




REACH Program: Session 4 Relaxing with Anger

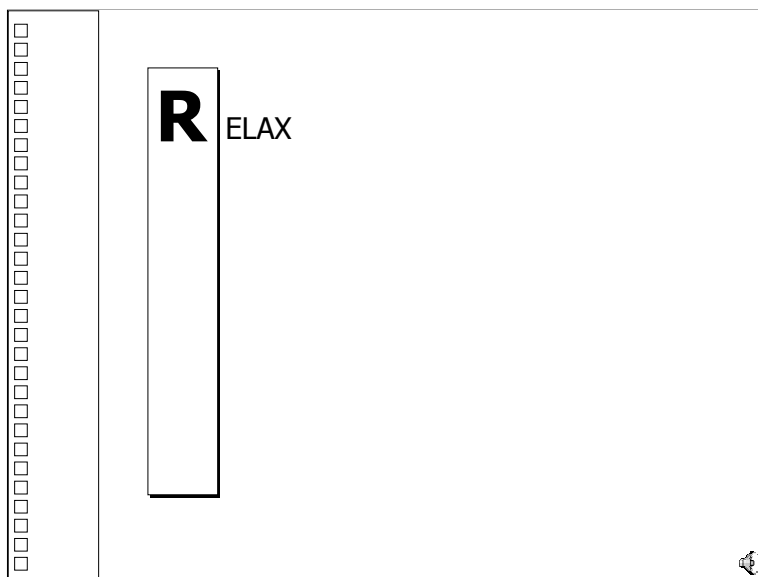


Last session we suggested that anger is always a two-stage feeling, and always starts with a kind of discomfort—anxiety, shame, frustration, abandonment, and so on. We suggested that one of the central purposes for doing the anger record was to begin identifying for ourselves the types of discomfort which become fuses for our anger.

But once we have identified some of the fuses, what then? We need additional skills in order to do “fuse-lengthening.”

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As we mentioned previously, there are five key skills we will discuss in this group. Last week we discussed Enduring Painful Feelings. This week we will talk about one of the key skills which helps us to endure discomfort—relaxation.



Let's try an exercise. Take a comfortable position in your chair. Breathe deeply and relax. . . Again, take another breath, and feel your body, starting with the soles of your feet. Scan your body for any places of tension. With the next out-breath, feel the tension leaving that part of your body. . . One more breath. . .

Think of a time when you were genuinely angry about something. See the scene in front of you again. If people were present, see the faces, or hear the voices. . . Loop through the scene again, this time sinking more deeply into it. See the faces, hear the voices. . .

Notice what is happening to your body as you do this. Has tension returned to any place in your body? Simply notice the place in your body where there is tension—back, neck, throat, chest, stomach, arms, legs. . . Relax this tension as you did before.

Now, gradually, as I count backwards from three to zero, find yourself emerging into the present again, gradually coming back into this room and this group. . . Three. . . two. . . one. . . zero.

Pair up with someone else, and take turns talking about the event.

- *Where was the tension in your body at the start, before we recalled the angry event? How successful were you, 1-5, at relaxing this?*
- *Briefly, what was the event?*
- *What did you notice happening to your body as you recalled the event?*
- *Were you able to relax the tension a second time? If you did, what happened to the anger as you did this?*



Feelings reside in our bodies,
and are held in muscular
tension.



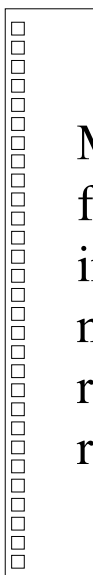
The ancient Greeks had the idea that the emotions were located within the chest cavity. In our language we still refer to this idea when we talk about gut feelings, having a heart, being full of bile or gall—all suggesting a connection between feelings and the body. Every feeling has some effect on the muscles, which explains why we can read “body language”: we can determine a person’s feelings by how the muscles have contorted the body—face, trunk, limbs, spine. [Show examples]



If we can relax our bodies, our
hearts and minds will follow.



A key to relaxing the mind is relaxing the body.

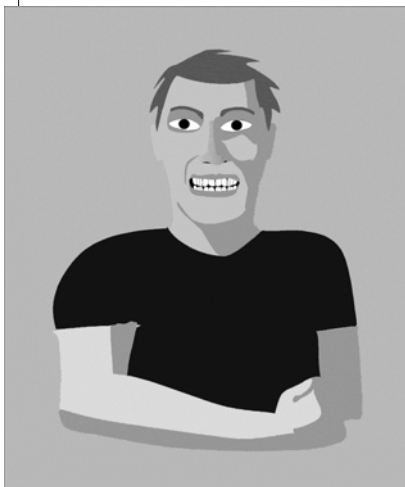
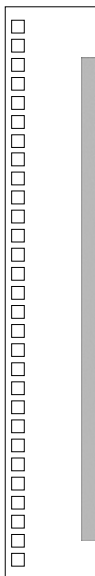


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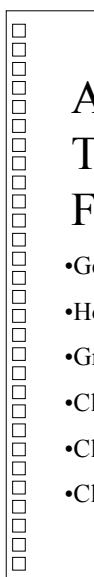
In the military, there is careful training in what Ten-Hut! means, but there is no instruction in deep breathing or yoga to help the soldiers learn At Ease. Soldiers need to induce the At Ease state of mind chemically, with alcohol. Relaxation is usually seen as screwing around, irresponsible behavior.



Clenching the Muscles and Anger

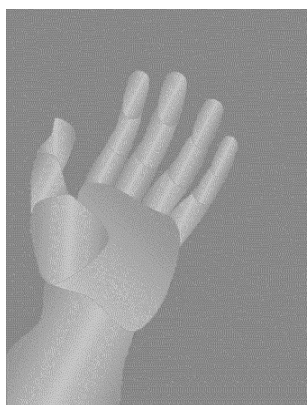


Muscular tension has always been associated with anger. In this cartoon, notice how the clenched fist and the increasing tension in the face are clearly recognizable as expressions of anger.



Action Hero: The Closed Fist

- Getting a grip
- Holding on
- Grasping
- Clenching
- Clutching
- Closing



Click Mouse
to Continue



Let's try an exercise. Turn to a group member next to you and tell him a few things about your day and your plans for tomorrow. Make sure your hands are relaxed and open while you are talking. . . (allow a minute) Switch and have the other group member do the talking. . . (allow a minute)

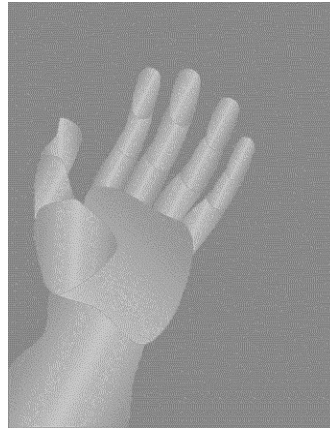
Now stop for a moment. The first talker make a hard fist with your right hand if you're right-handed, your left hand if you're left-handed. Continue telling about your day and your plans for tomorrow, making sure that you hold that fist solid and hard while you are talking. . . Switch and do the same with the other group member. OK, relax your fists.

OK, listeners: how were the stories different? How were your feelings different when listening to talkers who were making fists? Talkers: how was it different telling about your day and your plans for tomorrow, talking with first a relaxed hand, then a closed, hard fist?

The action-hero—the male ideal celebrated in mythology, folktales, films, and war stories—is typically symbolized by the closed fist. When we are trained by our culture to be warriors, we undergo an action-hero initiation which causes us to change discomfort into active anger. Emotionally, the closed fist is associated with getting a grip on oneself, preparing for action and revenge, holding on to old insults and slights, closing down emotionally, keeping secrets, holding weapons. The fist is the most primitive of tools—when the hand makes a fist, the fingers cannot be used for making things, for doing art or music or carpentry or craft.

Heroism of Endurance: The Open Hand

- Helping
- Asking
- Opening
- Relaxing
- Greeting
- Letting go



The open hand is very different in its meanings, suggesting both helping and asking, giving a hand-out or blessing and receiving a hand-out. The open hand is used in greeting—waving “hi,” or extending to offer a handshake. It suggests the lack of secrecy—nothing to hide, no weapons or secret intentions. It is also connected with letting go, releasing. A wave of the hand may mean, “go on, keep it,” “forget about it, it’s no big deal,” “it was nothing.” When the hand is extended palm-down, it can mean, “keep it down,” “relax.” All these are gestures of coping, of endurance, of moving on.

Let's try another exercise. Find a place you can relax, sitting or lying down. Feel your arms and hands relaxed on the surface next to you. Close your eyes and think of something in your life you are holding on to—a relationship, bitterness over something someone has done to you, some old habit you can't let go of.

Now with the rest of your body relaxed, and still thinking or picturing the thing you are holding onto, make a fist, with either your left or right hand. Close the fist about as tightly as you are holding onto this part of your life, and just feel the tension of the holding on.

Now slowly tighten your fist. As you do, imagine you are holding onto this part of your life even more tightly. Feel the tension as it climbs up your arm and spreads to the rest of your body—your shoulder, neck, head, eyes, back. Now tighten up the fist even more, as if you don't want to let go, are not yet ready to let go.

Now we will do something with your fist that you may not be quite ready to do in your life. You no longer need to hold on with your fist, and you may relax it when you are ready, feeling the tension drain from your hand, arm, neck, head, eyes, back.

If your fist is still closed, imagine small threads gently tugging the fingers open. You may feel the tingling as the blood flows more freely through your hand again. You may also feel the openness of your hand, the softness of your palm as it meets the cool air.

Feel this openness as the relaxation spreads to your whole body as you simply feel the letting go. And after you have dwelt in this letting go, you may feel yourself gradually returning to awareness of the world around you, and you may feel your eyes wanting to open, wanting to return to wakefulness.

