

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ANGER

You're reading this workbook because you're concerned about your anger. It's affecting important relationships and hurting those you care about. Perhaps it's getting you in trouble at work, while driving, or with store clerks. Maybe you're breaking things. Or it may even be affecting your health. With all the negatives associated with anger, why are you still blowing up? Why does anger remain such a powerful force in your life? Why, even when you resolve to control it, does your anger still flare up? In this chapter you'll find answers to these questions. A good place to start is understanding the five short-term payoffs that anger can provide.

Anger Payoffs

1. Anger reduces stress. Stress can come from a lot of sources—worry, frustration, unmet needs, physical pain or discomfort, rushing against deadlines, and so on. You don't need this book to tell you about your stress. What's important is the link between stress and anger. Stress creates physiological arousal—tension. The greater the stress, and the number of stressors, the more unpleasant is the arousal you feel.

Anger discharges arousal, but only temporarily. Right after a blowup, people often feel oddly relaxed, like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders. It seems like they can breathe again. Even though these effects are brief, and tension soon returns, the anger discharge can be highly reinforcing. You get a break from everything that frustrates and overwhelms you.

But there's a downside to using anger for stress reduction. The stress comes back with a vengeance. Studies show that anger creates more anger. Blowing up makes it more likely that you'll blow up again soon. Each time you indulge in anger to cope with stress, the next outburst becomes that much easier and stronger—and harder to control.

Not only does your anger get worse, but so does the anger of those around you. They get hurt and defensive. They counterattack. And they harden, becoming less and less concerned about your needs and feelings.

Short-term, then, anger is a good strategy for discharging stress arousal. But it tends to boomerang. Later, you pay dearly in the coin of broken relationships.

2. Anger hides emotional pain. Anger is a good defense against fear, loss, guilt, shame, and feelings of rejection or failure. It puts a tight lid on painful emotions, locking most of the feelings out of awareness. Growing up in dysfunctional families, we watch Dad push away his shame with rage. Or Mom cope with her depression by yelling at the kids. We learn that we can stop virtually any painful feeling if we can just get mad enough.

But once again, the short-term payoff has long-term consequences. First of all, you don't let yourself experience feelings that may be important signals, offering guidance for what you need to do or stop doing in your life. Maybe there's a good reason you feel guilt, and you need to face it and do something about it. Maybe you need to face your depression, taking responsibility to make key changes in your life.

The second problem with using anger to defend against your feelings is that the feelings often get worse over time. You're not only guilty for some past failure—now you feel guilty for the new damage your anger has done. Or the depression worsens because your anger is turning people off and isolating you. Now you have to crank up your anger even more to block these higher levels of guilt or sadness.

The third problem with using anger as a defense is that it becomes habitual. The anger reflex seems to go off at the slightest criticism or hurt, or the slightest anxiety. Say you're a little worried while trying to figure out the bills. Boom! It's a lot easier to blow up because your partner bought a sixty-dollar espresso maker than to feel uncertainty about your finances.

3. Anger gets you attention. Sometimes it seems that no one listens to you unless you're yelling. Anger does grab people's attention. They get alarmed and sometimes they'll try to placate you. But once again, the immediate payoff has long-term outcomes that hurt you. First, a certain percentage of people don't respond to anger with attentive listening. They get immediately defensive and tune you out. They start avoiding you or, worse, they hold it against you. The problem is that you've chosen a strategy that makes some people sit up and listen, and some people run.

The second problem with using anger to get attention is that the people who responded initially get inured and hardened over time. They stop being alarmed by your anger and start being disgusted by it. Instead of listening, they resent you and shut down.

4. Anger may be used for punishment and revenge. Someone really lets you down. They screw up because they're lazy or stupid or don't care about you. Inside is this huge wave of rage. You want to punish them and teach them a lesson. You want them to feel as much pain as you do. God, it feels good. This righteousness, this will to harm, is so powerful that it's all you care about. You hunger for the opportunity to get back at them—whether it's a screamed insult or a carefully planned revenge.

The trouble is, each time you act on these impulses, you make enemies, and the enemies often end up being the people you love and need most. Naturally, your enemies want to punish *you*. The world becomes a stage for bitter struggles, where old hurts and grudges push each of you to new excesses of rage and aggression.

5. Anger helps you change others. In dysfunctional families, we learn to use anger to extort things from others. We coerce them with blowups, or the fear of blowups, into complying with our demands. It's tempting to use anger as a club because, at least in the short term, people often give you what you want.

In the long run, of course, they turn off and turn away from you. They resent being controlled by fear. But worst of all is what it does to you. Using your anger to change others leaves you feeling helpless. When you're in pain, when something hurts, it always seems like the other person has to fix it. You feel powerless to overcome the problem yourself. And all you know how to do is try to coerce the other person into corrective action.

By placing the responsibility to change a painful situation outside yourself, you are starting down the royal slippery slope toward helplessness and depression. You're leaving others in charge of your pain and your life.

Exercise: What Are Your Anger Payoffs?

In this exercise you'll identify which of the five anger payoffs are influencing you. Don't be surprised if all or most are playing a part in your anger. For each anger payoff listed below, do a mental inventory of relationships and situations in your life (e.g., anger with family, friends, kids, coworkers, boss, clerks, receptionists; road anger; anger at objects, etc.). See if that payoff is in any way influencing or reinforcing your anger. If so, select a typical example and write it in the space provided.

1. Reduce stress—using anger to discharge stress-related arousal.

2. Hide emotional pain—using anger to defend against shame, guilt, depression, anxiety, and so on.

3. Get attention—using anger to alarm people so they'll listen to you.

4. Punishment and revenge—using anger to make people feel as much pain as you do.

5. Change the behavior of others—using anger to coerce people to do what you want.

You're now aware of some of the key factors that reinforce your anger and why anger has such powerful short-term effects. But there's more you need to know. To have a better chance at managing your anger, you'll need to understand the psychological mechanisms that create it. What follows is an explanation of the components of the anger response.

How You Get Angry

Anger is a two-step process. It starts with the experience of pain. The pain can be physical or emotional—it could be a stomachache or fatigue, feelings of rejection or loss. The pain can be something that frustrates your needs or threatens your safety. The particular kind of pain doesn't matter. What's important is that the pain by definition is unpleasant and makes you want to put an end to it. The second component of the anger response is trigger thoughts. These are interpretations, assumptions, and evaluations of a situation that make you feel victimized and deliberately harmed by others. Trigger thoughts blame and condemn others for the painful experience you've suffered.

You might think of emotional or physical pain as the fuel of anger. It's like a can of gasoline, and your trigger thoughts are the match. Either of the anger components alone is harmless. Pain by itself doesn't ignite rage, and trigger thoughts without pain are like a match without fuel.

Pain *plus* trigger thoughts equals anger. It's a simple formula. Imagine that you have a headache and your fourteen-year-old starts nagging you about going to a party that will involve drinking. She keeps pushing, and your head keeps pounding. Her pressure and the pain in your head aren't enough to get angry. You need a match—a trigger thought that says she's an inconsiderate kid who doesn't give a damn about how tired you are. Now the anger catches fire. You're hurting, and you have someone to blame. You've decided who's responsible for your pain. The next words out of your mouth are loud and attacking. Your daughter stares at you like you just went nuts, but in reality it was a simple matter of putting the fuel and match together.

Once you get angry, trigger thoughts can also make it worse. They can escalate your upset by continually painting the other person as bad and wrong and deliberately out to harm you. Each new trigger thought pushes your anger a notch higher, until you end up saying and doing very damaging things. Pain begets trigger thoughts, which beget anger, more trigger thoughts, more anger, and so on. Your thoughts and angry feelings become a self-perpetuating feedback loop.

Exercise: The Anger Log

The Anger Log is a tool that provides an opportunity to learn more about the components of your anger response. The log is divided into seven columns. The first column is labeled Pain/Stress; there you record the emotional and physical pain that existed before your anger. It might be a headache or anxiety about your marriage. It might be a frustrated need, or pressure to get a job done. The stress or pain might have gone on for hours preceding your anger, or it might be a

direct outgrowth of the provocative situation. Try to include here every stressful or painful experience you can think of that might be influencing your anger response.

The next column is labeled Provocative Situation. Here you briefly note the upsetting event that preceded your anger. The third column, Trigger Thoughts, is where you write down what you're thinking while getting angry. These thoughts tend to label the provoking person as wrong, or bad, or harming you in some way. The fourth column is Anger Rating. Here you'll write in a number, from 0 to 100, that reflects how angry you felt. Zero would indicate no anger, whereas 100 is the highest level of rage you can imagine experiencing. When you rate each anger experience, you make a subjective judgment about where your anger falls on the continuum between those two extremes. The fifth column is labeled Behavior. Here you record what you actually *did* in response to your anger. Did you yell or speak sharply? Did you curse or call the other person names? Did you say something attacking or belittling? Were you in any way physically aggressive—shoving, shaking, hitting?

The last two columns are labeled Outcome. Here you'll note the effect of your anger on yourself and others. First of all, rate the impact from a -10 to +10 in terms of how you felt and what happened to you subsequent to your anger. Write a brief description of the emotional and objective consequences of your anger. Did you feel sad, relieved, scared? Did anything change in terms of your relationships to others? Were there consequences that you regret and that impacted you negatively? Now go through the same process in terms of how your anger may have impacted others. If you have any sense of how your anger affected them, rate it on the same -10 to +10 scale. Also note anything they said or did that appeared related to your anger.

What follows are two examples of actual Anger Logs filled out by Ginny and Ralph. Ginny is a thirty-seven-year-old X-ray technician. She's married to Bob and has a twelve-year-old son, Barry. Ralph is a fifty-one-year-old flight instructor who has a rocky relationship with his girlfriend, Laura.

Ginny's Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0-100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others
1. Feeling frustrated and hurt.	Barry refuses to finish cleaning up living room during Saturday morning family work time.	He's defying me, trying to upset me. I've had enough of his lazy shit.	75	Yelled and physically pulled him back to living room.	-7 I was disgusted with myself for losing it.	-7 He pouted the rest of the day.
2. Have a headache; feeling frustrated	Ordered clothes from a catalog that came in the wrong size.	Stupid, careless people.	60	Yelled at order clerk; called her a jackass.	-2 Felt better for a moment, then depressed about how easily I lose control.	?
3. Anxious about next day dental visit for root canal; very tired	Helping Barry do homework he put off till late at night.	Same old last-minute lazy shit. He puts everything off and just assumes I'll do it.	50	Told Barry in a harsh voice that he's driving me crazy; gave him silent treatment after that.	+1 For some reason I felt like I got through to him.	-5 Barry cried.
4. Stress from deadline at work; sadness and anxiety re Bob's recent complaints about marriage.	Bob asked me to pick up some barbecue briquettes.	He knows red meat is no good for me. He doesn't give a damn about my health.	80	Told him he doesn't give a rat's ass about anything but himself.	-9 I felt <u>very</u> depressed.	-8 Bob stormed out to get briquettes and was yelling about divorce.
5. Sadness about state of marriage; frustrated because I wanted to go to movies but couldn't because of pain from root canal.	Bob asked about Barry's C- in English.	He leaves me with all the responsibility for Barry's schoolwork. He pays no attention.	55	Got really sharp and told him it was his own fault for ignoring the problem.	-5 Felt more depressed.	-7 Bob got really upset and left. Barry overheard and started crying. Had to comfort him.

Ralph's Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0-100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others
1. Tired from party last night. Anxious because boss gets irritated when I'm late.	Someone cut in front of me at the bridge toll plaza.	Asshole thinks he owns the road. He needs a lesson in courtesy.	70	Shouted out the window and kept honking the horn.	-3 Felt upset and couldn't calm down.	?
2. Feel invisible, like I don't count. Old feeling from growing up.	Laura gets reservation at an Indian restaurant. Indian food burns my stomach.	It's all about her; it's all what she wants.	75	Told her to cancel reservation. Refused to go; acted very cold.	-7 Depressed, lonely. Destroying the relationship.	-5 She left in a huff, hasn't called.
3. Shame, feeling forced to do something. Also worried about money because fewer people call for flying lessons.	Mother calls from a bar drunk and wants me to drive her home.	She doesn't give a shit. She's been doing this to me too long.	90	Told her to f.o. and hung up.	+5 Felt kind of relieved and relaxed.	-3 Called her later—she hardly remembered.
4. Feeling pressured, worried about money.	Frequent flying student demands that I lower my rates.	Cheap bastard, he's got the money, he's just trying to screw me.	70	Raised my voice and told him to go find another flight instructor.	-9 Lost a student and needed income.	?
5. Feeling lonely, worried about money, kind of a hunger headache.	Laura calls last minute to say she has to work late and let's skip dinner tonight.	Doesn't give a shit about me. Just kisses up to her boss; probably doesn't have to stay. She <u>wants</u> to.	80	Raised voice on phone. Told her she should think about me once in a while instead of kissing up to everyone else.	-8 Very lonely and depressed.	? She laughed and said she wouldn't come home at all; hung up on me.

Now it's time to get some practice filling out your own log. On the blank Anger Log provided, fill in all the anger experiences you've had from the past week that you'd rate above 40 on the scale. If it's under 40 don't include it. Make sure you fill out the log for at least five experiences. If there weren't five in the last week, keep looking back to previous weeks until you're able to list the minimum five experiences.

As you fill out the log, be careful to differentiate between pain/stress and the provocative situation. Remember, pain/stress is what you felt physically or emotionally *before* getting angry that may have contributed to your anger response. The provocative situation is the actual event your anger focused on. Try to write down as many key trigger thoughts as possible. Later, after filling out a number of Anger Logs, you'll be able to identify themes in your trigger thoughts. When you recognize and understand the kinds of thoughts that most upset you, you'll have taken a first major step toward changing these anger triggers.

Right now, go ahead and fill in the blank Anger Log based on upsets from the past week.

Now that you've recorded at least five significant anger episodes from the past week, there are several important questions you should consider:

- What types of stresses or pain typically foreshadow high anger episodes? Are any of these stresses preventable? Could they be calmed or coped with in ways other than anger?
- What types of provocative situations are typically associated with high anger episodes? Is there a common theme or dynamic to high anger situations?
- What category of trigger thought most angers you (i.e., feeling treated unjustly, not being cared about, being ignored, blaming others, negative labels like stupid or selfish, assuming ill will, etc.)?
- Do you behave differently in response to moderate (50–60) anger as opposed to high (75–85) anger experiences? How would you like to change the way you express your anger?
- Are the outcomes more negative for high (75–85) as opposed to moderate (50–60) anger experiences?
- Are the outcomes from your anger experiences more often positive or negative? If negative, are the outcomes affecting you temporarily or also in the long term?
- Is your anger affecting others in ways that concern you?
- Are there specific trigger thoughts or trigger thought themes that seem to generate the most negative outcomes?
- Are there particular behaviors that seem to trigger more negative outcomes, either for yourself or others?

You'll return to these questions again after completing Anger Logs for the next several weeks. However, it's good to start asking them now, because careful observation of your anger helps to build motivation to complete the anger control program.

Exercise: Monitoring Your Anger

Using the blank Anger Log on the next page and making as many copies as you need, record all anger experiences over 40 on the scale during the coming week. Review your day at a consistent point each evening (for example, right at bedtime) and fill in all seven columns for all significant anger episodes. This is important work; that's why it's necessary to make a strong commitment to see it through. If you suspect you'll have difficulty maintaining the log, make a contract with a friend, and ask him or her to check in with you about your progress with the log.

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0-100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

CHAPTER 4

RELAXATION SKILLS I

Learning to relax is an essential element in achieving anger management. Remember, getting angry is a two-step process. First, physical tension or stress has to exist in the body, then it requires anger-triggering thoughts to complete the picture. Half the anger battle can be won by simply learning to relax the physical tension that develops in provocative situations. It's a proven fact that if you can relax your body, and keep it relaxed, it's almost impossible to get angry. Combating stress using the skills you're about to learn can help you calm down, think clearly, and handle any situation in an effective, positive way. The eventual goal is to become so good at relaxing that you can let go of tension any time, anywhere, in thirty seconds or less.

The first step to effective relaxation is a technique called *progressive relaxation training*. It's been around since the 1920s in one form or another, and is generally regarded as the keystone to successful stress release. Keep in mind the technique described below is not as easy as it sounds. It requires practice and a commitment to follow through. But the results are well worth the effort, paying off big dividends in anger management.

Progressive Relaxation Training:

The basic principle is to first increase the tension in your muscles, hold it for five to seven seconds, and then *relax*. Remember to focus on one set of muscles at a time. Repeat each procedure as many times as necessary to achieve the desired effect. (*Caveat*: Do not tense areas of physical pain, injury, or recent surgery. And remove contact lenses.)

1. Get into a comfortable seated position and give your body a chance to relax. Allow yourself to experience a comfortable feeling of heaviness. Now, start at the bottom and, stretching your legs out, point your toes (like a *ballerina*) away from your body, noting the tension in your ankles. Now point your *toes to head*, creating tension in your calves. Let your feet fall to the floor, take a deep breath, and relax.
2. Now tighten your buttocks (remember *tight bottom*), and then your thighs by pressing down on your heels as hard as you can. Hold the tension (five to seven seconds), then let go, take a deep breath, and relax.

3. Take a deep breath, filling up your lungs completely, and flex your chest muscles. Now tighten your stomach muscles, creating, in effect, a *coat of armor*. Hold, then exhale, and relax.
4. Now arch your back, as though it were a bow (remember *bow and arrow*). Avoid straining and keep the rest of your body as relaxed as possible. Notice the tension beginning down at your coccyx (tailbone), and moving all the way up your spine to your neck. Hold as long as possible, then slump forward, take a deep breath, and relax.
5. Bend your elbows and tense your forearms and biceps in the classic *Charles Atlas* pose. Clench your fists at the same time. Tense these muscles until they feel taut. Then, straighten out your arms, shake out your hands, take a deep breath, and relax.
6. Now hunch your shoulders and pull your head in like a *turtle*. Press your chin against your chest, tightening your throat. Experience this uncomfortable sensation, then drop your shoulders and allow your head to fall forward. Now, slowly and carefully, roll your head to the side and back of your neck. Reverse direction and roll your head the other way. Take a deep breath, and allow your neck and shoulders to relax.
7. Continue to move your attention upwards toward your head and face. First, make a frown by wrinkling up your forehead (like a *walnut*) as tightly as you can. Next, scrunch up your eyes, flare your nostrils, clench your jaw (not so hard that you'll crack a tooth). Finally, compress your lips into a tight O. Pull your lips as tight as a *miser's purse strings*. In short, make an *ugly face*. Hold it, tighter and tighter. Then relax and let go. Now, take a deep breath, relax your lips, and blow out forcefully.
8. Now go back mentally over the entire procedure, and feel the relaxation in your feet, ankles, calves, back, and chest. As you let go, more and more, the relaxation deepens in your neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. Go deeper and deeper into being relaxed. Finally, feel the relaxation extend to your head and face, your jaw hanging loose and your lips slightly parted.
9. If some tension persists in a specific part of your body, simply return your focus to that spot. Increase the tension, hold it, take a deep breath, and then relax. And let go.

In order to achieve deep muscle relaxation quickly, remember *key words* in the list below. Tense muscle groups for five to seven seconds, then relax for fifteen seconds.

Key Words

- Toes like a ballerina
- Toes to head
- Tight bottom
- Coat of armor
- Bow and arrow
- Charles Atlas
- Turtle
- Walnut
- Miser's purse
- Ugly face

What Does Relaxation Feel Like?

A feeling of deep relaxation can be experienced in lots of different ways. Most people describe tingling sensations, heat, or a pleasant warmth moving through their body. Others focus on feelings of heaviness or general lassitude. For some, their muscles feel like a stick of butter slowly melting in a skillet, or maple syrup spreading over a pile of pancakes. Everyone experiences relaxation in a unique way.

Exercise: How Relaxation Feels to You

Go back to the box (above) containing the key words for progressive relaxation training. As you go through the relaxation process again, notice the specific relaxation sensations that you feel for each muscle group. Now write those down next to the key words. This will serve to reinforce, and deepen, the relaxation you already experience.

Relaxation Imagery

Another very valuable tool in combating stress is the ability to call up, at a moment's notice, a peaceful, relaxing scene. Eventually, with enough practice, you will be able to conjure this scene as an automatic reflex, and it will help you to achieve better control when faced with a stressful situation.

It's best to begin using *relaxation imagery* right after having practiced the progressive relaxation procedure. This allows you to capitalize on the good feelings that you have already created.

The idea is to think about, and visualize in detail, a time and place where you have felt especially safe, secure, and perfectly at peace. It sometimes helps to begin the process by imagining that you are walking down a path through the woods, with many trees on the left and right. Eventually you see a light at the end of the path, and come to a meadow. Here is a peaceful clearing, where the sun is always shining, warming your skin, and the grass smells lush. You can hear the tinkling of a brook nearby.

Perhaps it's just this meadow that you were looking for, or maybe you'll want to follow the road leading to the beach, where the waves come and go, caressing the white sand. The salty smell in the air clears your mind, and the sound of the waves lulls you into a peaceful, almost hypnotic state.

Or, you can see in the distance a cottage tucked into the side of a hill, with smoke lazily rising from the chimney. It's cozy in front of the fireplace. The smell of your favorite soup wafts from the kitchen and permeates the air, bringing back warm, nurturing memories.

Now it's time to create your own personal relaxation image. Perhaps one of the scenarios above triggered a memory for you. Or maybe a childhood scene, a time of innocence, will work for you.

Begin creating your scene slowly, with your eyes closed, sketching it in broad strokes like an artist preparing a major canvas. Visualize the scene and then anchor it to a specific time and place (e.g., 3 P.M. on a lazy afternoon on August 20th, 1985, in the Catskills mountains). Now start to fill in the details. Shapes and colors, the quality of light and shadow.

Next, add the dimension of sound: blackbirds cawing as they fly overhead, or waves washing up on shore. Perhaps you can hear a faint melody, a long-forgotten tune. . . .

Now, explore the tactile qualities of this place. Become aware of the temperature, whether it's warmth on your skin or a pleasant cool breeze. If you're lying on the grass, notice the tickling sensation as the blades brush your ear when you turn your head. And remember the unique

smells associated with this time and place. Fresh mown grass, bread just out of the oven, or honeysuckle on the vine . . .

Finally, pay attention to the emotional "feel" of this place. Become aware of ripples of calmness, the reassuring feeling of safety and security. A sense of peace and tranquility pervades the entire scene.

When you have finished creating this peaceful scene, stop for a minute and savor the experience. Just drink it in, memorizing all the components. Let all the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings sink into your awareness. Now anchor the scene with a *key word* like "Catskills" or "Mariposa."

Open your eyes and look around. Notice where you are in the real world. Now go back to the relaxation image. Use your key word. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in the scene. See it, hear it, smell it, feel it. Notice the accompanying sense of security, peace, and relaxation. Now come back to the room again.

Use the form on the next page to record your relaxation scene. Put in as much detail as possible.

In order to help you achieve the transition from the here and now to your relaxation scene as quickly as possible, it's sometimes useful to imagine a *Magic Door*. Science fiction fans will be familiar with this concept as "teleportation," in which you are literally transported from one place to another, instantaneously. Face the nearest blank wall and picture a door with a brass knob and a brass plaque. The plaque has your key word inscribed on it. When you turn the knob and open the door, you will find, to your surprise, that your relaxation scene is already fully prepared on the other side. All you have to do is cross the threshold and there you are, safe and secure.

With a little bit of practice, you are now ready to use this relaxation scene any time there is tension, or when a situation arises that is potentially disturbing or distressing.

Summary

The two relaxation skills that you've learned in this chapter, combined with what you will learn in the next chapter, can have a major impact on your experience of anger. Progressive relaxation training, if practiced daily, can reduce overall tension. And the relaxation imagery you've created can help you face specific situations that threaten your sense of calm.

Homework

1. Using the Anger Log, continue your daily monitoring of situations that elicit anger, and be sure to note trigger thoughts. As before, all angry reactions greater than 40 (on a 100-point scale of anger arousal) are to be recorded.
2. You may photocopy the progressive relaxation training procedure and your relaxation scene in order to facilitate daily practice. Be sure to practice the relaxation training and the relaxation scene at least five times during the next week. Record all practice in the Relaxation Log.

PERSONAL RELAXATION SCENE—Worksheet

Describe time and place (where and when):

Visual components (everything that you can see):

Auditory components (everything that you hear):

Tactile components (things that you touch or feel on your skin):

Olfactory components (what you smell):

Emotional components (feelings like safety or calmness):

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0-100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

Relaxation Log

Date	Progressive Relaxation Training	Relaxation Scene

INSTRUCTIONS: Put a check mark under the relaxation exercises completed on each date.

CHAPTER 5

ADVANCED RELAXATION SKILLS

Before we move on to the next set of relaxation techniques, it's useful to review the progress that you've made so far. By now you should be able to reliably relax, using the key words to follow the memorized sequence of the progressive relaxation technique. You should also be able to produce your relaxation image quickly, and in substantial detail, using all your senses. If you don't feel completely sure of yourself, practice a few more times. Then you can begin using this chapter with a sense of confidence and mastery.

At this point you may have questions about just how useful relaxation really is, especially when you find yourself in the middle of a fight with your spouse. The answer is that if you do the relaxation exercises every day, as part of your daily routine, you will notice a marked reduction in your overall tension. You'll also be less irritable. That's because relaxation has become an automatic part of your life. But this isn't enough. You need some more tools to help you relax during a period of actual upset, and that's just what this chapter is all about.

Breathing

A proper breathing technique is the next step on the relaxation agenda. Even though we've been breathing all our lives, most of us have forgotten how to breathe properly. For a quick refresher course, go find the nearest baby. Notice her little tummy rise and fall with each breath. This is called diaphragmatic, or "deep," breathing.

You can start by putting one hand on your chest and the other over your abdomen, just above the belt line. Now take a deep breath and push it all the way down into your belly. It helps to imagine filling a canteen with water. The canteen fills from the bottom up, just like the air in your belly. As you breathe in, the hand over your abdomen will rise, while the hand on your chest hardly moves at all. Focus all your attention on your belly, and send your breath down, down, down to fill your belly. Allow your breath to slightly stretch and relax your abdomen. As you take each breath, noticing your belly rise and fall, you experience a sense of calm. By doing

this exercise, you are automatically sending a message to your brain that all is well. Just like a peacefully sleeping baby.

If you're having trouble pushing the air into your belly, it might be helpful to press down on your abdomen with both hands or place a moderately heavy telephone book on your abdomen. Both of these methods will not only increase your awareness, but will also force you to use your abdominal muscles.

Exercise: Deep Breathing during Stress

In order to practice *deep breathing* during stressful situations, use the outline provided on the next page. For this practice exercise, you'll need to prepare two scenes where stress can lead to a moderate anger response (but not a nuclear meltdown). Create one scene using your work environment and one scene using your home environment. Break down each situation into at least three segments. At the end of each segment is a cue to remind you to take a "deep breath." Now practice your deep breathing technique by visualizing the scenes, one segment at a time, taking a deep diaphragmatic breath at the end of each segment. Notice how the deep breath affects your tension level while you're imagining the scene.

Practice your first moderate stress scene two or three times. When you move on to the second scene, visualize it once without taking your deep breaths. Really get into it; try to make it as real as possible. Notice your stress level when you're finished. Visualize the scene at least two more times, but now taking a deep breath as you finish each segment. Chances are, you'll see that your stress level goes down when you include deep breaths during the scene.

To give you an idea of how to structure your stressful scenes on the worksheet, we've included an example worksheet with two scenes created by a forty-three-year-old insurance adjuster.

When she did this exercise, she experimented with different strategies. First she went through each scene and just thought about how it made her feel. Then she went through each scene again and did some deep breathing, as recommended. She was amazed to find how much her tension level actually went down at the end of the exercise.

Exercise: Relaxation without Tension

Up to now you've practiced the progressive relaxation technique (PRT) by increasing tension, but now it's time to eliminate that tension as well, using a technique called *relaxation without tension*. Once again, go through the PRT sequence. But this time, as you scan each muscle group, simply notice any tension in that part of your body, take a deep breath, and as you exhale, *relax away* and let go of all that tension.

- Start at the bottom just as before, and point your toes, then gently reverse, toes to head. Notice any tension, take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax away the tension.
- Now focus on your buttocks. Again, just notice tension (if you find any), then take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax.
- Next, your chest and stomach muscles. Notice, breath, exhale, relax.
- Arch your back, and, without straining, notice any tension. Then, take a deep breath, and relax away the stress.
- Focusing on your arms and biceps, simply notice any tension you may feel there. Now, take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax the tension. Just let it go.
- Check out your neck and shoulders. Notice, breathe, exhale, relax away the tension.