

GROUP #3  
UNDERSTANDING ANGER AND VIOLENCE

Differentiating Anger from Violence:

Discussion: What is the difference between anger and violence?

Some people think that they are identical. However, anger is an emotion. Violence is a behavior. Anger is something that is impossible to avoid. It is a normal and natural emotion. However, it is up to the individual how he acts once he gets angry. Violence is only one outlet for anger. There are numerous ways that one can act when he gets angry. It doesn't have to turn to violence.

Also, with violence come consequences. Some of these consequences may be losing trust, losing a relationship, getting arrested, having a criminal record, maybe losing a job and feeling remorseful.

Many of us were raised to think that there is something wrong with anger and that we should hold it back at all cost. Holding back anger is also not healthy. It can be like a pressure cooker waiting to explode.

The best way to deal with anger is to express it in a direct, non-intimidating manner. That way it doesn't have a chance to build-up.

Discussion: Are there any questions or comments? Did any of you think that anger and violence have to go together? Why? What has your violence cost you?

Recognizing Anger

Sometimes what we talk about is easier said than done. The first thing that we have to learn in order to control anger is how to recognize it. There are stages that we all go through and sometimes we don't even realize them. For most of us, our bodies know that we are angry long before our minds realize it.

Exercise: Everyone write down at least three things that they begin to feel when they start to get angry.

Example: I can feel my heart start to pound.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The following is a partial list of what different people experience before they get angry:(Riverside: 1995)

1. Some become loud or verbally abusive or start to blame or become sarcastic.
2. Some may feel tension in their chest, arms, legs, forehead, face, back of the neck or in the stomach.
3. Some feel a reduced ability to concentrate and may get headaches or even experience a blackout.
4. Some feel that it is harder to hear.
5. Some may experience difficulty with vision.
6. Some people get cold, while others begin to sweat.
7. Some may break out in a rash.
8. Some may begin to breathe more heavily.

9. Some may feel their heart start to pound.
10. Some may feel acid building up in their stomachs, or feel like they have knots in them.

Exercise: Everyone write down at least three ways that they behave when they are feeling angry.

Example: I become verbally abusive.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The following is a partial list of how people behave when they feel angry:

1. Some have affairs.
2. Some force, or have a lot of sex in order to avoid emotional intimacy.
3. Some have difficulty sleeping or may sleep more than normal.
4. Some use alcohol or drugs.
5. Some use the "cold shoulder".
6. Some become verbally abusive and blame
7. Some may take their anger out on other people (i.e. while driving).

Levels of Anger:

The problem with anger is that at lower levels it is hard to recognize. Most people don't recognize lower levels of anger and consider them more as being a sense of annoyance or irritation. Therefore, we "stuff" them or ignore them altogether. Eventually, however, they begin to build-up and often explode for stupid reasons.

Discussion: Can anyone relate to a time when they exploded for a really stupid reason?

The key to not exploding foolishly is to learn to understand the different levels that anger can have. Now let's define anger on a scale from 1 to 10.

Low Level Anger (1-3) Give More Examples

- |           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Irritated | 1. |
| Annoyed   | 2. |
| Bothered  | 3. |

Middle Level Anger (4-6) Give More Examples

- |              |    |
|--------------|----|
| Angry        | 1. |
| "Pissed-off" | 2. |
| Upset        | 3. |

High Level Anger (7-10) Give More Examples

- |           |    |
|-----------|----|
| Furious   | 1. |
| Enraged   | 2. |
| Explosive | 3. |

It is more important to realize when we are feeling low level anger so that it does not continue to build-up. Freud said that anger is like smoke going up a chimney. If the chimney is blocked the smoke will get released in unintended places. Don't forget, it took a long time for us to learn our behaviors and they will not disappear overnight. However, the more we practice to change them, the easier it will get.

#### Checklist for Hidden Anger:

Below is a checklist for hidden anger.

Procrastination in the completion of imposed tasks

Habitual lateness

Admiration for sadistic or ironic behavior

Sarcasm, cynicism or flippancy in conversation

Frequent sighing

Over-controlled monotone speaking voice

Difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty sleeping through the night

Smiling while hurting

Frequent disturbing or frightening dreams

Boredom, apathy, loss of interest in things that used to be a source of enjoyment

Slowing down of bodily movements

Getting tired more easily than usual

Sleeping more than usual

Waking up tired rather than refreshed

Clenched jaw

Fist clenching

Grinding of teeth

Chronically stiff neck or shoulders

Chronic depression (Depression is anger turned inward.)

Stomach ulcers

Discussion: How many of the above do you experience much of the time?

#### Acknowledging How You Feel:

This anger is yours. Another person may have said or done something that pushed one of your buttons but the anger is yours and so are the feelings you have that are triggered. You cannot make someone else responsible for your actions. No one can make you do anything. Accepting the anger as your own is easier if you forget the notion that your feelings need to be justified. They don't and often they can't.

The words "should" and "feel" are two words that do not belong together. No one should feel a certain way. In fact it can be harmful to worry about what you think that your feelings should be. It only takes away from finding out what you actually feel. Once you find out how you feel then you can begin to take actions that are in your own best interest. Remember: There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Discussion: Are there any questions or comments?

### Releasing the Anger:

Once we realize that we are becoming or are angry, we must learn to release it. The idea here is to ACT, NOT REACT. Once we accept our anger, it is up to us to decide when, where and how to release it. Remember, only you are in control of yourself. Below are some ways to control anger properly:

Use "I statements."

Wrong: You make me mad when you don't call.

Right: I feel bad when you don't call.

(Do you see how the Right way takes the blame away and is less confrontational?)

Take a time-out.

Be direct (Don't stuff-it. It only leads towards an explosion)

If someone did something to hurt or annoy you, don't attack the person. Instead, directly let them know how you feel. After all, we've all done stupid things, but that doesn't make us stupid.

Other ways to handle and release anger will be discussed as we continue.

Homework: Complete your Anger Journal for next week.

GROUP #4  
THREE WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

Stuffing It:

1. Stuffing it - Usually begins with a negative "I statements" then is followed by:  
Denial - I'm not angry or upset.  
Sympathy - He really doesn't mean to hurt me.  
Thoughts of low self - esteem. Boy, I really messed up again.  
Doubting yourself - I really don't have a right to get angry.  
Intellectualizing - If she thinks that she is going to get me angry she is wrong.  
The problem with stuffing it is that the person usually becomes withdrawn or depressed. Eventually everything that is being stuffed builds up like a pressure cooker and explodes. Sometimes the explosion is at an unintended person or in an inopportune place. Stuffers often displace their anger at unintended victims. Have you ever been driving down the highway, had someone cut you off and then go berserk? Maybe your boss upsets you the day before and the poor person who cut you off is the one you take it out on.

Discussion: Is there a time that you recall doing this? Everyone give an example.

Escalating It:

2. Escalating it - Usually begins with "You Statements" or "You Questions."  
For Example:  
"You never do anything around here."  
"You are a b\*\*\*\*."  
"Why are you so stupid?"  
The problem with escalating is that it is spiraling anger that keeps going upwards until there is an explosion. Once you explode, that is it. You can't take it back. Verbal escalating may scare the other person and cause them to fear you. Verbal escalating also may build to physical escalating in which you may wind up in jail for hurting someone or worse.

Discussion: Is there a time you recall doing this? Everyone give an example.

Directing It:

3. Directing it - This is the simplest form of communicating, but for some reason it is the hardest for many people to do. This may be because as children we were taught to stuff it or escalate it.

Discussion: Do any of you recall watching Rambo take it and take it until finally he blows something up? One of the reasons that we stuff it and escalate it is that many of us were raised to think that showing emotion is bad. For example, did one of your parents ever say to you that if someone hits you, don't cry about it. Just hit him back.

Directing it begins with a positive "I statement".

For example:

"I feel angry that ..."

"I would like it if ..."

People who learn to communicate their anger in a direct way get their point across more effectively, feel closer to the person with whom they are communicating and, generally, are more respected.

Discussion: Are there any questions or comments?

Exercise: Everyone write down at least two examples of how they stuffed it or escalated it and how they could have been more direct.

- 1.
- 2.

Homework: Complete your Anger Journal for next week.

## GROUP #5 SELF-TALK

### Positive Self-Talk vs. Negative Self-Talk:

Positive self-talk is a good way for escalators and stuffers to learn to control themselves. Practicing it will teach a person how to control his anger and not let it run away from him. It will de-escalate and reduce one's anger. Negative self-talk, on the other hand escalates and prolongs a person's anger.

First of all, self-talk is what we say either out loud or silently to ourselves. If we learn to listen to what we say, we will learn if we are using positive or negative self-talk.

Discussion: Has anyone ever said to you: "Hey, stop yelling at me, I can hear you?" Lots of people don't even realize when they are yelling. Chances are that when you are yelling at someone because you are angry, you don't even realize it. Can any of you think of a time when this happened?

### An example of negative self-talk is:

I hate him. He's probably out cheating on me. He doesn't love me. He doesn't care what I think. He only thinks of himself.

Discussion: How do you feel when you read this out loud? Chances are that you are beginning to get yourself upset. How would you feel if you were already angry? What might you do?

This is also an example of directing your anger. Once you have taken a time-out and given yourself a chance to calm down maybe you will see things differently or maybe you will act differently. (Remember: Act. Don't React.)

Exercise: If we prepare ahead for when we might get angry, it will be easier for us to think of ways to control it when it happens. Everyone write down three things that you can do when you get angry. We will call these time-out activities (examples include: running, writing in a journal, talking to someone, hitting a punching bag, taking deep breaths, etc.).

Example: running, writing in a journal, hitting a punching bag, taking deep breaths.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### I-Statements:

Before we express our feelings of disapproval to our partners, children or anyone else, let us first take a minute to decide whether or not it is actually the behavior that is upsetting us. Perhaps it is the consequences that are produced by the behavior. If the behavior does not produce certain consequences would we really get upset? For example: Let's imagine that your partner is playing the stereo very loudly. At first it doesn't bother you. Then the phone rings and you can't hear

what is being said on the other end. So it really isn't the loud music that is bothering you. It's the consequence that is upsetting.

It is important that we focus on the consequences. Therefore, when we communicate using I-Statements, it is important that we construct them properly. First describe the behavior and how it is interfering with you: "When you play the stereo really loudly..." Secondly, state the feeling what the consequence of the behavior produces for you: "...I feel upset..." Lastly state the consequence: "...That I can't hear."

Exercise: Can any of you think of something that upset you at a certain time that was not directly due to a behavior but rather the consequences that the behavior caused? Everyone write down at least two times that this has happened in your past and how you would phrase it differently using an I-Statement.

- 1.
- 2.

One important thing to remember is that I-Statements focus on you and not on the other person. Also, they do not blame. You-Statements place blame and serve to criticize. They are verbally assaultive. With practice, I-Statements will help you to become a much more effective speaker.

Homework: Complete your Anger Journal for this week.

GROUP #6  
RECOGNIZING ANGER

Stages of Anger:

1. Unaware Stage- In this stage the person is basically unaware that he is even angry. The person's level of anger and his awareness of it, are influenced by his level of stress and how he has have coped with negative situations in the past.
2. Thinking Stage- This is the stage where the person realizes that he is angry. He often will spend time thinking about whatever it is that is making him angry while it continues to build and build. The person often will blame others for making him angry and may start to do whatever it was he used to do in the past regarding how he handled his anger. The more time that a person spends in this stage without releasing anger will serve only to make the explosion greater later on. Learning to control your thoughts is the only way to control this stage.
3. Verbal Stage: This is the stage where the nasty name calling happens. Eventually it leads to yelling. Usually a person who has been stuffing negative thoughts for a period of time lets them out. The other person then takes it as a personal attack and defends himself by counterattacking. At this point the yelling begins. Learning to refuse the initial attack or the counterattack, taking a time-out or by using good communication techniques with I-Statements are the only ways to control this stage. (Remember: Don't blame or name call.)
4. Physical Stage: This is the point of no return. It is where the explosion takes place. This is characterized by physical violence. At least one or both of you have lost control of your behavior. There may be throwing objects, breaking valuables, hitting, holding to restrain or using weapons. (Women usually use objects while men usually use their hands.)

Discussion: Does this sound familiar to any of you?  
If so, where do you think you learned this?

Cycle of Violence: (Walker: 1980)

1. Growing Tension:
  - Pressure from others (i.e. boss, bill collectors)
  - Abuser begins to threaten and belittle victims and assaults partner's self-esteem
  - Abuser monitors and controls partner
  - Jealousy escalates (i.e. accuses partner of sleeping around)
  - Abuser blames others for their behavior
2. Explosion of Violence:
  - Physical and/or sexual abuse (i.e.. forced sex after abuse)
  - Increased verbal abuse
  - Threats of killing partner, children, parents, self)
  - Abuser destroys victim's belongings
3. Honeymoon Phase:
  - Abuser promises to get counseling
  - Abuser promises to stop drinking / doing drugs
  - Abuser apologizes

Abuser buys gifts

Once the cycle begins, it repeats itself faster and faster each time. That is, the "growing tension" stage doesn't last as long and leads into the "explosion of violence" stage much faster and much worse. In addition, the "honeymoon" stage becomes shorter and shorter. After all if an abuser realized that his partner isn't going to leave him, then he eventually doesn't waste time on making up. The reason has to do with boundaries. Often children test boundaries. They try to see just how far they can get and this is also true of people who are abusers. If an abuser is verbally assaultive and gets away with it, they may slap. If they get away with that then they may hit, and so on and so on.

(Riverside: 1995)

Discussion: Be honest. Can any of you relate to this scenario? Let's go around the room and discuss it.

How the Cycle of Violence Affects Children:

Some children become parentified. For example, a boy might feel that it is now his responsibility to protect his mother and be the adult. Often children will begin to use drugs or run away as a way of escaping.

Some children become hurt trying to break up the fighting.

Some children become depressed.

Some children may never be able to trust either the abuser or the victim again.

May children will grow up to follow and repeat the cycle of violence.

When a parent says, "I am staying for the kids" what is actually happening is that the children are taught that violence is normal and a part of a relationship. If a child sees a parent get hit, and that parent stays with the abuser, the child will learn that it is acceptable to stay and take the abuse.

Discussion: How would any of you feel if you saw your child decide to stay with a person who abuses them?

Homework: Complete your Anger Journal for next week.