



UNIT-3

How Does Anger Affect Our Thinking

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify ways to help other people safely manage some of their repressed or expressed anger.

Unit 3

How Does Anger Affect Our Thinking

Is Anger the Best Response?

Sometimes we find ourselves responding to particular events with anger, and because we always respond with anger, we begin to think it is the event itself that is making you angry. However, the culprit isn't the event. It's how you interpret the event that makes you angry. We cannot physically respond to every person or event with anger: the law, social norms, and common sense place limits on how far we can let our anger go.

As well, **anger affects your thinking**. Memory, creativity, and concentration weaken. Your thoughts become accusatory, exaggerated, and rigid. You treat assumptions as facts; you may become irrational.

To help you determine whether anger is your best response, ask yourself: **Is my anger helping me or hurting me?**

If the answer is "hurting," it's a message that your anger is needless; it is making the situation worse. In these instances it's time to respond differently.

The art of anger management (being able to transform anger from a negative experience into a positive one) is learning how to use your thoughts and feelings and behaviors so they work for you, not against you.

Distorted Thinking

We know that how we think about things determines to a large degree what we experience, and this is particularly true about anger. Anger is a strong emotion and can quickly become irrational, even when it seems justified. Use cold, distant logic with yourself to avoid your thoughts becoming distorted. The most common forms of distorted thinking are:

- Magnifying
- Destructive labeling
- Imperative thinking
- Mind reading

Magnifying

This type of distortion turns the consequences of a negative event into a catastrophe. For example, if you usually get angry when you are two minutes late for a meeting or miss a particular call, you are probably magnifying the problem. Ask yourself if you are making a mountain out of a

molehill. Do you have a tendency to take something that is unfortunate and turn it into the worst possible situation?

There are some things you can do to control your tendency to magnify a bad situation. These three steps can help you neutralize your anger:

- Make a realistic assessment of the situation. How bad is it really?
- Be very precise and accurate in the language you use to describe the bad situation. For example, this wasn't the worst restaurant you've ever eaten at. The soup was cold and service was slow.
- Look at the whole picture, not just the annoying piece.

Here are some **coping thoughts** that you can use:

- "Yes, this is frustrating but it's not the end of the world."
- "By next week, none of this will matter."
- "It's a setback; it's not worth getting all bent out of shape."

Destructive Labeling

This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. When you use destructive labeling, you broaden one or two qualities into a negative, global judgment. Examples may include calling your boss a jerk, your girlfriend a hag, or your colleague a loser.

Destructive labeling creates and perpetuates anger because it forces you to focus on only the negative characteristics you find irritating in another person. Sometimes we label others in an effort to protect our own self-esteem. However, when you hear yourself labeling someone, step back and describe the annoying behavior with precision.

Here are some **coping thoughts** that you can use:

- "Why am I swearing?"
- "I feel frustrated and things aren't going the way I'd like them to, but I can cope."

Imperative Thinking

This is when you have a list of inflexible rules about how you and others should act. For example, "You should have called me back right away if you weren't interested."

Imperative thinking creates anger because it implies that we are entitled to get what we want in a specific situation, or that people should be the way we want them to be. Then, when our imperatives are violated, we think an injustice has taken place.

Violating our own self-requirements (for example, thinking, “I should have done a better job”) also creates anger because we perceive the violation as failure. Usually what this means is that we have unrealistically high expectations. This is a trait we often see in a chronically angry person.

Here are some **coping thoughts** that you can use:

- “I’m not being reasonable here.”
- If you use the words should, must, or always, stop yourself and ask, “Is that really true?”
- Try thinking of the situation from someone else’s perspective.

Mind Reading

With this type of distorted thinking, you rarely check out your presumptions. Instead, you act as if they were true. (For example, you may think, “If my co-worker respected me, he would have asked for my opinion. Since he doesn’t, I will ignore his input too.”) Clearly, we don’t have the power to read someone else’s mind. Often, these presumptions become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Here are some **coping thoughts** that you can use:

- “How do I know that this is true?”
- “What assumptions am I making?”

Conclusion

Most of what we’ve been doing is looking at your behavior over the long term and making you aware of what has been going on in your own mind. This includes the thoughts that trigger your anger, the distorted thoughts that can fuel your anger, and the thoughts we can use in place of these.

If you can get a handle on the type of self-talk or inner dialogue that goes on in your head all day, and have some different coping strategies, you will have made a big start toward getting your anger under control.

Understanding Behavior Types

Sometimes, understanding why someone is behaving in a particular way is enough to ease your anger a little. Let’s talk a bit about passive, manipulative, assertive, and aggressive behaviors.

Aggressive Behavior

Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of in a forceful and self-serving way.

Characteristics

- Self-serving
- Demanding
- Dogmatic

- Competitive
- Pushy
- Uses intimidation, power, and status
- Insensitive
- Strong need to control and dominate others
- Fears rejection
- Impatient
- Temperamental

Major Consequences

- May accomplish personal desire and goals.
- Tends to alienate people, create distrust and tension, and undermine the ability to establish lasting and healthy relationships.

Manipulative or Passive-Aggressive Behavior

Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of in an indirect, cunning, deceptive, and crafty way with ulterior motives in mind.

Characteristics

- Game player (using pouting, looking hurt, silence, dropping hints, flirting, giving or withholding attention or caring, and other indirect methods to manipulate people)
- Uses double messages (say one thing and mean another)
- Hides real feelings and intentions
- Inward feelings and outward expressions often incongruent
- Rebellious
- Gets defensive and angry when caught manipulating
- Strong need for approval and attention
- Insecure but wears façade
- Distrusts others

Major Consequences

- May be successful in manipulating others in indirect ways.
- Undermines credibility and trust.
- Causes them to lose touch with real self and real feelings.

Passive Behavior

Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of by suppressing them or maneuvering others to take care of them.
- Also use manipulative behaviors to get others to take care of them.

Characteristics

- Denies needs, subordinates them to others, or manipulates others to take care of them
- Often plays martyr role
- Creates conditions in which others will take the lead or make decisions
- Follower
- Tries to do what they think others expect of them
- Lacks self-confidence
- Easily intimidated and controlled by others
- Indecisive
- Moody
- Occasionally cashes in on stored-up anger and feelings
- Uncertain about who they are

Major Consequences

- May result in some needs getting met.
- Often results in sacrificing needs, getting them met in inappropriate ways, and the loss of identity and ability to take care of self.

Assertive Behavior

Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of by knowing, accepting, and acting on them in constructive, straightforward, and authentic ways.

Characteristics

- Caring
- Genuine
- Sensitive to the needs and feelings of others
- Selfless
- Expresses needs and feelings in constructive and straightforward ways
- Persistent without being offensive
- Levels and confronts from caring and reasonable position
- Good sense of timing and judgment about when to assert themselves
- Self-confident
- Calm in a crisis

Major Consequences

- Able to know and take care of needs in a constructive way without doing so at the expense of others.