

## **13 STEPS TOWARD ANGER MANAGEMENT**

Adapted From THE ANGER WORKBOOK - Dr. Les Carter & Dr. Frank Minirth

### **1. Learn To Recognize The Many Faces Of Anger**

**Define your anger - what is it about?** It is often linked to an unfulfilled need for worth or respect.

*Learn to Preserve Your Personal Worth, Know Your Essential Needs, Know Your Basic Convictions.*

### **2. Admit That All Angry Expressions, Good Or Bad, Are The Result Of Choices**

**5 Ways to Handle Anger: 1. Suppress Anger, 2. Open Aggression, 3. Passive Aggression, 4. Assertive Anger** - If anger is defined as preserving personal worth, needs, and convictions, then assertive anger means this preservation is accomplished while considering the needs and feelings of others. This form of anger can actually help relationships to grow. It represents a mark of personal maturity and stability. It requires self-discipline and respect for the dignity of others. It implies that we are not just pushing selfish agendas on them. And it requires us to put our communications into the context of the "big picture," anticipating how it will affect future interactions.

**5. Dropping Anger** - This is the most difficult to do. Dropping your anger means you accept your inability to completely control circumstances and you recognize your personal limits. This option includes tolerance of differences as well as choosing to forgive.

**Two keys about assertiveness:** (1) Make sure the issues receiving your attention are not trivial. Instead, expend your emotional energy on subjects that matter. (2) Be aware that your tone of voice can help create an atmosphere of respect for others.

### **3. Let Go Of Excessive Dependencies So Your Anger Management Is Inwardly Directed Rather Than Externally Determined**

#### **Feeling Unloved Breeds Dependency**

#### **Learn to Balance Your Dependencies:**

**Develop Spiritual Well-Being** - (1) One must acknowledge the unreliability of humans. One must be encouraged to accept the reality of human nature. In unflattering terms, Jer. 17:9 warns, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

Acknowledging this reality helps us to alter our thoughts about others when we feel disappointed with someone's unwillingness to be loving. (2) One must choose to endorse the healthy characteristics prescribed in scripture. A good place to begin is with the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5:19-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. With a powerful commitment to composure we can focus on the fruit of the spirit until it becomes *habitual*. A spiritually grounded life is not the result of a one-time decision, rather one needs to decide *daily* to yield to God's empowerment.

Key: Learn to anticipate and identify potential situations in which you feel vulnerable - situations and people that can *push your buttons*. *Plan to respond appropriately*, not react inappropriately. *Awareness* is key.

**Develop a Contemplative Mind** - Contemplative thinking can lead to something like this: "In the Lord I have competence. I do not have to be pulled down by other's behavior." Notice how contemplative thinking differs from dependency in the following comparisons.

Dependency: "I worry about how others will treat me."

Contemplation: "I may want to be liked by others, but I can manage just fine even if others don't think as I do."

Dependency: "I'm not sure I can handle adversity."

Contemplation: "If problems arise, somehow I'll manage them."

Dependency: "I've got to have steady surroundings so I can be stable."

Contemplation: "I like steady surroundings, but I can learn how to remain steady even in the midst of unrest."

Knowing you can draw upon spiritual strength, you can choose not to let your anger be at the mercy of your environment.

#### **4. Choose To Relinquish Your Craving For Control In Exchange For Freedom**

**Why Control Occurs: 1. Performance Takes Priority, 2. Differences are Threatening, 3. Obligation is Perceived as Mandatory**

**Responding to Other's Control: Counter-Control** - Another person's attempt to control us is an invitation to a *power-play* and we often accept that invitation by engaging in our own counter-control tactics. The desire to get away from another's control is both understandable and normal. However, when we accomplish this by using force we add to the very atmosphere we dislike. Learn to resist this temptation. Understand the net result is your anger escalates and anxiety gains a foothold. "A soft answer turns away wrath" but a harsh word stirs up anger" - Proverbs 15: 1. This reflects a choice to behave appropriately in the face of another's inappropriateness.

**Acknowledge God's Declaration of Freedom** - God grants us freedom in the form of *choices*. Freedom is best balanced by a submission to God's declarations in scripture. When we realize God is in control we can relinquish our need to be controlling. People who try to control others usually means they can not control themselves. Ideally, in freedom we choose to manage our anger by using one of the two healthy choices discussed earlier - *assertiveness* or *dropping it*. We are willing to set appropriate boundaries and state legitimate needs while also being wise enough to know when to be cooperative and non-controversial. We have the freedom to choose how we want to respond to another's controlling attempts and a choice to not get trapped accordingly.

#### **5. Ground Yourself In Truth By Setting Aside Idealistic Myths**

Myth 1 - My history of rejection leaves me emotionally depleted.

Myth 2 - God should have stopped my problems.

Myth 3 - Letting go of my anger means I am conceding defeat.

Myth 4 - No one understands my unique problems.

Myth 5 - I don't deserve to be happy.

Myth 6 - There is nothing to look forward to anymore.

Anchor Yourself in Truth - One must learn to challenge negative generalizations and myths and replace them with what is truthful.

### **6. Keep Your Lifestyle Habits Consistent With Your Emotional Composure**

Sabotaging Emotional Stability: Morals Decline, Work Becomes All-Encompassing, Poor Health Habits Develop, Material Gain Is Overemphasized, Substance Abuse Is More Likely, Spiritual Life Is Ignored

### **7. Live In Humility Rather Than Self-Preoccupied Pride**

**What is Pride?** Pride Is Our Spiritual Disease

Choosing Humility: Humility is Other-Focused, Humility Accepts Limits, Humility Does Not Require Repressing Emotions.

### **8. Hold Your Defenses To A Minimum: Trust Your Healthy Assertions**

**Identify Your Fears, Fear Causes Defensiveness**

**Three Categories of Defense:**

**1. Denial** - A refusal to acknowledge personal problems or tensions. In most cases denial is subconscious; avoiding issues is so central to the person's character it occurs without overt deliberation. It is as though there is a need to exist beyond humanness. The inherent fear in denial is that our humanness or vulnerability might be discovered and held against us. When we deny our problems we insinuate, "It could be disastrous to admit imperfections; I'd hate to think what that would do to my reputation. "

**2. Evasiveness** - Evasiveness is driven by a conscious element of fear, while denial involves subconscious self-deception. Evasiveness is a deliberate deception of others. When we act evasively we are specifically choosing to avoid the responsibility of meeting problems head on. We assume that open conflicts or confrontations would be uncomfortable. When we are evasive we may be fearfully wondering, "What if I say the wrong thing? You might not like me if I tell you what I really feel. I am inadequately equipped to discuss personal matters." Evasiveness is a mark of personal insecurity and a lack of trust in others.

**3. Reversal** - Reversal is more openly combative. It is driven by the idea that the best way to protect yourself is to keep others on the defensive. When we use reversal techniques we assume others are out to get us, so we become offensive whenever delicate matters are mentioned.

**Becoming Authentic** - The opposite of fearful defense is open authenticity. This means while we are wise enough to balance self-disclosure we are also willing to make ourselves as known as common sense allows. Authenticity is living without pretense; our external lives are consistent with our internal lives. Being authentic does not require us to deny our fear; there is enough imperfections to warrant some wariness in each of us. It means we will erect minimal barriers and have little to hide. To be authentic we must learn to like ourselves for who we are. When you let fear guide you, you are inviting people to think poorly of you. When people sense your hesitancy or your defensiveness they are prone to reject you. You'll get the adverse treatment you don't want. Then you become angry, which only makes matters worse. Learn to become more concerned with what you think about yourself as opposed to worrying about what others might think of you!

**Why We Struggle with Fear:**

**We Over-Interpret Rejection** - When we over-interpret rejections, we are not only guilty of letting others have too much power, we also are communicating "I can't trust myself." This lack of self-trust can be noticed by others, and it can give them "permission" to pounce. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**We Are Uncertain of Other's Motive** - Learn to accept the idea that a person can have less than the highest motives in relating with you, and you'll not be shocked when a disappointment occurs. The result will be that you won't give undue attention to someone else's failing and you can stay on your course for healthy living. Learn to adopt the mindset to be stubborn enough not to let your emotions be dictated by others. Assume that no one will ever be completely trustworthy, and yet you can choose independently to maintain inner balance in spite of it.

**We Forget God Is in Charge** - "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" (Ps. 56:4). When our emotions hinge on the opinions of humans, we are fearful because we can never be sure when we might be rejected or criticized or ignored. A human-based self-image is only as secure as the humans we entrust with our emotions. But a God-based self-image is different. Because God accepts us, weaknesses and all, we can live confidently in the knowledge that He can guide us through all relational or circumstantial pitfalls.

## **9. Accept The Inevitability Of Loneliness As Your Struggle To Be Understood**

**Why We Feel Lonely: Our Sinful Nature, We Neglect Relationships, We Do Not State Our Needs Successfully.**

## **10. Relate To Others As Equals. Neither Elevating Yourself Above Them Nor Accepting A Position Of Inferiority**

Everyone Feels Inferior at Times: We Succumb to Inferiority Feelings, We Seek False Superiority, Recognize Equality, Minimize Evaluation

## **11. Pass Along To The Next Generation Your Insights About Anger** **Keys to Handling Your child's Anger:**

**Don't Be Threatened by Your Child's Anger** - If you get easily caught in power plays or if you often speak tensely to your child, you may be exhibiting this kind of defensiveness and revealing how threatened you are. Subconsciously, the child reacts with manipulation. When we respond in fear to a child's anger, we communicate "you are a very powerful force in my life and I have to overwhelm you to teach you anything." It is an invitation to battle. And any time a parent battles the child, everyone loses.

So what is the alternative? First, let your child be human. You've had moments of irritability, too, and you probably don't respond all that well when someone attempts to scold you for your emotions. Allow your child the same latitude. Second, quietly hold firm to your rightful authority, even if the child eyes you with skepticism. If your words make sense and your discipline is fair, let them stand on their own merits. Don't attempt to sell a child something that needs no salesmanship.

When you lose your shock over a child's anger, the result is increased objectivity and the ability to relate with reason and fairness. Stability and logic, rather than knee-jerk emotion, will be your guide. A calm firmness will permeate your character, prompting the child to realize the futility of power plays.

When you feel threatened by your child's anger you can use the *none-the-less* approach to discipline. Often times you feel compelled to defend your decision by explaining why your child should not be feeling as your child does. Realize your explanations only fuel your child's fire.

This is when it is time to drop your explanations in favor of the *none-the-less* approach. Example: "Sam, I know you are frustrated (acknowledge the feeling) because you'll have to alter your plans. None-the-less, the garage needs to be cleaned this afternoon." The key is not to be threatened by your child's protest. You must continue on your course. You can repeat your original statement. You can keep telling your child the same thing with no pleading or persuasion. This is your way of communicating that you are confident enough in your decision that you can withstand your child's angry reaction. Eventually your child will get the picture and lower their anger level.

**Let Choices & Consequences Shape the Child** - Parents can be impatient for children to learn important lessons. If we take a moment and reflect what is really going on, we realize as parents we are *telling the child how to think*. We need to ask ourselves what affect our lectures and threats have upon our children. Our children become angrier and inwardly vow that no one will tell them what to do. It is not the instruction itself that the child is angry about, it is the fact that the adult is not letting the child have choices.

Rather than doing the mental work for our children, we need to let them choose for themselves how they will handle their tension. Parents can be overly concerned about the choices our children will make - obviously discernment is necessary. We need to be cautious about being too finicky. The point is that parents are doing a dis-service by trying to think for children. Part of our task as parents is nurturing our children to learn how to think for themselves. Children need the experience of struggling with their own emotions. Right now a child's decisions are relatively harmless, then ten years from now when our children are living on their own, they'll need to know how to sift through opinions about more complex matters and make the best choice. Now is the best time for children to develop strategies for managing their emotions. *But they won't become proficient if we get in the way.*

Good questions and responses take the burden off your shoulders and place them in the child's lap - "What do you think can be done about this?" "What opinions do you have?" "I see you're feeling *frustrated* because *he is bothering you* - what options do you have to manage this *frustration*?" "This won't be an easy problem to solve, but you always have choices. You can argue back with your brother, you can hold a grudge, you can go to a different part of the house. Which choice makes the most sense to you?" In these subtle ways, the parent communicates confidence in the child. Another related task is helping our children learn to calculate the consequences of their choices.

**Don't Preach, Don't Major in the Minors, Share Your Own Experiences, Incorporate Spiritual Insights Delicately**

### **12. Avoid The Temptation To Rationalize Your Anger**

Assume Full Responsibility For Who You Are.

Rationalizations Perpetuate Anger: My past is too painful, Forgiveness is too good, Why should I try when no one else does? Anger is a familiar habit.

### **13. Be Accountable For Your On Going Growth And Open About Your Anger Management**

**Applying Your Insights:** Set Goals to Become More Relational, Make Amends with those You have Wronged, Choose to Be Positive in Your Communication, Be Authentic about Your Anger-Management Efforts

