECAUSE THEY DON’T EXPRESS FEELINGS AS WELL AS WOMEN.**  
FALSE! This is a very negative view of men – it implies that men are so emotional that they cannot control their feelings so they become violent.
- **IT IS THE MAN’S RIGHT TO CHOOSE HIS PARTNER’S FRIENDS.**  
FALSE! This belief is an insult to women as it implies that they cannot be trusted to choose their own friends. Adults have the right to make their own friends. If your partner’s behavior is so untrustworthy, then you don’t have a real relationship.
- **EXTREME JEALOUSY AND POSSESSIVENESS ARE SIGNS OF LOVE.**  
FALSE! Love is built on mutual trust and respect. If you don’t trust your partner and feel that you have to monitor her every move, then you don’t really have a relationship.
- **IF A MAN DOESN’T CONTROL A WOMAN IN A RELATIONSHIP, THEN SHE WILL CONTROL HIM.**  
FALSE! Healthy relationships are about *sharing power and control* and negotiating differences of opinion.

**SOME COMMON CAUSAL INFLUENCES LEADING TO PARTNER ABUSE  
AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE\***

**The Causal Pyramid – With the Final Responsible Agent:  
The Individual**



**ABUSE**

## WHY BE AGGRESSIVE OR PASSIVE WHEN YOU CAN BE ASSERTIVE?

Some people think that the only way to get their wants and needs met is to use aggressive methods. They are aggressive with complete strangers, with other drivers on the road, with their co-workers, friends and family members. Being aggressive can sometimes get you what you want, but at what cost? Aggression alienates people and hurts them. It can also be a trigger for others to react with even stronger aggression, making a situation dangerous.

Everyone has feelings - but deciding what to do with them is the challenge. Often it is best to "pick and choose our battles carefully," so we thoughtfully decide not to verbalize our feelings in certain situations. But if we make being passive and non-assertive a lifestyle, we get ourselves and those around us quite frustrated.

In contrast to being aggressive or passive, being assertive usually gets the job done without hurting anyone. And you keep your self-respect and dignity.

Consider the following information about these three styles of communication.  
How do they apply to your own life?

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### What is assertiveness?

It expresses your own wants and needs in a way that does not violate the rights of others or intimidates them. It is honest, straightforward and expressive.

### What is aggression?

It expresses one's own needs at the expense of others. Includes hostile outbursts or angry overreaction. Uses methods such as getting even, putting the other person down, shaming and humiliating. An aggressive person decides his/her way is the only way.

### What is non-assertiveness?

Refusal to verbalize one's needs and wants; Is emotionally dishonest; Allows others to cross important boundaries and infringe upon their rights. Can withhold their opinions to hurt and manipulate others.

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### What does assertiveness look like?

You appear confident and show respect for yourself and the other person. You have direct eye contact with the other person, but you are not staring at them.

### What does aggression look like?

You appear very angry, out of control: Can sound self-righteous; Feels superior at the time but later feels guilty and bad about one's self. Often glares at the other person to intimidate them. May have clenched fists. Uses a sarcastic or haughty tone of voice.

### What does non-assertiveness look like?

You seem anxious, weak, hurt or sad. Your body slumps and you appear to be a victim. Can be teary, whining, or mumbling. Speaks quietly or in a monotone voice.

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What does **assertiveness** sound like?

Uses direct statements, e.g., "I think...", "I feel..." Shows empathy and a willingness to understand the other person's point of view (even though you may disagree with it), e.g., "What do you see in this situation? What are your ideas about solving this problem?"

What does **aggression** sound like?

Uses threats, name-calling, judgmental statements, accusations, and put-downs. Interrupts, intimidates and tries to control the conversation, thoughts and emotions of the other person. Uses manipulative statements, e.g., "If you don't do as I say...", "Are you crazy...", "You better listen to me or I will..."

What does **non-assertiveness** sound like?

Uses vague or rambling statements, e.g., "I wonder if I could...", "Maybe you could, uh, or you could, well..." The other person is confused and may get impatient or angry.

What does being **assertive** accomplish?

You may or may not achieve your desired goals. But you will feel good about yourself and the other person will feel good, too. You maintain self-respect and self-confidence.

What does being **aggressive** accomplish?

You achieve your goals by hurting the other person – possibly destroying the relationship. You lose self-respect and may feel guilty and out of control.

What does being **non-assertive** accomplish?

You do not get your needs or wants met. May feel resentful and angry because the other person does not give you the response you desire. Avoids uncomfortable situations and conflict. May feel depressed over time and misunderstood by others.

Give an example of when you used **aggression** in a situation. How could you have handled the same situation in an **assertive** way? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Give an example of when you used **non-assertiveness** in a situation. How could you have handled the same situation in an **assertive** way? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Give an example of when you used **assertiveness** in a situation. What was the outcome and how did you feel about yourself? \_\_\_\_\_  
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