Anger Workshop

DP 001 - Developmental Intervention

By

Equilla Luke-Johnson and Harry F. Klinefelter, III
ANGER WORKSHOP:
EXPRESSING AND DEALING WITH ANGER

by

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ANGER WORKSHOP

GOALS:
1. To expand awareness of the concept of anger.
2. To identify some personal barriers to the constructive expression of anger.
3. To learn alternative means of expressing anger effectively.
4. To identify some coping strategies for successfully dealing with anger expressed by others.

TARGET POPULATION:
Interested members of the university community (i.e., students, faculty, staff).

TIME:
1½ hours.

OVERVIEW:
1. Introduction and self-disclosure by leaders and audience volunteers of their personal interest in anger.
2. Participants identify associations related to the word, "anger".
3. Lecturette on defining and differentiating anger.
4. Participants discuss how they manage anger.
5. Sources of anger and typical styles of expressing anger are reviewed.
6. Group brainstorm barriers to expressing anger (fears).
7. Leaders role play healthy/unhealthy ways of handling anger.
8. Participants discuss their reactions to role plays.

OUTLINE:
Minutes:

10 I. Introduction.
   A. Introduce group members and leaders if group is small; otherwise, just introduce leaders.
   B. Leaders present overview of the workshop.
   C. Leaders and participants self-disclose about their interest in the topic of anger.

10 II. Free Association Exercise.
   A. Audience (if small enough) is seated in a circle. One leader asks members to mention the first word association that comes to mind when they think about "anger".
B. Other leader records responses on blackboard and processes the exercise with participants.

10 III. Lecturette - Defining and Differentiating Anger.

A. People often experience ambivalent attitudes toward anger.
B. Many different views are held about anger: religious, mental health, famous quotations.
C. Multiple meanings of anger.
D. Different ways of conceptualizing anger.
E. Perspective on anger that forms premise for workshop is shared.

10 IV. Discussion by group: How participants express their anger.

10 V. Lecturette - Common Ways Anger is Expressed and Sources of Our Anger.

A. Typical reactions to anger.
   1. Overreaction/underreaction.
   2. Somatic complaints.
   3. Emotional reactions.
   4. Release through activity.
B. Sources of anger.

10 VI. Group Brainstorm: Barriers to the Constructive Expression of Anger. Categorize participants' responses according to fears.

25 VII. Leaders Model Constructive/Destructive Ways of Expressing/Responding to Anger. Leaders process participants' reactions and distribute handouts: "Tips on Communicating Anger;" "Tips on Dealing with an Angry Person" (Handout #2).

5 VIII. Conclusion, Summary, and Collection of Evaluations.

   Materials: Blackboard and handout mentioned earlier.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENT

I. Introduction

A. Leaders seated opposite one another in circle if numbers allow.
II. Free Association Exercise

A. Words associated with "anger" are solicited from audience until a sufficient quantity is produced to illustrate the complexity of this emotion.

B. Participant reactions to exercise are processed using the following questions as guides.

1. "What thoughts and feelings did you experience while participating in this exercise?"
2. "What memories were triggered for you?"
3. "What relevance does your own word association have to the way in which you deal with anger?"

C. Leaders encourage participants to remember and store thoughts and feelings stirred up by this exercise for use later in the workshop.

III. Lecturette - Defining and Differentiating Anger.

A. Ambivalent attitudes toward anger.

1. Powerful, scary, and misunderstood emotion.
2. Carries a lot of negative connotations (as illustrated by free association exercise).
3. Confusion about anger is reflected in absence of explicit social/cultural norms for its responsible expression.
4. Implicit dangers connected with expression of anger are captured in following quotation: "When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry count to 100 (Thomas Jefferson)."

B. Religious view of anger: some mixed and potentially confusing messages.

1. Old Testament portrays God as "slow to anger." Implication is that the spontaneous expression of angry feelings is to be avoided. This admonition (suggesting the postponement of anger) is apt to be mistakenly construed as advocating the denial of feelings of anger.
2. New Testament reference to anger: "be angry and sin not." Above quotation affirms the value of expressing anger. It implies that being angry is not synonymous with committing a sin. However, except for some of the more enlightened churches, the covert message conveyed by Christianity is that anger is seldom acknowledged and rarely expressed.
C. Mental health attitude toward anger.
   1. Its expression is valued and encouraged (in appropriate and accepting surroundings).
   2. Validity and depth of anger are acknowledged.
   3. Constructive expression of anger = sign of emotional maturity.
   4. Emotional immaturity, on the other hand, is characterized by hostility and hate.

D. Meaning of anger.
   1. A combination of uneasiness, displeasure, discomfort, tenseness, resentment, and frustration.
   2. Anger = a response to an offending stimulus.
   3. Etymologists point out that term is not associated with hostility, aggression, or rage in either German, French, or Spanish.

E. Ways of conceptualizing anger.
   1. productive/nonproductive; constructive/destructive; undercontrolled/overcontrolled; inside/outside.
   2. Anger kept inside.
      a. healthy - leads to sublimation (Meninger).
         Martin Luther quote: "When I'm angry, my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding sharpened."
      b. unhealthy - anger turned inward produces depression (psychoanalytic view).
   3. Anger expressed outside.
      a. healthy - responsible, effective, purposeful (assertive), communication enhances relationships; allows greater intimacy and enhances self-esteem.
      b. unhealthy - aggression, hostility, hate - creates bad feelings with others and diminishes self-esteem.

F. Basic assumption and bias underlying workshop.
   Anger is a value-free emotion that provides the opportunity for emotional growth (both intrapersonally and interpersonally) when acknowledged and dealt with in an assertive manner.

IV. Leader-led group discussion of how participants express anger.
   Helpful to ask audience to recollect previous memories stimulated by word associations to "anger".

V. Lecturette - Common Ways Anger is Expressed and Where Anger Comes from.
A. Overreacting (acting out behavior)/underreacting.

Style of expressing anger is a function of individual's belief system and learning history (e.g., parental edicts and admonitions regarding anger).

B. Overreaction

1. Often frightens others and distances them from person who acts out anger by screaming, hitting, kicking, or somehow assaulting an object or person.
2. Overreactors often vent anger without regard for other people's feelings.

C. Underreactors.

1. Frequently deny experiencing the feeling.
2. Acknowledge angry feeling while smiling outwardly in face of object of anger.
3. Person may internalize anger - store it up, and explode later (delayed reaction is out of proportion to magnitude of irritating stimulus).
4. Women in Western society most often portrayed as underreactors, but significant number of men also suppress their anger.

D. Society's mixed messages concerning demonstrations of anger.

1. OK in athletic contests and more acceptable for men to do.
2. Taboo in public places (e.g. restaurants, offices, etc.).

E. Physiological reactors

Tension headaches; stomach aches; neck, shoulder, and arm tension; high blood pressure; ulcers; migraines; skin reactions (rashes, hives).

F. Emotional reactions

Crying and depression.

G. Physical activity as means of expression.

1. Sublimation (e.g. vigorous exercise) - anger channeled in a socially accepted way.
2. Displacement - acting out on object other than source of your anger.
H. Where our anger comes from.

1. powerlessness and threat
2. passivity
3. overreaction to past
4. emotional experiences
5. beliefs about anger
6. lack of skills
7. reinforcement for certain behavior (secondary gains)

VI. Group brainstorm of barriers (fears) to constructive expression of anger.

Fears for leaders to include in list on blackboard if audience omits them or fails to produce enough material during brainstorm.

A. Retaliation
B. Rejection (loss)
C. Losing control
D. Being seen as a terrible person
E. Hurting someone’s feelings
F. Not being liked
G. Experiencing the hurt and pain related to feeling angry.

VII. Demonstration/Role Play by leaders of constructive/destructive ways of expressing/responding to anger.

A. Destructive style of dealing with anger by both sender and receiver of communication.

1. Sender tries to violate all of tips on communicating anger (#1) listed on handout.
2. Recipient of anger responds in a non-productive way by acting contrary to the suggestions outlined in handout #2 entitled, "Tips on Dealing with an Angry Person."

B. Destructive expression of anger coupled with constructive approach by receiver of anger. Process power exerted by recipient - argument does not develop, because it takes two for that to happen.

C. Both leaders model constructive communication style in managing angry feelings. Process what happened as prelude to passing out aforementioned handouts (#1 and #2) to audience.

VIII. Conclusion and summary of workshop experience.

Program evaluation (handout #3) is collected.
A written evaluation was performed at the end of the workshop in the form of a brief questionnaire (sample included). This data is summarized and included in this appendix.

The audience for this program was larger than anticipated, but the size did not seem to inhibit their willingness to participate actively in either the free association or brainstorming exercises or group discussions. Audience involvement and energy level were consistently high throughout the program with peak interest stimulated by the leaders' role-plays. These "in vivo" demonstrations provoked numerous comments and an extended discussion period. It was clear that participants represented a diverse range of expectations for the workshop. For example, a small but distinct minority of women expressed specific difficulties in communicating anger in an intimate relationship with men, while another person's concerns with angry feelings were related to a weight problem. Despite careful efforts by the co-facilitators to establish limited expectations, several participants seemed reluctant to adjust their goals for the workshop to a more realistic level. However, both formal and informal feedback confirmed the workshop's value to the audience as a whole.
Handout #1

TIPS ON COMMUNICATING ANGER

Healthy communication is based on the assumption that we all have the right to have feelings -- and to express these feelings in ways which show respect for others as well as ourselves. Personal relationships become more authentic and satisfying when we share our honest reactions with others and allow them to do the same. Below are some helpful hints to assist you in dealing openly and effectively with natural emotions such as anger:

1. **Use "I" statements.** For example, use the statement "I am angry with you" rather than "You make me angry". This increases the likelihood that your message will be heard rather than reacted to in a defensive manner.

2. **Make statements which are descriptive rather than evaluative.** By describing your own reaction, it leaves the other person free to use it or not to use it as he/she sees fit. By avoiding evaluative language, you reduce the need for the other person to respond defensively.

3. **Statements need to be specific rather than general.** If you are told that you are "dominating", it will probably not be as useful as to be told that "Just now when we were deciding the issue, you did not listen to what others said, and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you."

4. **Make statements based on observations rather than on inferences.** They need to be on what you can see or hear in the behavior of another person, not on interpretation and conclusions.

5. **Take into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback.** Feedback can be destructive when it serves only your own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.

6. **Direct statements toward behavior which the receiver can do something about.** Frustration is only increased when you remind someone of some shortcoming over which he/she has no control.

7. **Make well-timed statements.** In general, feedback is most useful when spoken at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.)

8. **Check to insure clear communication.** One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback he/she has received to see if it corresponds to what you, the sender, had in mind.

**Suggested Readings:** *Your Perfect Right* by Alberti and Emmons  
*The Angry Book* by Rubin
TIPS ON DEALING WITH AN ANGRY PERSON

Use of these suggestions can help you gain a sense of control when confronted by an angry attack. At the very least, they will enable you to develop skills that will allow you to avoid becoming entangled in a "no-win" argument. Continued practice will provide you with the potential ability to defuse the other person's verbal assault and convert a potentially destructive encounter into an opportunity for a healthy exchange of feelings and the creative resolution of interpersonal conflict. Armed with these tips to guide your responses, you can choose not to submit to accepting the role of helpless victim of someone's aggressive "anger attack".

OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH AN "ANGER ATTACK" ON YOU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructive/Productive</th>
<th>Destructive/Counterproductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Listen non-defensively and &quot;tune-in&quot; to the other person's anger (as much as you can!)</td>
<td>1. Refuse to listen and express your hurt feelings by attacking back and/or crying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Express your understanding of their feelings and acknowledge responsibility for any behavior on your part which may have contributed to hurting the other person and provoking the angry outburst.</td>
<td>2. Defending yourself and counter-attacking by expressing your anger in destructive ways (see handout on &quot;Tips On Communicating Anger&quot;).</td>
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<td>3. Clearly and sensitively express how you feel about being the recipient of the &quot;anger attack&quot;.</td>
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<td>4. State your preference for a time, place, and style of communicating your feelings in a nonhurtful way so that the conflict can be resolved.</td>
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</table>
PROGRAM EVALUATION

Counseling, Learning, and Career Services invites your help in evaluating the effectiveness of this program. Your responses to the following questions will enable us to improve future services. Thanks.

Age _______________ Sex _______________ Major _______________

Student _______________ Staff _______________ Other _______________

1. How did you hear about this "Food for Thought" program? (please circle all responses which apply)
   a. Daily Texan Ad
   b. Poster or flyer
   c. Faculty/Staff person
   d. Display in Union
   e. Counseling Center, RASSL, a Career Center Staff Person

2. Please circle your response:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Overall this program was a beneficial experience for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>b. The presenters were well-informed about the topic.</td>
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<td>c. This program was presented in a well-organized manner.</td>
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<td>d. I found the program interesting.</td>
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<td>e. The presenters clearly communicated the meaning of the material.</td>
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<td>f. If it were offered again, I would recommend this program to a friend.</td>
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3. Please circle your response:

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<tr>
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. This program helped me broaden my awareness of the concept of anger.</td>
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<td>b. This workshop helped me identify some of my personal barriers to the constructive expression of anger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. This program provided me with some ideas about how to express anger in more productive ways.</td>
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<td>d. This workshop provided me with some new alternatives for dealing with anger expressed by others.</td>
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4. Please check any topic(s) which you would like to see included in future programs:

___ Food abuse (eating disorders)
___ Alcohol (substance) abuse
___ Building self-esteem
___ Who's minding your body? Ways to stay well.
___ Perfectionism
___ Relationship enrichment
___ Loss and grief
___ Memory improvement
___ Other

___ Special Population concerns, explain:
### EXPRESSING AND DEALING WITH ANGER

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<th>Total filling out sheets=26</th>
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<th>Female=21</th>
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#### Major

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<th>Food Abuse</th>
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#### Question #1

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#### Comments:

Presenters were both poised and really included the whole group-much involvement from audience. One of the best yet!