

ALTERNATIVES TO DESTRUCTIVE ANGER

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Increase awareness of how anger is expressed destructively.
2. Decrease the number, intensity, and duration of angry outbursts while increasing the use of new skills for managing anger.
3. Become capable of handling angry feelings in constructive ways that enhance daily functioning.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- Antisocial Behavior
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)—Adult
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Family Conflict
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

Clients often feel they responded to a frustrating situation in the only way possible. They fail to realize that they have choices and control over their behavior. You may want to review the alternatives to rage listed in the first section of the assignment to help clients understand the alternatives they could apply when dealing with frustration or anger. Review the client's journal material and suggest additional constructive ways to respond to frustrating or hurtful situations that prompt mismanaged anger.

ALTERNATIVES TO DESTRUCTIVE ANGER

Destructive anger can take many forms. Anger can be expressed in rage that is out of control, either verbally or physically. We also can express anger by snapping at someone or being unkindly critical. A third form that anger may take is that of cold, icy withdrawal that punishes others by shutting them out, shunning them, or refusing to acknowledge their attempts to relate to us. All of these reactions and many more can be destructive to the relationship and to our own feelings of self-esteem. Destructive expressions of anger often generate later feelings of guilt and shame.

This exercise is designed to briefly identify some *constructive* alternatives to destructive anger by giving a brief description of the positive alternative. The goal is for you to consider these alternatives as you seek to replace destructive anger with more constructive behaviors. You will be asked to keep a journal of situations in your daily life that provoked anger and then note how one or more of these constructive alternatives may have been applied to the situations.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES

- A. *Assertiveness*: Speaking forthrightly in a manner that is very respectful of the other person's needs and rights and does not attack anyone so as to make the person defensive.
- B. *Tune Out / Cool Down*: Recognize that the situation has become volatile and nonproductive and suggest withdrawal from the situation to give each party a chance to cool down and collect their thoughts and regain personal control.
- C. *Relaxation*: Learn and implement relaxation skills to reduce stress and tension through the use of words that cue relaxation, deep breathing that releases tension, imagining relaxing scenes, or deep muscle relaxation procedures.
- D. *Diversion*: When anger is felt to be building, find diversionary activities that stop the buildup and focus the mind on more enjoyable experiences.
- E. *Physical Exercise*: When anger and tension levels rise, physical exercise can be a wonderful way to release tension and expel energy as an alternative to losing control or exploding in rage.
- F. *Problem-Solving Skills*: Identify or clarify the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, review the pros and cons of each alternative solution, select the best alternative for implementation, evaluate the outcome as to mutual satisfaction, and finally, adjust the solution if necessary to increase mutual satisfaction.

- G. *Self-Talk*: Take time to talk to yourself in calming, reasoned, and constructive sentences that move you toward anger control and away from hurtful expressions of anger.
- H. *"I" Messages*: Speak to the target of your anger, describing your feelings and needs rather than attacking, labeling, or describing the other person's behavior, motivations, or goals. Begin your sentences with "I feel . . ." or "I need"
- I. *Other*: Describe your own or your counselor's alternative to rage. _____

APPLICATION TO DAILY LIFE

In the columns that follow, describe the date and time, the situation that prompted the angry response, the destructive response, and the alternative constructive response that might have been used. In the final row, instead of writing a full description of the alternative, you may simply enter the alphabetical indicator of the constructive alternative, A through I.

Entry 1 Day/Date and Time: 	Situation	
	Response	
	Alternative Response	

(NOTE: Please make additional copies of the next page for later entries.)

EXERCISE 1.A

Entry (# of entry) Day/Date and Time: _____ _____	Situation	
	Response	
	Alternative Response	

Entry (# of entry) Day/Date and Time: _____ _____	Situation	
	Response	
	Alternative Response	

ANGER JOURNAL

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Develop an awareness of current angry behaviors, clarifying origins of and alternatives to aggressive anger.
2. Keep a daily journal of persons, situations, and other triggers of anger; record thoughts, feelings, and actions taken.
3. Decrease the number, intensity, and duration of angry outbursts while increasing the use of new skills for managing anger.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- Antisocial Behavior
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Family Conflict
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

Some clients deny the degree of anger they feel and express. Other clients may be aware of feelings of anger but need help in understanding the contributing factors and causes for their anger. As you process the journal entries with clients, help them clarify and pinpoint these contributing factors and the causes for their anger. Often the causes for the anger are not those that are initially identified, but lie beneath the surface and can be discovered with some patient processing. Finally, it is helpful to press the client toward describing positive alternative behaviors that could have replaced the maladaptive anger responses that were selected in the heat of the moment. Positive alternatives may include things like assertiveness, timeout, problem-solving, “I” messages, or self-talk.

ANGER JOURNAL

To make you more aware of your angry feelings, the circumstances surrounding them, the target of them, the causes for them, and how they were shown, you are being asked to keep an anger journal. This journal will help you record the when, what, who, why, and how of the angry feelings as well as allow you to give some thought to what alternative emotional, behavioral, or cognitive reaction you might have had to the situation. Be as honest as you can be with yourself about your angry feelings, trying not to discount them, excuse them, or deny them. When you conclude that you have experienced anger, that is the time to make an entry into this journal. Your entries do not have to be lengthy; a sentence or two will suffice. You should enter enough information to permit you to discuss each incident with your therapist as you try to process and learn from your anger experiences. Do not forget to include experiences that have generated some anger within you even though you did not express it in words or behavior. The buildup of unexpressed anger can result in an inappropriate outburst at a later time. This journal may help you understand that phenomenon. It is also important for you to give some thought to the last entry; that is, what alternative positive reaction could you have given to the situation instead of burying or blurting out your feelings of anger. Often there is a more constructive response available that you are able to discover when you give the issue some calm consideration and analysis. The heat of the moment leads many of us to make mistakes. Try to make at least one entry per day into your anger journal.

The anger journal that follows asks you to enter the date and time of the experience that generated anger. Second, you are asked to enter a description of the situation, such as where you were and what was happening. Third, you are asked to name the people who were present and specifically the people with whom you were angry. Next, you are asked to enter a sentence or two indicating your reason(s) for being so angry or the cause of your anger. Then you are asked to describe how your anger was or was not revealed. In the final column, enter your thoughts about how you could have responded to the experience more constructively. (NOTE: *Please make additional copies of the form for later entries.*)

EXERCISE 1.B

Entry (# of entry) Day/Date and Time: _____ _____ _____	What (Situation)	
	Who (People)	
	Why (Case)	
	How (Reaction)	
	Alternative Positive Reaction	

Entry (# of entry) Day/Date and Time: _____ _____ _____	What (Situation)	
	Who (People)	
	Why (Case)	
	How (Reaction)	
	Alternative Positive Reaction	

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION OF ANGER

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

1. Verbalize feelings of anger in a controlled, assertive way.
2. Decrease overall intensity and frequency of angry feelings, and increase ability to recognize and appropriately express angry feelings as they occur.
3. Demonstrate respect for others and their feelings.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR WHICH THIS EXERCISE MAY BE MOST USEFUL

- Antisocial Behavior
- Bipolar Disorder—Mania
- Family Conflict
- Impulse Control Disorder

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCESSING THIS EXERCISE WITH THE CLIENT

The purpose of this exercise is to improve the client's ability to verbally express anger in an assertive manner. Teach the client effective communication skills and/or coping strategies in the therapy sessions to help the expression of feelings of anger in a direct, calm, controlled, yet nonaggressive manner. The client is encouraged to practice the assertive communication techniques on a regular basis at home, at school, and in the workplace. The first page of the assignment identifies several effective communication skills. Feel free to teach the client other effective communication skills that will help the client to express anger appropriately.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION OF ANGER

In this assignment, you are asked to practice expressing your anger in a calm, controlled, and assertive manner on a regular basis at home, at school, or in the workplace. Assertive communication of anger includes the following characteristics:

1. Use of “I” statements—“I” statements reflect ownership of thoughts and feelings. Effective “I” statements are present-focused and free of manipulative ploys. Use of “I” statements are more likely to reflect statements of personal responsibility.
2. Avoid use of “You” statements that are often blaming, accusatory, or judgmental in nature. “You” statements often focus on the other person’s faults and place them on the defensive.
3. Calmly state your reasons for your anger. Refer to specific behaviors and focus more on the present situation and not on past faults of the other person.
4. Use facts instead of judgments.
5. Make requests for positive and specific changes in behavior. For example, “I would appreciate it if you would call and let me know when you are running late.”
6. Express your anger as soon after the specific behavior or event as possible so that your expression of anger can be present oriented.
7. Express anger in a calm and reasonable tone of voice. Clearly, it is best to avoid yelling or talking to the other person in a high-pitched or accusing tone of voice. Avoid nagging and whining as well.
8. Use active listening skills. After you have expressed your thoughts and feelings in a calm and controlled manner, it is important to listen to the other person’s point of view. Remember to listen to other people’s thoughts without interrupting. Maintain good eye contact while they are speaking to let them know that you are listening intently to their thoughts and feelings. Try to avoid thinking about what you want to say next.
9. If the discussion becomes tense or heated, remember to take a break to regain your composure and organize your thoughts.

Now that you have been taught effective communication techniques, we encourage you to use these skills on an everyday basis. Please fill out the Assertive Communication Log to record the incidents where you had the opportunity to practice communicating your feelings of anger.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION LOG

Date: _____ Time: _____

Setting: _____

Person(s) Involved: _____

What were you angry about? _____

How did you express your anger to the other person(s)? _____

How did the other person(s) respond to your expression of anger? _____

How did you, in turn, respond to their statements or feedback? _____

How successful or effective do you feel you were in expressing your anger? Did you resolve the problem? Please explain. _____

What, if anything, would you have said or done differently? _____
