



Anger Management

Client Handbook Series
January 2015

Developed by Carleton University, Criminal Justice Decision Making Laboratory
& Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services
© Ralph C. Serin, Sarah McQuaid, & Angela DeWolf, & the Ontario Ministry of
Community Safety and Correctional Services

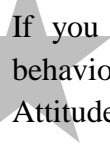
This handbook series is public domain and can be copied and used with clients
without cost but also without evidence regarding efficacy.

Types of Violence

Think about your violent behaviour in the last six months. Read the different types of violence below and pick one that best describes you.

- Reactive Violence:** Involves an angry and impulsive violent reaction to frustration or something that we have mistaken as an insult.
“I get into fights more than the average person.”
“When angry, I tend to react without thinking.”

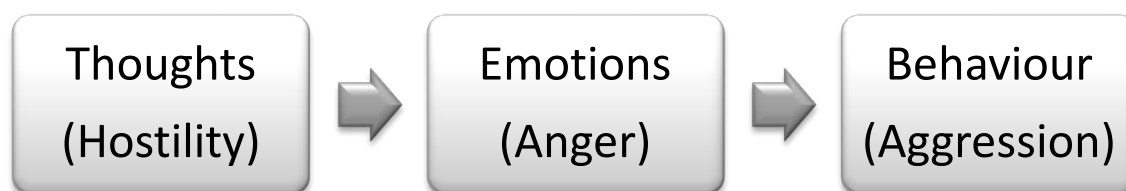
- Instrumental Violence:** Involves purposely harming another person for personal gain. It is often planned and has a purpose.
“I feel like my actions were necessary to get what I wanted.”
“Some of my violent behaviour was done to gain control.”



If you picked Instrumental Violence, this workbook is not for you because your violent behaviour is less related to anger and more related to how you think. Please refer to the Criminal Attitudes workbook. The goal of this workbook is to give people anger control skills in order to prevent future violence. If you picked Reactive Violence, please continue with the rest of the workbook.

Anger

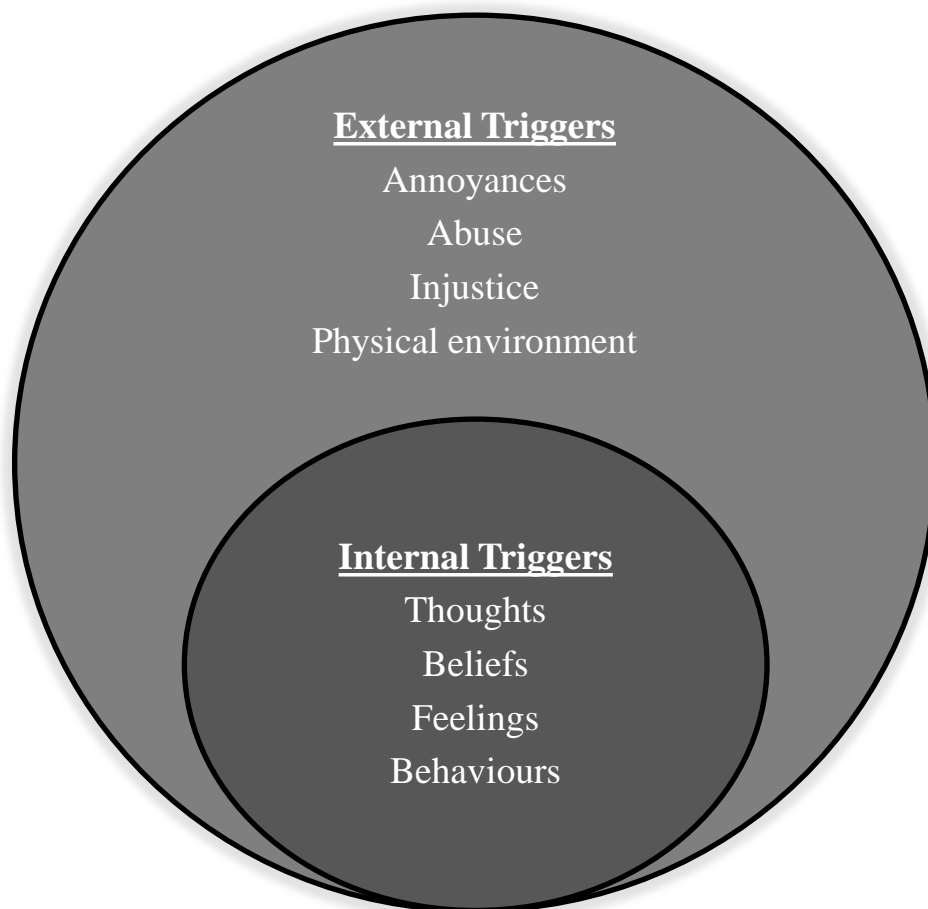
People often confuse anger, hostility and aggression as the same thing; however, they are separate but related experiences. For instance, the way we think about a situation can affect our feelings and emotions about that situation, which can increase or decrease our risk of violent behaviour.



- ❖ **Hostility** is a *negative way of thinking* about the world that can result in aggressive and violent behaviour.
- ❖ **Anger** is an *emotion* that can range from mild frustration to full blown rage. It is a natural emotion that can warn us to problems and energize us to act, such as when we feel that someone close to us is being threatened. However, for some people, anger can get out of control and it can lead to problems in work, relationships, and overall quality of life.
- ❖ **Aggression** is a *behaviour* that is meant to cause harm to another person or damage property. It can be physical (hitting someone), verbal (threats) or emotional (putting someone down). It's important to remember that a person can become angry without acting aggressively and a person can be aggressive without being angry (e.g. committing a robbery).

Triggers

Triggers are the different influences in your life that may lead you to become angry. Whether they come from within you (internal triggers) or come from outside sources (external triggers), you still control their impact on your behaviours.



What are some of your triggers? List them in the two boxes below.

Internal Triggers:

External Triggers:

Anger Log

Keeping an Anger Log can help you keep track of what makes you angry (your triggers) so that you can spot it when it starts to happen again. You can then develop coping strategies to help you deal with your anger in an appropriate way. Below is an example of an Anger Log.

Example Anger Log

- ❖ **Where were you?**
I was at a bar downtown.
- ❖ **Who was around you?**
Three of my buddies: Mike, Jon, and Dylan.
- ❖ **What happened?**
A guy bumped into me and spilled my drink.
- ❖ **How angry were you? (On a scale of 0 being not angry at all to 10 being extremely angry)**
I was about a 6.
- ❖ **How long were you mad for?**
A few minutes.
- ❖ **What physical sensations did you feel? (e.g., rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, adrenaline rush, nausea)**
My heart was beating fast, I felt a rush of adrenaline, and I felt kind of lightheaded.
- ❖ **What emotions did you feel? (e.g., frustrated, embarrassed, anxious, guilty)**
Other than angry I felt kind of embarrassed.
- ❖ **When you noticed you were angry, how did you respond?**
As soon as I felt angry I pushed him back and then punched him.
- ❖ **Do you feel you responded well?**
No, I shouldn't have dealt with it in that way.
- ❖ **How could you have improved your response?**
I shouldn't have resorted to violence so quickly and instead ignored him or checked out the situation better.

Anger Log

Now it's your turn to fill out an Anger Log. Describe an event in which you felt angry and acted aggressively because of it.

Anger Log

❖ Where were you?

❖ Who was around you?

❖ What happened?

❖ What emotions did you feel? (e.g., frustrated, embarrassed, anxious, guilty)

❖ How angry were you? (On a scale of 0 being not angry at all to 10 being extremely angry)

❖ How long were you mad for?

❖ What physical sensations did you feel? (e.g., rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, adrenaline rush, nausea)

❖ When you noticed you were angry, how did you respond?

❖ Do you feel you responded well?

❖ How could you have improved your response?

Changing Your Thinking

Sometimes when we get angry our thinking can spiral out of control, making it difficult to think clearly (e.g. jumping to the wrong conclusions).

In order to change your negative thoughts (e.g. jumping to the wrong conclusions or seeing the worst in everything), you need to be aware of your 'self-talks' that can lead you to become angry. Self-talks are the things you tell yourself about a situation, which can be either positive or negative. As people become angry they often have negative and hostile self-talks, which can be so automatic that they are unaware of them and how they may lead to aggressive behaviour. This means getting angry and then acting aggressively can happen in a few seconds.

Below are some steps that can help you identify your negative self-talks and replace them with more realistic and positive ones.

Step 1: Identify your trigger

- Describe the situation or person that triggered your negative mood.
- E.g. My boss is always giving me a hard time.

Step 2: Identify your automatic thoughts

- Make a list of the automatic thoughts you tell yourself about the situation or your beliefs and expectations of others.
- E.g. "I'm sick and tired of being disrespected all the time. He's obviously out to get me"

Step 3: Identify your emotions

- Describe and rate how you feel about the situation based on your self-talk.
- E.g. angry, upset, frustrated

Step 4: Challenge your thoughts

- Challenge your negative thoughts. Are your thoughts about the situation correct? Is there proof to back up your beliefs?
- E.g. "It seems like my boss gives everyone a hard time, not just me".
- Could the situation be accidental?
- E.g. "The person who pushed me was drunk".

Step 5: Replace and practice positive thoughts

- Create and practice (for mastery) some positive self-talks that you can use to counter similar negative thoughts in the future.
- E.g. "Relax, I shouldn't take things so personally; I know I'm a hard worker."

Changing Your Thinking

Try challenging your own thinking. Remember, it's not the event itself that can make you angry but how you think about and view the situation. Learning to challenge your hostile and negative thoughts and replace them with healthy ones takes a lot of practice and effort.

Step 1: Identify your trigger

Step 2: Identify your automatic thoughts

Step 3: Identify your emotions

Step 4: Challenge your thoughts

Step 5: Replace and practice positive thoughts

Aggression Management

Anger isn't just revealed in your thoughts and behaviours; it can also have physical symptoms. Below is a list of physical symptoms you might feel when you get angry. Put a check mark in the box next to the ones *you* often feel when you get angry. Fill in any extras that may not be on the list.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitching | <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grinding teeth | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart pounding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clenching fists | <input type="checkbox"/> Clenching jaws/teeth | <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turning red | <input type="checkbox"/> Dry throat | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paling (losing colour) | <input type="checkbox"/> Shaking hands | <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chills and shudders | <input type="checkbox"/> Black out | <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in your voice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goose bumps | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling hot | <input type="checkbox"/> Tears in your eyes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Numbness | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling cold | <input type="checkbox"/> Glaring or scowling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Good! Now you can use these physical cues to help you recognize when you are starting to feel angry. It's good to notice anger (a feeling) and to calm yourself down before it can turn into aggression (your actions). A good first step towards calming down is practicing relaxation. Often when we are angry our muscles will tense up. Taking the time to breathe and to relax your muscles can help your anger subside as well. Try these relaxation steps right now, and remember them the next time you start to feel angry.

Relaxation Technique

- 1) Take a deep breath and hold it.
- 2) Tense your hands.
- 3) Hold it for a few seconds.
- 4) Exhale slowly and let your hands relax.
- 5) Now repeat with the other muscles in your body; move up your arms then down your back and legs to your feet.
- 6) Each time, focus on how good it feels to relax the muscles. You may even want to picture a relaxing scene as you do this.
- 7) Keep tensing and relaxing different muscles until your anger subsides.


Conflict Resolution

Many problems happen when you feel that your rights have been violated or when you believe you have been disrespected. Your first reaction may be to fight back because you can't always avoid the things or people that make you angry. Instead, you can learn to control your feelings and behaviour in these situations. Below are some examples of the different ways that a person can deal with conflict.

- ❖ **Passiveness:** Involves holding anger in, backing down or giving in. This is not a helpful way to deal with conflict because it will allow your rights to be violated. This leads you to become resentful and angry at yourself for not standing up for what you wanted or needed. It may avoid conflict, but it will not solve the problem.
- ❖ **Aggressiveness:** Involves exploding and hurting others. This is also not a good way to handle your anger because it can result in being arrested, pushing others away, losing loved ones, and feelings of guilt, shame or regret.
- ❖ **Assertiveness:** Involves listening and expressing your anger in a calm and rational manner. This is the ideal way to deal with conflict or a frustrating situation.

What is Assertiveness?

Sometimes people confuse assertiveness with aggression. Remember, the goal of aggression is to harm another person, whereas assertiveness means standing up for yourself and expressing your thoughts and feelings in a non-aggressive way. Being assertive does not mean being demanding; it means being direct and honest in a manner that is respectful of other people. Some benefits of assertiveness include earning respect from others, improving communication, and creating honest relationships. Assertiveness doesn't lead to aggression.



The next page has some helpful skills that you can use the next time you are faced with a conflict or a frustrating situation.

Skills

Below are some assertiveness skills that you can use in different situations. It's also important to be aware of your body language, such as keeping eye contact, having an upright posture, not using dramatic gestures and having a positive or neutral facial expression. Scowling and gesturing when trying to be assertive will give mixed messages to the other person.

Denying Requests

- ❖ Ask them again what is expected of you.
- ❖ Turn it down and say "No".
- ❖ Apologize if you feel it's necessary.
- ❖ You do not have to offer an excuse.

Handling Criticisms

- ❖ Agree with any truth in the statement: "You're right, I did...."
- ❖ Agree with any possible truth: "You could be right..." or "That's quite probable..."
- ❖ Agree with the general truth. "What you say makes sense..."

Handling Constructive Criticisms

- ❖ Acknowledge the error: "You're right, I did..."
- ❖ Give a brief apology (if necessary).
- ❖ Do NOT make a big deal, deny, justify etc.

Listening Skills

Listening carefully to what the other person is saying can help you avoid misunderstandings and conflict. Active listening can make it easier to find a solution that does not involve an angry or aggressive response. Some examples include:

1. **Pay attention:** Stop talking, look at the speaker directly, avoid distractions.
2. **Show that you're listening:** Use body language such as nodding occasionally, smiling and using other facial expressions.
3. **Provide Feedback:** Asking questions "What do you mean when you say..."; or reflecting "Sounds like you are saying..."
4. **Wait before Judging:** Let the other person finish each point and don't interrupt by asking questions or giving your counter argument. Try putting yourself in the other person's place so you can see their point of view.

Managing Your Anger

Step 1. When you know what makes you angry you'll be better able to develop better ways for dealing with those situations when they come up. What events/things trigger your anger?

Step 2. You can't change what you don't acknowledge. Consider whether or not you have an anger problem, and then check one of the boxes below.

- "I acknowledge that I have an anger problem."
- "I do not have an anger problem."

Step 3. Other people in your life can be a great support network while you are trying to change. They can also be a source of motivation when you are tempted to return to your old ways. Who is in your support network?

Step 5. Forgive others and have empathy. Holding on to past anger can delay the change process. This is why it's important to forgive others for past wrongs, and also to forgive yourself – to start fresh. Having empathy means you put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand how they feel in a situation. This can help you figure out why they acted the way they did, and you might realize that you would have acted the same way.

Step 4. Use the techniques that you've learned to help you calm down and to avoid acting aggressively. List the techniques you've learned; you can go back through the booklet if you have to.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

(Try to master a couple)

Summary

Here's a quick summary of what you have learned about anger:

- 1) Anger is an *emotion*; aggression is a *behaviour*; hostility is a *way of thinking*.
- 2) Your triggers are what make you angry. Knowing what your triggers are can help you prepare for any situation.
- 3) By keeping an Anger Log you can better understand the process you go through when something makes you angry; then you can begin to change your actions.
- 4) It's important to manage your negative thoughts before they spiral out of control by replacing them with positive self-talks.
- 5) Recognize what physical sensations you feel when you begin to get angry and then try relaxation techniques to calm yourself down.
- 6) Conflict is a part of everyday life that is sometimes unavoidable. Knowing how to deal with conflict is not something people are born with but a skill that can be learned.
- 7) Assertiveness and listening skills can help you manage conflict in a way that does not result in aggressive behaviour.
- 8) You can always revisit this workbook and use the steps and techniques to help you better manage your anger. Practice is required, in situations of less anger, in order to master the techniques. Not all techniques work equally well for each person.