

REACH Program: Session One

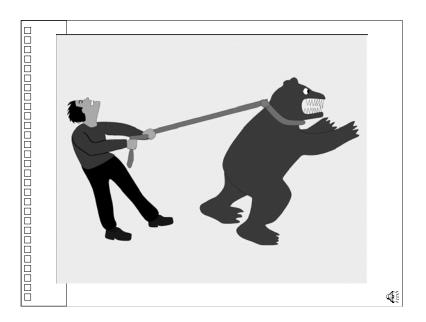
Introduction

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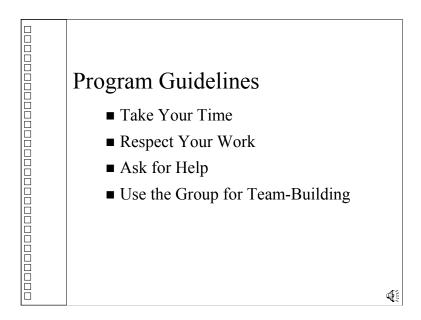




Welcome to the Reach group. We are going to be working together over the next several weeks on the issue of anger. But first let's talk about the group in general, and then we'll get to know a little about each other.

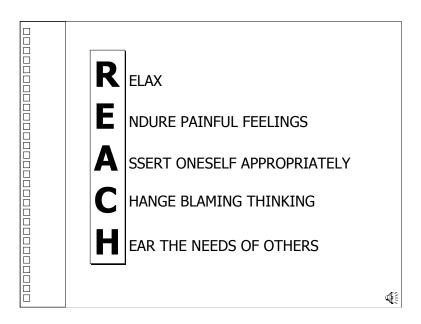


The struggle against anger is almost universal. The Greek philosopher Aristotle once said, "Anyone can get angry--that's easy. But to get mad at the right person, at the right time, to the right degree, for the right reasons, and in the right way--that is very difficult." Most everyone has fallen short of this "perfect" anger, has done something or said something that they felt sorry for later. The purpose of this group will be to move closer as a group to the noble, well-managed anger which to which Aristotle refers.



Let's talk about basic guidelines for the group.

- First, Most of you were on time today, and I appreciate that. I'll make an effort to start on time and end on time, and I would appreciate it if you would do the same. It's also important that you attend the group regularly. I know things may come up, but please let me know in advance if you will be unable to attend the group, so I can let the group know. Also, we won't wait for you and wonder where you are. (Add attendance policy for mandated clients)
- *Confidentiality* (My obligations as therapist. Group members' obligations to each other)
- •Respect for Group Members. In the ways we relate to others, this means
 - Leaving time and space for others
 - ➤ Not interrupting
 - Not swearing or using demeaning language towards other group members (but reporting swearing thoughts is sometimes important—we'll discuss this later
 - Not assuming we understand what others think or feel
- Pass rule (If a member feels he is not ready or able to answer any question or do any exercise, this will be respected. He takes responsibility for himself by simply passing)
- Alcohol Policy (Use of alcohol/substances during group sessions)
- Reporting to Outside Sources (Release of Information, Frequency of Reporting)



The group is called the REACH Program, and the letters spell out the basic skills we'll be working on in the group, not necessarily in this order. We will discuss

- •Relaxation--bringing the stress-level down by concentrating on bodily tension
- •Enduring painful feelings--one of the keys to anger management
- •Asserting oneself appropriately--assertiveness skills, "high-test anger"
- •Changing the blaming and extreme sorts of thinking which are the accelerants to anger
- •Hearing others when they express their needs and upset--listening skills. This crucial for stopping the contagion of anger.

Reach: Two Meanings

- The skills we discuss will be *within reach*.
- It will be necessary for you to *reach*. There is no magic to emotional conditioning. This is a participation sport, not a spectator sport.

•The skills we discuss will be within <u>reach</u>. This is the challenge to me (us). I (we) won't be asking people to flap their arms and fly to the moon. We won't be setting the high-bar to world-record height. We'll be breaking down anger management skills into practical, small steps. If you feel we are asking the impossible, let us know—we aren't doing our job.

•You will need to <u>reach</u>. This is a conditioning program, not magic. You will need to push yourselves beyond your comfort zone to improve your anger management abilities, the same way you would if you were training for a marathon or a bike race.

Manning Anger



- The word <u>man</u> and the word manage come from the same root
- Manage is the verb for what it means to be a man. A man manages.



The word man and the word manage come from the same root. I believe that manage is the verb for what it means to be a man. A man manages. This is like manning a boat. If we don't man a boat, it blows in circles, doesn't get anywhere. It may even sink. If we man a boat, the wind is a respected companion. We can use the wind to get somewhere.

In the same way, if I don't manage my anger, my life blows in circles. But if I manage it, anger can be like the wind to a sailor, can be a driving force in my life, like ambition or passion. This program will be about learning the technology of sailing with anger.



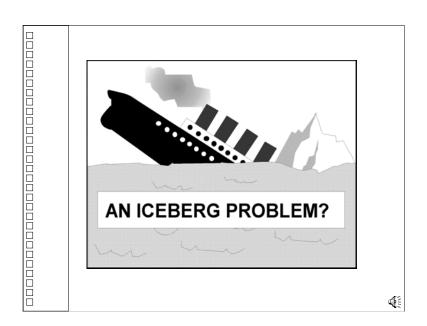
The REACH program is basically a training program. How many have participated in a sport at some point? How many participated in an organized sport with a coach and conditioning program? How many have lifted weights or worked out in some other way? How many went through basic training for the military? Why are these conditioning programs important?

Anger management is a conditioning program aimed at developing emotional strength. Emotional strength is developed in exactly the same way as physical strength: repetitive work against resistance. The only difference is that we are not working against the resistance of weights. We are working against resistance in ourselves.

For some group members, this group may seem a lot like a class. One temptation is to see this as a spectator sport, where you can just sit back and listen from the back, tune out, press the mute, switch channels.

So, a NEWS FLASH: This is a participation sport. You will be asked to try out the approaches we are discussing, not just listen to them as if this were Psychology 101. We are training partners, preparing not for some game, but for our lives. To make progress with anger management, it will be necessary to do the boring, repetitive work against resistance which can make that happen.

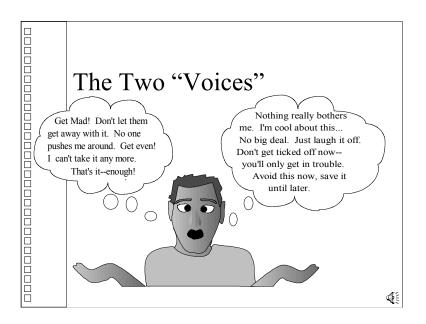
Lifting weights is not exciting--we do it because it produces results. The anger record and other homework may not be exciting, either, but they make a difference in terms of emotional conditioning.



A person might say, "I don't have an anger problem. I've only gotten really angry once, in spite of the fact that I've been in the marriage from hell for 20 years. I shouldn't be here."

The frequency of anger is not the point. The Titanic only hit <u>one</u> iceberg, and sank only <u>once</u>. Does this mean that the Titanic didn't have an iceberg problem? Obviously not. In the same way, if a person only gets angry once in his life, he may still have an anger problem, because of the destruction the anger caused.

If we were suddenly pulled back in time and made crew members on the Titanic, knowing what we know about the accident, we would no doubt organize a careful iceberg watch, we would slow the ship down in the fog, we would be fully prepared with an evacuation plan in case of an accident. We would not be shrugging off the accident as a one-time fluke.

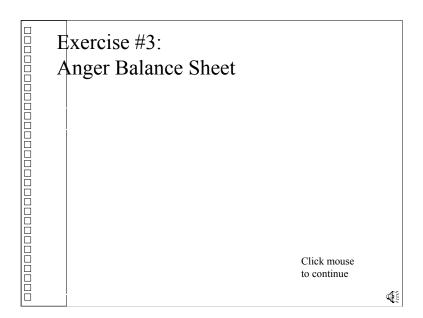


In general, there are two very different "messages" men get from society about how they should deal with their anger:

- "Get mad." Men often get the message "If you are a man, you should get angry--a moment of justified anger is the defining moment of a man's life." Men receive this message from sports, films, music.
- "Don't get mad." On the other hand, men often get an opposite message regarding anger: "Don't get mad--stay cool and under emotional control at all costs." Men get this message from some of the same sources--from sports, the military, music.

As a result, men are frequently very confused regarding their anger. Do they stuff this powerful emotion down someone else's throat, or stuff it down their own? Either option causes problems.

The purpose of this group is to help us see other options in how we work with our anger.

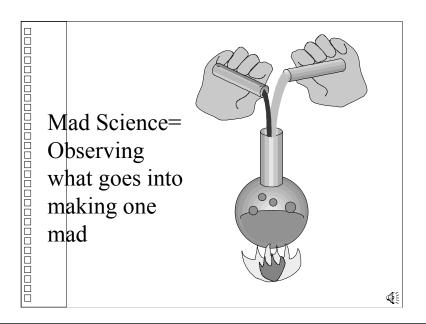


There are positives and negatives in anger, as in any emotion. Write down advantages to anger in the left column, and disadvantages in the right. Write down as many examples as you can. Be as specific as possible. It is best to use examples from your own life, but if you prefer, you may use examples from the lives of others you've observed."

Was it more difficult to come up with positives than negatives?

How many people came up with more negatives about anger than positives? What do you make of that?

PROPERTIES On passing, 'Finish' button: On falling, 'Finish' button: Allow user to leave quiz User may view elicles after quiz: User may ettempt quiz:	Goes to Meet Silds Goes to Meet Silds After user has completed quiz At any time Unlimited times	poperbes Edit in Quizmaker	

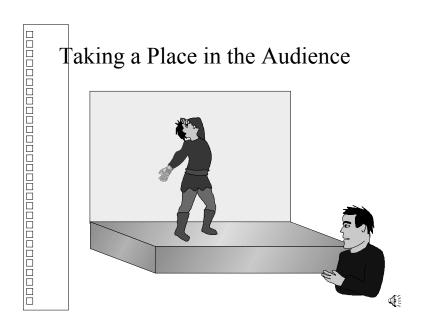


Mad Science is the science of what makes me mad. It begins with self-observation. No two individuals are the same, so anger management will be different for each person. An individual who is triggered by shame will need a different anger management approach from a person who gets angry when faced with abandonment, unfairness, or inhibition of freedom. For this reason, it is imperative that group members begin by watching their anger and recording several features of the angry incidents in an anger record.

This has two main purposes:

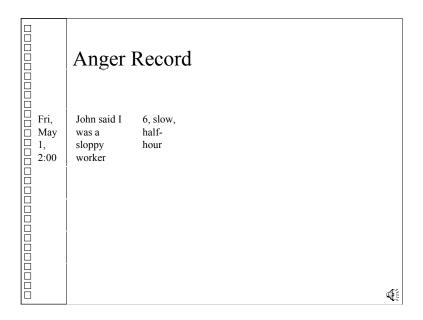
- •A lot of information is gathered about one's anger. This information-gathering is similar to the military intelligence which precedes an attack, or to charting pitches in baseball.
- •At the same time, just watching the anger cools it down. When we watch, we are a little detached from the anger, and this is helpful in dealing with it..

Mad science provides information that will be very useful in our work, but the observation itself is a crucial anger-reducer. It gets the neocortex--not just the amygdala-- involved in the action. By simply recording the events, I take a more detached stance towards the precipitating event and towards my own emotions. When I am angry, I might say, "That pisses me off!" or "My anger is about a nine on a scale of one to ten." Although both sentences discuss the same angry event, the syntax in the second sentence leads to significant emotional cooling, due to the more detached stance. The first way of talking heats the anger up—I am one with my anger, "I" = "pissed." In the second sentence, I am separate from my anger, able to observe and rate its intensity.



This means that we will be learning to talk about our anger a little differently. Often when we get mad we "strut and fret" on the stage, talk loudly about the unfairness and disrespect, vent frustration publicly. This doesn't reduce the anger—it heats it up, pours gas on the fire.

The anger record will allow us to take a place in the audience and discuss our anger from a place of detachment. "Let's see—how mad was I? I wonder what feelings of discomfort triggered it? What was I thinking that heated it up?"



This is the Anger Record. It's sort of like a box-score in a ball game. It's simply a way of keeping track of the situations that happen when we become highly-charged emotionally. A box score in baseball allows us to keep track of the high points in a game—the home runs, errors, score and the like—but is shorthand. It leaves out the hyperbole and drama, but allows a person to go back and reconstruct how the game unfolded. The anger record is a shorthand of this kind, and doesn't take long to fill out.

- The first column is straightforward—when did the event occur?
- •The next column is where we give a brief description of the event: for instance, "Mad at John for criticizing my work"
- •The next column is a rating of intensity: How mad were you on a scale of 1-10? There is no absolute measure of anger. Rate the anger in the present instance compared to the angriest you have ever been. Let's say the anger level in this situation is six.
- •The next column is the feelings column. We are not interested in a restatement of the fact you were angry: "mad," "infuriated," "aggravated," "ticked off" and the like. We already know you were mad—you are making an entry into the anger record, and have told us you were mad at a 6-level. We want to know what the feelings of discomfort were that "lit the fuse" of your anger. Let's take a side-trip to discuss this.

sssssss BANG!

- Anger is like an explosive-
- SSSSSSS...B

 Anger is like an explosive with a fuse and an accelerant

 The fuse--the small fire which starts the big one-is always a feeling of discomfort

 physical emotional

 If the small fire is not lit, the big fire is not lit, which starts the big one--

 - If the small fire is not lit.

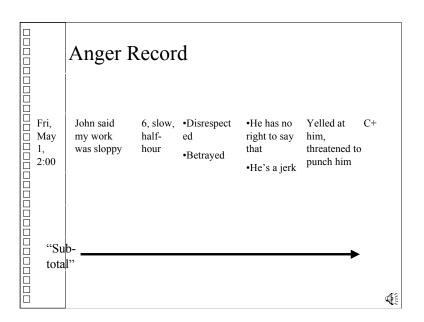




The emotion anger is built like an explosive charge, with a fuse and an accelerant. The fuse is a small fire, and the accelerant—gasoline in the case of a Molotov cocktail—turns it quickly into a large fire we call an explosion. With anger, the fuse is always a feeling of discomfort. Without discomfort of some sort, there can't be anger.

For anger, the accelerants are always certain types of thought which turn the small fires into big, angry ones. We will discuss these "inflammatory thoughts" later. For now, let's look at the fuses.

The discomfort which begins anger may be physical, like pain in my foot when someone steps on it. Or it may be emotional—shame, anxiety, envy, unfairness. When something happens which lights my fuse of anxiety, for instance, I might tend to quickly turn this into anger. Sometimes this transition to anger happens so fast I am not even aware of the anxiety. In these cases, my fuse is very short, leaving me very little opportunity to change things, and the anger grows quickly.



Let's return to the Anger Record.

•The next column is the Thoughts column. Here we simply write down any thoughts going through the mind. The feelings are adjectives—shame, guilt, restriction, anxiety. Thoughts are sentences or phrases:

o"He had no right to say that"

o"He's a jerk"

Some of the thoughts may be swears: "He's an asshole," "She's a bitch." Remember it's not OK to swear at group members. But it is essential to notice even these powerful thoughts and keep track of them. This is simply mad science—observing what goes on.

Sometimes the thoughts heat the anger up—notice the thoughts that do that. Sometimes the thoughts cool the anger down: "Just let it go," "Let's not go there." These are extinguishing thoughts, and we will discuss these again later, so that we can get better at developing them. For now, just make not of these thoughts that cool you down.

- •The next column is the Action column. What did you do? In this instance, the person says he "Yelled at him and threatened to punch him."
- •The final column is the grade column. Look over how you handled your anger in this instance. How did you do on a scale of A-F?

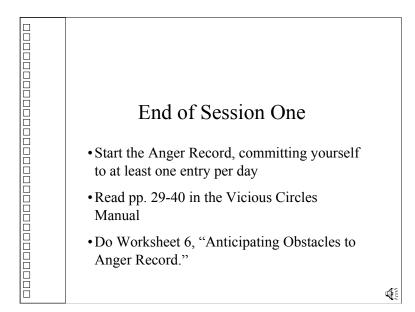
Notes on Anger Record

- Commit yourself to one entry per day.
- Keep track of small fires, not just big ones. Record *irritation*, not just anger.
- If you can recall no current anger/irritation, *mine past anger*.
- To build emotional strength, we need repetitive work against resistance. Find what resists your work, and work against it.

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The Anger Record is an important Weight Machine for emotional conditioning, so here's a few pointers to filling it out.

- •Commit yourself to one entry per day. Regular repetition of this task is crucial, just as repetitive work is crucial to developing muscles. The average person reports one episode of anger per day, and between three and four episodes of irritation or aggravation. Even if you are average, with no special anger problem, there should be plenty of events to choose from
- •Keep track of irritation—the "small fires"—not just rages that burn a whole city block.
- •If a day comes when you genuinely cannot recall any episodes of irritation or anger, mine old anger—go back five years if you need to. It is never too late to learn from our anger.
- •To build emotional strength, we need repetitive work against resistance. Find what resists your work, and work against it. For instance, you may find yourself failing to fill out one episode of anger per day. Be patient with yourself, but persist. Change is difficult. If something resists you, that is good, you have found the place of your work, where your strength can grow. This is your resistance, the part of yourself that doesn't want to change. Commit yourself to work against this, move beyond your comfort zone.



The assignment for next week is to start on the anger record, trying to get one entry per day.

In addition, read pp. 29-40 in the Vicious Circles Manual. Do Worksheet 6, "Anticipating Obstacles to Anger Record."

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