

SESSION 3:

Anger Control Plans

In this session, you will begin learning about specific strategies to manage your anger. The anger control plan refers to the list of strategies you will identify to manage and control your anger.

I. Anger Control Plans

Up to now the group has been focusing on how to monitor anger. In the first session, you learned how to use the anger meter to rate your anger. Last week, you learned how to identify the events that trigger your anger, as well as the physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive cues associated with each event. In this session, you will begin to develop your own anger control plans and learn how you can use specific strategies, such as timeouts and relaxation, to control anger. Some people refer to their anger control plans as their toolbox and the specific strategies they use to control their anger as the tools in their toolbox.

An effective set of strategies for controlling anger should include both immediate and preventive strategies. Examples of immediate strategies include timeouts, deep-breathing exercises, and thought stopping. Examples of preventive strategies include developing an exercise program and changing irrational beliefs. These strategies will be discussed in later sessions.

Timeouts

The timeout is a basic anger management strategy that should be in everyone's anger control plan. A timeout can be used formally or informally. In its simplest form, it means taking a few deep breaths and thinking instead of reacting. It may also mean leaving the situation that is causing the escalation or simply stopping the discussion that is provoking your anger.

The formal use of a timeout involves our relationships with other people. These relationships may involve family members, friends, and coworkers. The formal use of a timeout involves having an agreement, or a prearranged plan, by which any of the parties involved can call a timeout and to which all parties have agreed in advance. The person calling the timeout can leave the situation, if necessary. It is agreed, however, that he or she will return to either finish the discussion or postpone it, depending on whether the parties involved feel they can successfully resolve the issue.

A timeout is important because it can be used effectively in the heat of the moment. Even if a person's anger is escalating quickly as measured on the anger meter, he or she can prevent reaching 10 by taking a timeout and leaving the situation.

A timeout is also effective when used with other strategies. For example, you can take a timeout and go for a walk. You can also take a timeout and call a trusted friend or family member or write in your journal. These other strategies help you calm down during your timeout period.

- Can you think of situations where you would use the timeout strategy? Please describe them.

- Can you think of specific strategies that you might use to control your anger? Please describe them.

Sample of an Anger Control Plan

Anger Control Plan

1. Take a timeout (formal or informal)
2. Talk to a friend (someone you trust)
3. Use the Conflict Resolution Model to express anger
4. Exercise (take a walk, go to the gym, etc.)
5. Attend 12-Step meetings
6. Explore primary feelings beneath the anger

II. Relaxation Through Breathing

End this session by practicing a deep-breathing exercise as a relaxation technique. You can practice this exercise on your own by focusing on your breathing, taking several deep breaths, and trying to release any tension you might have in your body. You should practice this exercise as often as possible. Here are the directions.

Find a comfortable position in your chair. If you would like, close your eyes; if not, just gaze down at the floor. Take a few moments to settle yourself. Now become aware of your body. Check for any tension, beginning with your feet, moving upward to your head. Notice any tension you might have in your legs, stomach, hands and arms, shoulders, neck, and face. Try to let go of any tension.

Now, become aware of your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and leaves your body. This can be very relaxing.

Take a deep breath. Notice your lungs and chest expanding. Now slowly exhale through your nose. Again, take a deep breath. Fill your lungs and your chest. Notice how much air you can take in. Hold it for a second. Now release it and exhale slowly. Inhale slowly and fully one more time. Hold it for a second, and release.

Continue breathing in this way for another couple of minutes. Continue to focus on your breath. With each inhalation and exhalation, feel your body becoming more and more relaxed. Use your breathing to wash away any remaining tension.

Now take another deep breath. Inhale fully, hold it for a second, and release. Inhale again, hold, and release. Continue to be aware of your breath as it fills your lungs. Once more, inhale fully, hold it for a second, and release.

When you feel that you are ready, open your eyes. How was that? Did you notice any new sensations while you were breathing? How do you feel now?

This breathing exercise can be shortened to just three deep inhalations and exhalations. Even that can be effective in helping you relax when your anger is escalating. You can practice this at home, at work, on the bus, while waiting for an appointment, or even while walking. The key to using deep-breathing as an effective relaxation technique is to practice it frequently and to apply it in a variety of situations.

III. Monitoring Anger for the Week

1) What was the highest number you reached on the anger meter during the past week?

2) What was the event that triggered your anger?

3) What cues were associated with the anger-provoking event?

Physical cues _____

Behavioral cues _____

Emotional cues _____

Cognitive cues _____

4) What strategies did you use to avoid reaching 10 on the anger meter?

- For each day of the upcoming week, monitor and record the highest number you reach on the anger meter.

____ M ____ T ____ W ____ Th ____ F ____ Sat ____ Sun

SESSION 4:

The Aggression Cycle

In this session, you will learn about the aggression cycle and practice progressive muscle relaxation. The aggression cycle serves as an integrative framework that incorporates the concepts of the anger meter, cues to anger, and the anger control plan.

I. The Aggression Cycle

An episode of anger can be viewed as consisting of three phases: *escalation*, *explosion*, and *postexplosion*. Together, these three phases make up the aggression cycle. The escalation phase is characterized by cues that indicate anger is building. As you may recall, cues are warning signs, or responses, to anger-provoking events. If the escalation phase is allowed to continue, the explosion phase will follow. The explosion phase is marked by an uncontrollable discharge of anger that is displayed as verbal or physical aggression. The postexplosion phase is characterized by the negative consequences that result from the verbal or physical aggression displayed during the explosion phase. These consequences may include going to jail, making restitution, being terminated from a job, being discharged from a drug treatment or social service program, losing family and loved ones, or feelings of guilt, shame, and regret.

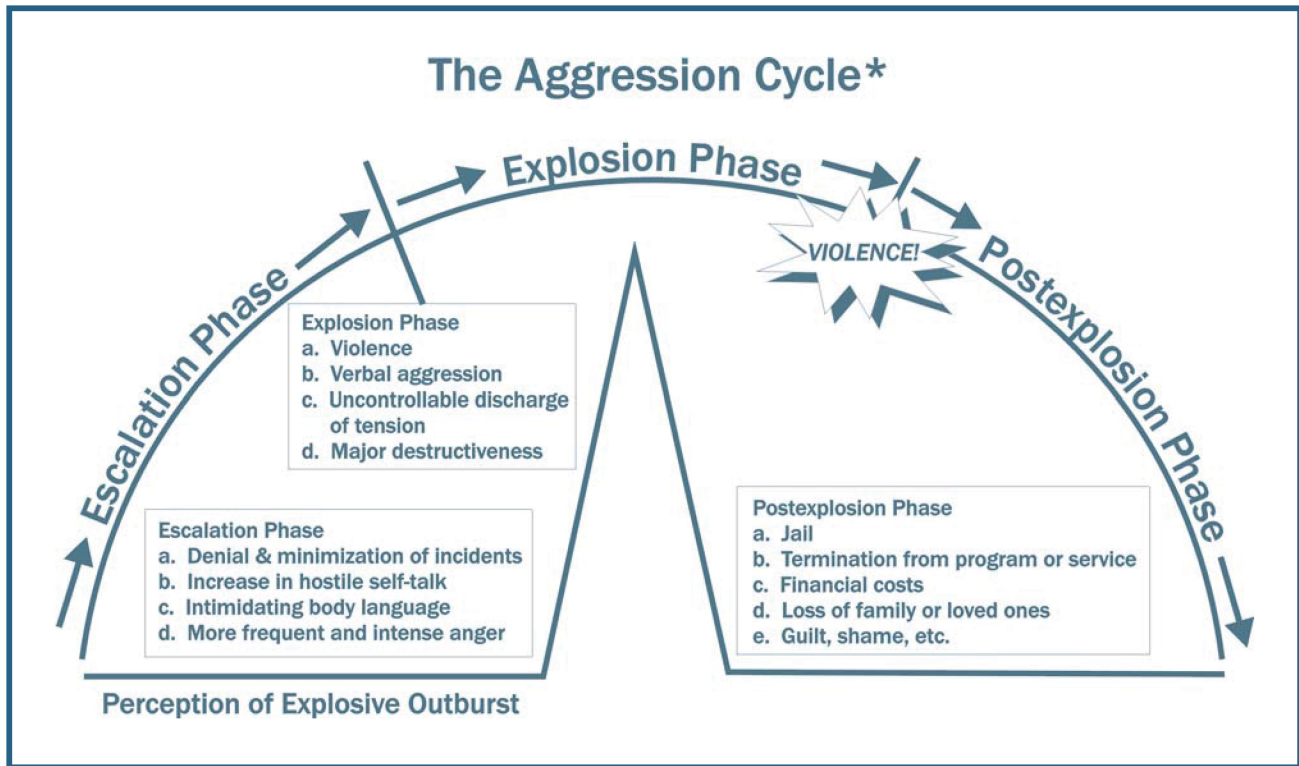
II. The Aggression Cycle and the Anger Meter

Notice that the escalation and explosion phases of the aggression cycle correspond to levels or points on the anger meter. The points on the anger meter below 10 represent the escalation phase, the building up of anger. The explosion phase, on the other hand, corresponds to a 10 on the anger meter. A 10 on the anger meter represents when you lose control and express anger through verbal or physical aggression that leads to negative consequences.

One of the primary objectives of anger management treatment is to prevent reaching the explosion phase. This is accomplished by using the anger meter to monitor changing levels of anger, attending to the cues or warning signs that indicate anger is building, and using the appropriate strategies from your anger control plans to stop the escalation of anger. If the explosion phase is prevented, the postexplosion phase will not occur and the aggression cycle will be broken.

- What phase of the aggression cycle are you in if you reach a 7 on the anger meter?

- What phase are you in if you reach 10 on the anger meter?



*Based on the Cycle of Violence by Lenore Walker (1979). *The Battered Woman*. New York: Harper & Row.

III. Relaxation Through Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Last week you practiced deep-breathing as a relaxation technique. This week you are introduced to progressive muscle relaxation. You should practice this exercise as often as possible. Here are the directions.

Take a moment to settle in. Now, as you did last week, begin to focus on your breathing. Take a deep breath. Hold it for a second. Now exhale fully and completely. Again, take a deep breath. Fill your lungs and chest. Now release and exhale slowly. Again, one more time, inhale slowly, hold, and release.

Now, while you continue to breathe deeply and fully, bring your awareness to your hands. Clench your fists very tightly. Hold that tension. Now relax your fists, letting your fingers unfold and letting your hands completely relax. Again, clench your fists tightly. Hold, and release. Imagine all the tension leaving your hands down to your fingertips. Notice the difference between the tension and complete relaxation.

Now bring your awareness to your arms. Curl your arms as if you are doing a bicep curl. Tense your fists, forearms, and biceps. Hold the tension, and release. Let your arms unfold and your hands float back to your thighs. Feel the tension drain out of your arms.

Again, curl your arms to tighten your biceps. Notice the tension, hold, and release. Let the tension flow out of your arms. Replace it with deep muscle relaxation.

Now raise your shoulders toward your ears. Really tense your shoulders. Hold the tension for a second. Now gently drop your shoulders and release all the tension. Again, lift your shoulders, hold the tension, and release. Let the tension flow from your shoulders all the way down your arms to your fingers. Notice how different your muscles feel when they are relaxed.

Now bring your awareness to your neck and your face. Tense all those muscles by making a face. Tense your neck, jaw, and forehead. Hold the tension, and release. Let the muscles of your neck and jaw relax. Relax all the lines in your forehead. One more time, tense all the muscles in your neck and face, hold, and release. Be aware of the muscles relaxing at the top of your head and around your eyes. Let your eyes relax in their sockets, almost as if they were sinking into the back of your head. Relax your jaw and your throat. Relax all the muscles around your ears. Feel all the tension in your neck muscles release.

Now just sit for a few moments. Scan your body for any tension and release it. Notice how your body feels when your muscles are completely relaxed.

When you are ready, open your eyes. How was that? Did you notice any new sensations? How does your body feel now? How about your state of mind? Do you notice any difference now from when you started?

IV. Monitoring Anger for the Week

1) What was the highest number you reached on the anger meter during the past week?

2) What was the event that triggered your anger?

3) What cues were associated with the anger-provoking event?

Physical cues _____

Behavioral cues _____

Emotional cues _____

Cognitive cues _____

4) What strategies did you use to avoid reaching 10 on the anger meter?

- For each day of the upcoming week, monitor and record the highest number you reach on the anger meter.

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