# Your Recovery Workbook:

# Managing Anger

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### YOUR RECOVERY WORKBOOK: MANAGING ANGER

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### A Managing Anger Story:

A young man who had a wife and children was usually angry when he came home from work. He shouted at them, even for little things like spilling milk on the table. He was having trouble sleeping, but he didn't know how much his anger affected him until he went to the doctor. He found out that his high blood pressure and heart disease were worse because of his anger problems. He wanted to learn how to control his anger for his health and so his family could be happier. He learned how to "simmer down" and when he felt his bad temper starting to rise, he made himself stop before he over-reacted. He knew that his anger was coming more from frustration and stress than from what had happened. He took some deep breaths and tried to relax before coming back to discuss the problems that came up at home and at work. He and his family felt much better after he learned to manage his anger.

## 1. INTRODUCTION



- In this workbook, you can learn more about anger and how to recognize and take charge of it.
- Anger affects you until it is expressed. After that, you usually feel better.
- By noticing your anger and talking it out more calmly, anxiety and depression may also decrease.
- Negative thinking and emotional "triggers" can affect your response to situations and people in your life.
- It is possible to learn how to think and do things differently so your emotions don't control you.
- Take an active role in managing your anger. Find coping skills that work for you.
- By controlling your temper, relationships can be healthier and safer.
- If you find it hard to manage your anger, the first thing you need to do is to be honest with yourself and admit that you have a problem.
- Then, you can make a plan to deal with it.
- Your response to anger is up to you.
- This workbook will be your guide as you learn to avoid hostility and angry outbursts while still expressing your anger.
- Contact your doctor or health care provider for any questions you have.

## "Don't hold on to anger, hurt or pain. They steal your energy and keep you from love." – Leo Buscaglia



#### What is anger? (Mark the statements below that you agree with)

- □ An unpleasant emotion ranging in intensity from being irritated or annoyed to having fury or rage. ~ T. W. Smith
- An acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured. ~ Mark Twain
- □ A normal, commonly experienced emotion.
- □ A sudden, violent displeasure
- $\Box$  A force that can be destructive if we don't know how to control it.

#### What happens when you are angry? (Mark the symptoms that you have had)

When there is a real threat, or if you believe there is a threat, your body produces a hormone called adrenaline to prepare for fighting or running away. Your:

- □ Heart races or pounds. Fists or teeth may be clenched.
- □ Breathing is quicker and not as deep. You may feel tense all over.
- □ Body can be shaky, hot, or sweaty, with a churning stomach.
- □ Conversation changes to arguing or attacking.
- □ Posture and behaviors may become aggressive, and voice may be loud.
- □ Facial expression may be angry or staring.
- □ Family feels hurt and you feel guilty afterwards.

Adapted from Vivyan, C. (2009). Anger. Retrieved from https://www.ringling.edu/fileadmin/content/ counseling/pdf/qtanger.pdf

### IT'S WISE TO DIRECT YOUR ANGER TOWARD PROBLEMS, NOT PEOPLE. ~ WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

### TAKE THE ANGER QUIZ



Copy or bring these worksheet pages to discuss your anger issues with your health care team. Make a plan if you need help. (Write True or False before each question below)

- \_\_\_\_\_I don't show my anger all the time, but when I do, I get really mad.
- \_\_\_\_\_Waiting in line or waiting for other people really annoys me.
- \_\_\_\_\_I fly off the handle easily.
- \_\_\_\_\_I find myself in heated arguments with people I am close to.
- \_\_\_\_\_I lie awake at night thinking about things that upset me during the day.
- \_\_\_\_\_I don't say anything when I'm upset. I think about what I should have done.
- \_\_\_\_\_I find it hard to forgive someone who has done me wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_I get angry with myself when I lose control of my feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_People really irritate me when they don't act like they should.
- \_\_\_\_\_If I get really upset, I tend to feel sick later (weak, headache, stomach ache).
- \_\_\_\_\_People I trusted have let me down, so I feel angry and betrayed.
- \_\_\_\_\_When things don't go my way, I'm more likely to get depressed, not angry.
- \_\_\_\_\_When I am frustrated, I can't put it out of my mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_After arguing or getting angry with someone, I regret it.
- \_\_\_\_\_I have had trouble in school or on the job because of my temper.
- \_\_\_\_\_Some people are afraid of my bad temper. I tend to want to get even.
- \_\_\_\_\_When I get angry or hurt, eating or using alcohol or drugs comforts me.
- \_\_\_\_I have gotten so angry that I hit other people or broke things.
- \_\_\_\_\_At times, I have felt angry enough to hurt someone badly.
  - \_\_\_\_Sometimes I feel so hurt and alone that I feel like committing suicide.
- \_\_\_\_\_I know I have problems and need help learning to control my temper.



Score 1 point for ea	ach Tr	ue answer, and 0 points
for False answers.	Write	your score in this box

For a score of 0-2, you may not recognize your anger, or you may be denying it.
Anger can be healthy if you express it without hurting other people. Letting out
your anger can sometimes prevent stress-related illnesses and high risk behaviors.

- If you had 3-5 points, you are on track with managing your anger in a healthy way.
- □ If your score is 6-7, you have some control of your anger, but learning some ways to manage your anger could help.
- □ If you scored 8-10, your anger is enough to make people feel scared or afraid of you. Your relationships are probably stressed because of your anger.
- If you scored 10 or more, your anger is a big problem and is probably damaging your relationships. You need to change and gain more control over your anger, stress, and anxiety that leads to trouble in your life.
- □ If you answered true to any of the last 4 questions, then your situation is dangerous and you should seek professional counseling right away.

The Anger Quiz was modified from a quiz by an unknown author. Please send a message if you know who should be given credit for it.

### FOR EVERY MINUTE YOU ARE ANGRY YOU LOSE SIXTY SECONDS OF HAPPINESS... ~ RALPH WALDO EMERSON



Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about your anger:



Sometimes, it's hard to know what is really causing your anger. Keep track of your anger to help you gain insight into how and why your anger shows up.

Write down your anger patterns for a week. Use another paper if you need more room to write.

Daily Anger Log:	What made you	How did you	How did you feel
	angry?	respond?	after?
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

After keeping track for a week, ask a friend or family how your anger affected them during the past week. Write down what they tell you:

Ask your friends or family members how they handle anger and write down what they tell you:

Anger patterns are different for everyone. It is important to talk to someone about your anger and get some support as you try to manage it.



Sometimes, people say their anger is caused by "pet peeves" or people "pushing their buttons." (*Circle what makes you feel angry*)

Being nagged or treated unfairly	Someone invading your "space" or go-	
	ing through your things	
Hearing annoying noises	Having nasty things said or written	
	about you	
Having something taken from you	Having something of yours damaged	
without asking, or not being returned	or ruined	
Being accused of something	Someone not following through on	
	something they promised	
Someone not answering your questions	Feeling threatened or harassed	
Someone acting disrespectful to you or	Someone saying "no" to you	
to someone you care about		
Someone breaking rules or doing	Other:	
something you don't agree with		

Look at what you circled above and ask yourself, "Are there other emotions you might be feeling, but are you instead responding with anger?" Remember, it is healthier to express your actual feelings and to try to solve the problems. *(Circle feelings you may be "masking" with anger)* 

-Hurt or rejection	-Frustration	-Loss
-Loneliness or sadness	-Jealousy	-Fear
-Stress or anxiety	-Shame	-Disrespect
-Guilt	-Other:	-Other:

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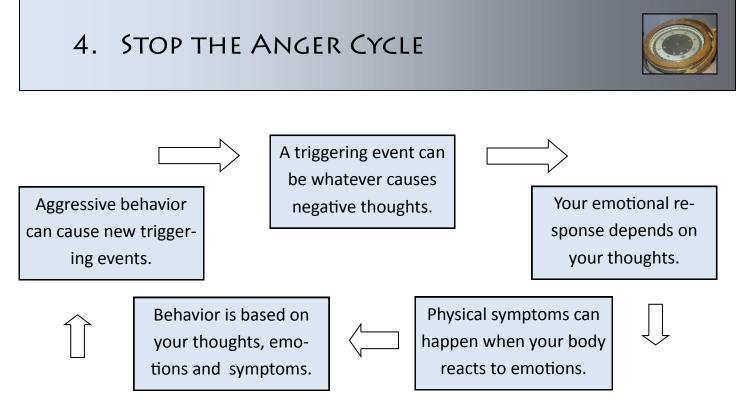
How do you feel when you start getting angry? Knowing this is the first step toward learning to control your anger. *Circle your warning signs below:* 

Clenching jaw	Feeling shaky	Rubbing head	Irritated
Headache	Tense muscles	Pacing	Sad or depressed
Stomach ache	Tight fists	Raising voice	Guilty
Heart beating fast	Fast breathing	Losing sense of humor	Resentful
Sweating	Loud or mean voice	Acting mean	Anxious
Hot neck or face	Shaking	Acting stubborn	Wanting to get away
Stomach "butterflies"	Light-headed	Urge to hit or slam	Other

The time between when you feel angry and when you act angry may be short, but it is the key to stopping your anger from quickly getting worse.

You can prevent anger from controlling you. Instead, **you can control your anger**. *(Circle what you do if your anger is <u>not</u> controlled)* 

Blow up	Stomp away	Spend time alone	Say mean things
Throw things	Take a walk	Try to calm down	Cry
Hold anger inside	Get some exercise	Yell or scream	Get depressed
Make angry gestures	Quit listening	"I won't stand for it"	Other:



Modified from Schuldt, W. (2015). The Cycle of Anger. Retrieved from http://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/cycle-of-anger

When you start feeling angry, try to interrupt it. (Mark the responses you want to try)

- □ Say "STOP" loudly in your thoughts (to interrupt rapidly increasing anger.)
- □ Say, "I need some time to think before I say something I might regret."
- □ Go to a quiet place to think for 5 minutes or count to 20 before you respond.
- Distract yourself from the anger for a short time with listening to music, thinking about something that you enjoy, or taking a walk.
- □ Try to relax by taking deep breaths, praying or meditating.
- □ Think about **the facts** of the situation. Sometimes, your thoughts about what happened or what the other person meant by it are not correct.
- Recognize negative thinking that may be affecting your response. Try to change it to positive or neutral thinking.
- □ Talk to the important people in your life about your issues and struggles. You need support of give-and-take relationships.

Smith, C. (2015). William' 12 strategies for controlling aggression. Retrieved from http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\_97.htm



Sometimes, if you catch your anger early enough, just stopping to think is enough. Changing your thoughts about the situation will change how you feel and what you do. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you take a step back.

Practice this by thinking about the last time you were angry, and ask yourself:

How am I feeling, and why? Am I feeling hurt on top of my anger?

What will happen that's bad if I continue down this path?

What will happen that's good if walk away?

How might the other person be seeing this situation?

Two hours from now, how will I be wishing I had handled this situation?

Will this be important a day from now? A week from now? A year from now?

When arguing, which of the Fair Fighting Rules do you use? (Circle them)

Discuss one issue at a time	No degrading language	Express your feelings with words. Say "I feel…"
Take turns talking	Take a time out if needed, but continue talking later	No yelling
Try to understand or see it from their point of view	Try to compromise	Don't retreat into your shell

Modified from Schuldt, W. (2015). Anger Management Guide. Retrieved from http://www.therapistaid.com/ therapy-guide/anger-management/none/none

Spend time every day with people you care about. Invest in your relationships so they can "weather the storm" even if you sometimes lapse into old behaviors.

Try to be patient. Everyone make mistakes— That's how people learn to improve.

Smith, C. (2015). William' 12 strategies for controlling aggression. Retrieved from http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\_97.htm

### 6. HAVE HEALTHY ANGER



When you act angry, people often react to your anger rather than to what you say.

Even though it is healthy to express your anger, it may be better to wait. Stepping away from the situation to think about it is OK as long as you come back to talk about it later.

But if you don't express your anger or frustration, and instead "stuff it" inside, you may feel depressed and anxious, or have "explosive" outbursts later.

#### Think about anger as a normal, healthy reaction. (Mark the ones you agree with)

- □ Helps you know that there is an unmet need or a problem to solve.
- □ Prompts you to talk about important things that may have been avoided.
- □ Motivates you to make changes in your life or relationships.
- □ Expands your point of view by listening to what others are saying.
- □ Can change attitudes and/or give insight into situations.
- □ May help you set goals, compromise, and solve problems.
- □ Brings up issues that are difficult but necessary to talk about.

Sometimes, you might feel angry, sad, or anxious without even knowing why you feel that way. It can help to spend some quiet time or "sleep on it" to **find out what is really bothering you.** You may be irritable from having too much stress.

Sometimes, anger problems can come from trauma or abuse in a past relationship. Those intense reactions can damage your present relationships. The way you feel like reacting may not be reasonable or fair.

Journaling can be helpful as you write down your feelings or thoughts on paper. This can help you prepare to **face the real source of your anger**.

Express your anger when you can think more clearly and are ready to talk calmly.



Domestic violence may include physical, emotional, or sexual violence. It can include threats of violence, physical harm, attacks against property or pets, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, or the use of children as a means of control.

Family violence is meant to gain and keep power and control over other people.

Myth—People who abuse others are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration.

Fact—This is False. Domestic violence is intended, and people who hit their family members are **not** out of control. Their violence is targeted to certain people at certain times and places. They generally don't attack their bosses or people on the streets, no matter how angry they may be. Abusers are often careful about how and where they cause physical or emotional harm to their family.

Myth—Alcohol and drug use is a major cause of domestic violence.

Fact—This is False. Although alcohol and drugs often go along with family violence, they do not cause the violence. Many men who beat their wives or family members do not drink. People who quit drinking often continue being violent or abusive even after they stop drinking. An abuser may use alcohol as an excuse for the violence, or alcohol may prevent him from realizing the level of force he is using, but alcohol is not the cause. Domestic violence and substance abuse are separate problems.

Modified from MN Advocates for Human Rights Handout (2003). Domestic violence training materials. Retrieved from http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/domestic/training/

Even if you think of your anger problem as "out of your control," it isn't. **There is no excuse for being violent or abusive in your home.** Your family deserves a home filled with kindness rather than a home where they feel insecure and afraid.

### ANGER IS ONLY ONE LETTER SHORT OF DANGER!

### BE ASSERTIVE



When we communicate, it's easy to misunderstand what people say or what they mean. Try to listen, even if you feel angry. And treat each other with respect.

- Try to be assertive. Assertive people **stand up for themselves**, being honest about what they want, and also **respect the needs of others**.
- Aggressive people focus on winning. They care little about the other person's feelings, rights, or needs.
- When you are angry, it's important to express yourself clearly. Being assertive lets people know what you expect, and what your issues and needs are.
- Even if you don't always get what you want, being assertive can help you become more self-confident, gain respect, and improve your relationships.

#### Assertive:

"I'm OK, you're OK" attitude. Believes or acts as if everyone is equal, deserving respect, and that no one is entitled to have things done their way. Assertive people act friendly and open to compromise. They give polite and clear messages, such as *"I can see what you mean, but I would really like..."* 

#### Aggressive:

"I'm OK, you're not" attitude. Feels entitled to have things done the way the want it because "they are right," and they believe the needs of others are not important. May point fingers, make fists, or put hands on hips. Gives disrespectful, sarcastic, harsh, or critical messages such as, *"This is what we are doing. If you don't like it, that's tough."* 

#### **Passive:**

"You're OK, I'm not" attitude. Believes their opinion doesn't matter. Avoids eye contact. Has stooped posture. Gives in easily with, "*That's OK. I don't mind.*" Being passive can lead to "stuffed in" anger.

Modified from Vivyan, C. (2009). Assertiveness. Retrieved from http://www.get.gg/docs/Assertiveness.pdf

(Mark if you are assertive, aggressive, or passive — If unsure, ask a family member)

## 7. CHOOSE YOUR RESPONSE



When someone is critical of something we have done, we tend to believe that they are being critical of "us" rather than of our actions.

We might be extra sensitive to criticism if past experiences led to feeling blamed, neglected or unwanted.

But the critic may simply be trying to be helpful by pointing out what happened, or how it could be done better.

Try to accept criticism with a positive attitude, since that may be how it was intended.

- Ask yourself, 'Is it true?"
  - If yes, you could say, "You are right. I do that sometimes. What would be a more helpful way to do that? I'm sorry if it caused problems."
  - If no, you could say, 'I disagree. And I feel a bit upset that you say that. Can you explain a little more what you mean by that?"
  - If partly true, you could say, "Even though I made a mistake, I disagree with your comments about me. Can you explain what you said a little more?"
- □ A passive response is, '*I'm sorry—it's all my fault. You are right. I am stupid.*"
- □ A passive-aggressive response is, *"Sorry."* (While thinking, It's not my fault. I'll get my revenge later.)
- □ An aggressive response is, 'What? How dare you talk to me like that, you loser!"

Mark your usual response to criticism. How does your family respond to criticism?

What response do you want to have?

### SLOW DOWN YOUR ANGER



- Remember, **don't respond right away if you are angry.** Stop and listen, then step back and think before you respond.
- Try to use humor to help defuse anger but avoid sarcastic or harsh humor.
  Sometimes it helps to exaggerate the situation in your mind until it becomes funny.
  Or, draw a picture of the person to take the edge off a tense situation.
- Humor can help when you find yourself thinking that getting your way is the only option. Instead, picture yourself as a queen or king who always gets what they want. You would soon realize your thinking was not reasonable.
- But don't try to just "laugh off" your problems. Use humor to face them.
- **Communicate better** by trying not to jump to conclusions or get defensive.
- Sometimes anger and frustration are from very real problems in our lives. If problems don't seem to have a solution, you can focus on how to handle and face the problem.

Allen, L. (2011). Anger management. Retrieved from http://www.lynnallenlmhc.com/anger-management/

- Tell people what you want, Instead of using hidden meanings, hints, or gestures. You might say, *'I need a hug." or, 'I need someone to talk to."* You won't always get what you want or need, but it is more likely when you communicate clearly.
- Learn to say "No" and accept "No" from others. It can be hard when people make demands of us, because saying no can make people feel guilty. But if you say "Yes" to everything, you will feel resentful, tired, and used.
- Dismiss any negative self-talk. It is OK to say no if you explained to them why you couldn't do it, if it was someone else's problem (not your responsibility), and if you know you have to take care of yourself in order to help them out next time.
- It will be easier to manage your anger if you decrease the stress in your life.

Modified from Vivyan, C. (2009). Assertiveness. Retrieved from http://www.get.gg/docs/Assertiveness.pdf

### CHOOSE WAYS TO "COOL OFF"



#### (Circle the things you will to try to do when you are angry)

Slowly count to 10 or 20	Walk away from the situation for a while
Breath deeply and slowly or try yoga	Gently stretch to relax clenched or tense muscles
Imagine you are in your favorite place, or in a peaceful place	Get some exercise—walking, running, biking, or sports
Talk with a trusted person	Clean the house or clean your room
Use positive self-talk, "I can be calm. His opinion doesn't have to change mine."	Write your feelings in a journal or draw a picture.
Imagine that you can block words with your hand, a shield, or with a kick.	Listen to music or take a hot bath
Pretend to talk to the person who angers you. Say how you feel or what you think.	Think of a funny memory or watch something funny on TV
Play with a pet if you have one, or dis- tract yourself with something you enjoy	Other:

#### If you still have problems managing your anger, try an "Anger Workout":

- □ Yell in a paper bag, in a car with windows closed, or at a sports event.
- □ Tear up newspapers, wring a wet towel, or beat on drums.
- □ Write a letter of anger and rip it up (without mailing it).
- □ Squish a stress ball or gadget. Push and roll bread dough or play dough.
- □ Avoid hitting or punching things (even pillows) when you are angry.

#### Get help from a counselor or health professional if still unable to manage it.

### CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK



When you are angry, your thinking can be overly dramatic. When something goes wrong, you may think, "everything's ruined!" Replace negative thoughts with more reasonable ones, such as, *"This is frustrating, but it's not the end of the world."* 

Avoid words like "never" or "always" when talking about yourself or others. It makes things seem more hopeless and can make people less likely to help you.

**Focus on goals.** Don't go on the attack when you notice something that needs to be changed. State the problem and then try to find a solution that works for both of you.

**Use logic.** Even if anger is justified, it can quickly become irrational. Remind yourself that the world is not out to get you and you are just in a rough spot.

**Change demands into requests.** Angry people tend to demand things their way. Even if you don't get what you want, it doesn't have to turn into anger.

If you use anger as a way to avoid feeling hurt, it doesn't make the hurt go away.

If problems weigh you down and make you feel trapped, don't blame the people around you.

Give yourself a break. Make sure to schedule some personal time when you feel stressed out.

Consider if there is a better time for things. Serious arguments often happen at night when you are tired and stressed out. Try talking things out at other times of the day.

**Avoid anger if you can.** If you get furious every time you see your child's messy room, pull the door shut so you can be calm until the problem can be solved.

If you have road rage, try other options such as taking a bus or train, or find a less congested or more scenic route to drive.

Allen, L. (2011). Anger management. Retrieved from http://www.lynnallenlmhc.com/anger-management/

How do you plan to change the way you think?

### 8. BUILD TRUST



- Angry people may believe that people do things to annoy them on purpose. But, it isn't really all about you. People tend to focus on their own lives.
- **Build trust** with friends, coworkers and family. That way, you will be less likely to get angry with them and blame them when something goes wrong.
- **Be honest with people**. Explain your actions or decisions when you need to, and always keep your word. If you do this, people will learn to trust you and you will learn to trust them in return.
- Live each day as if it's your last. Life is short. If you spend a lot of time getting angry, you are going to miss the many joys and surprises that life offers.
- Think about how many times your anger damaged a relationship or caused you to miss a happy day with friends and family. That is time you will never get back. You can prevent it from happening again—the choice is yours.
- Forgive and forget. To decrease your anger long-term, you need to forgive people who have angered you. It isn't easy, but the only way to move on is to let go of those feelings. You may have to go to a counselor to help you do this.
- Starting today, **make amends** with one person that you have hurt through your anger. It might be difficult, but you will feel better afterwards. And, you will be one step closer to healing the relationship.

Smith, C. (2015). Anger Management. Retrieved from http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\_97.htm Who do you plan to forgive?

Who do you plan to make amends with? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Forgiving is a way to reopen and heal the channels of communication.

You don't really forget what happened, but you can put the issues behind you, and not bring them up again and again. It "clears the air" and helps calm fear or guilt.

### 9. PLAN FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



- You can't just snap your fingers to make your anger disappear, but you can manage it and control it enough to make your physical and emotional health better.
- Remember that everyone makes mistakes. Try understanding and forgiving yourself and others when irritability, frustration, or anger happens.
- Practice ways to express your anger in healthier ways to improve your relationships.
- This workbook can guide you to healthier relationships and motivate you to make small changes that will build up to successful recovery from your anger problem.

Watch a video called Using Anger – Make Anger Your Friend. (2:25 minutes) <u>http://</u> <u>www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA6eRvOnhug</u>

Make a future plan for your recovery from anger problems.

When I am angry about this:	I usually respond by:	Instead, I will try re- sponding by:	What would help me succeed:
1.			
2.			
3.			

Think about how you can manage your anger. Tell your health care team and your family what would help you to succeed. Ask for their support.

Use the next page for creative expression as you plan for calmer, healthier relationships.

### Focus on Better Relationships



### Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about managing your anger:



#### About the Author

Mary B. Knutson is a Registered Nurse with a Master's Degree as a Nurse Educator. She has worked to improve education resources in academic settings, research, longterm care facilities, hospitals (including psychiatric units), and community health care agencies with the goal of empowering people and helping them toward better self-care. A collection of health education resources can be found online at www.healthvista.net.

Visit healthvista.net for more recovery resources.

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