

REACH Program: Session 5 Vicious Circles



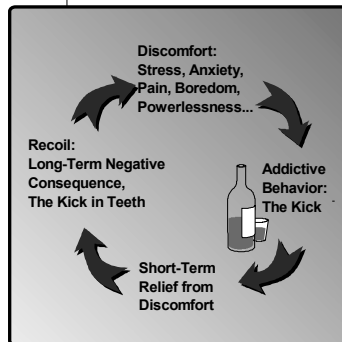
The general purpose of this session is to increase the group member's awareness of the "big picture" of anger. We are generally near-sighted in our attitude towards anger—focusing on the immediate reward that it may provide, rather than the long-term negative consequences that it brings in its wake.

There are two theoretical issues about the vicious circles:

- 1) This is not an exhaustive list—that is, there are no doubt more than five vicious circles of power addiction. We are simply presenting five typical vicious circles of anger.
- 2) These vicious circles are not mutually exclusive categories—a person might be seen as both Rage for Order and Mad about you, for instance. At times, these may be seen as different ways of discussing the same situations.

In terms of presenting these to groups, it is helpful to present an example of each of the vicious circles, because the narrative is often more understandable and memorable than a more abstract picture. Emphasizing the positive value which the anger aims for generally de-stigmatizes the anger in that a person is able to see that its original intentions were good, although the results turned out differently. The vicious circles are presented here as part of a single teaching unit. In my experience, it is often overwhelming to hear about all of these in a single session, so it is often pedagogically advisable to present these over two sessions, to make it more digestible.

Addiction as Vicious Circle



Addiction:

A vicious circle
of behavior
propelled by a
short-term kick and
a long-term kick in
the teeth



Discussion: What is an addiction? How would you define it?

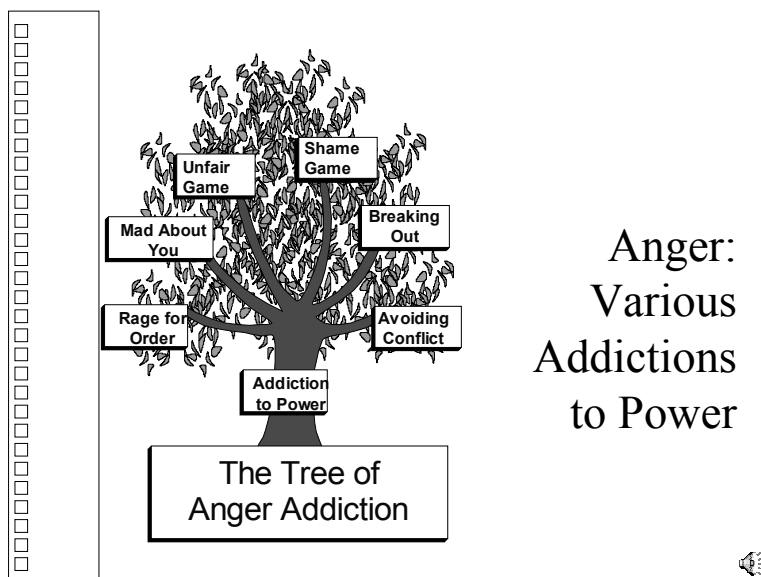
1) An addiction doesn't always involve a substance like alcohol, nicotine, or heroine. A person may be addicted to gambling, sex, or the internet.

2) An addiction is not simply a habit. There are good habits such as brushing teeth and balancing the checkbook which are obviously not addictions.

A definition of addiction which is useful is this:

- An addiction is a vicious circle of behavior which is driven by a short-term kick and a long-term kick in the teeth.*

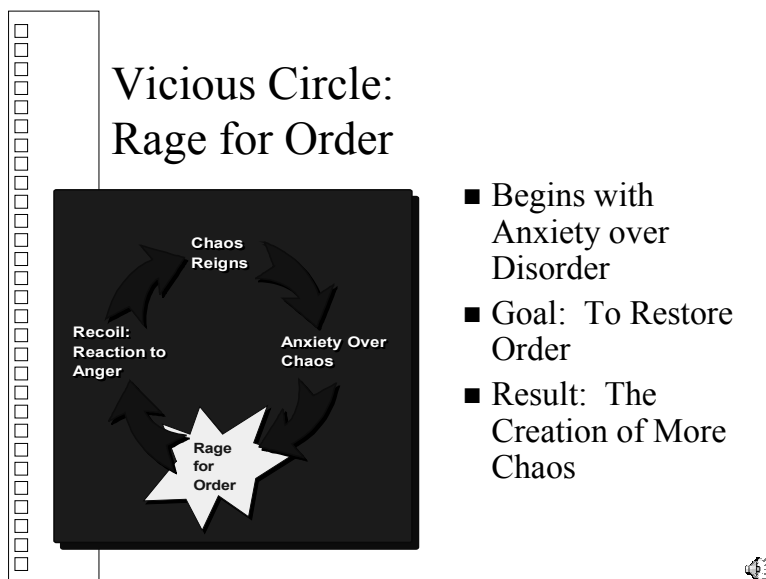
This helps distinguish between an addiction of any kind and positive habits like changing the oil in one's car, which have short term negative consequences (dirty hands, smaller bank account) but long-term positive consequences.



If anger addiction is an addiction to power, there are several “branches on the tree”—different subtypes. These are:

- *Rage for Order*
- *Breaking Out*
- *Mad About You*
- *Shame-Game*
- *Avoiding Conflict*

These are the Vicious Circles--the circles of behavior which make us vicious. They are like tailspins we have a hard time pulling out of, merry-go-rounds which won't stop. Each of the vicious circles begins with a positive value--order, freedom, love, respect, peace--but in each case there is a recoil so that the person does not get what he wants.

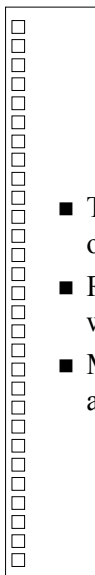


Rage for Order

This Vicious Circle is driven by the value of Order. There is nothing wrong with order--this value is crucial for the stable functioning of individual and social lives. The problem comes when one tries to achieve order through an angry explosion. This causes a backfire or recoil, and then a person is in more chaos than he started with.

*An example is when a person gets angry with children for being unruly, then hits, yells, or threatens in an attempt to create harmony, quiet, and discipline. A person who uses corporal punishment often works out of this framework. However, the significant research into the effectiveness of corporal punishment suggests that the end result of corporal punishment is not less chaos, but more. The immediate effect may be some semblance of quiet--the child may do as we say, may stop the unwanted behavior. But long-term, the children who are victims of corporal punishment are more likely to be violent, oppositional, and depressed (Strauss, M. *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families*. San Francisco: Lexington Books, 1994.) It is as if we were trying to douse a fire, and were choosing an extinguisher which put it out short-term, but which would cause the house to burst into even more intense flames later.*

Rage for Order is not just about disciplining children. A person who gets angry with a spouse, dog, co-worker, or other driver because of chaotic or undisciplined behavior also falls into this category.



Vicious Circle: Mad About You

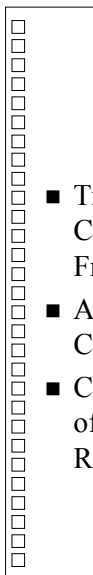
- Triggered by anxiety over abandonment
- Recoil: Partner withdraws out of fear
- Makes abandonment a certainty



Mad About You

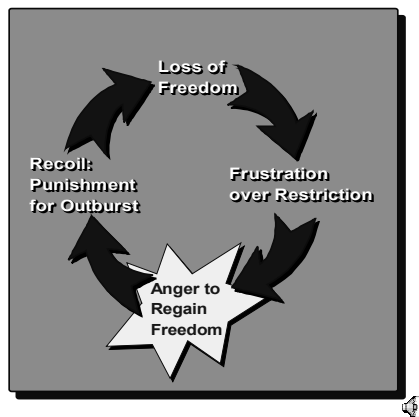
The Mad About You vicious circle is driven by the value of love. It aims to create love and intimacy through anger. It may achieve compliance and a reassurance, even some passion. These may pass temporarily for love and intimacy, but this is fools gold, not genuine love. A person does not usually feel prone to be loving or intimate with someone who has been threatening, verbally abusive, or violent towards him/her. The more usual reaction would be anger, mistrust, and fear. If a person has been angry or threatening towards me, I might edit carefully what, how, and when I tell him/her about my thoughts or feelings.

How can I achieve genuine love? This is a big question, but in general I achieve real love by being loving, caring, trustworthy, and attentive. There is no “quick fix” for love creation, no short-cuts in this arduous endeavor. Anger frequently attempts to be a “quick fix” in a relationship, but it backfires in the long run. This does not mean that anger has no place in a relationship. If the foundation of caring and attentiveness is laid, well-spoken, tempered anger is an opportunity to straighten things out, a chance to discuss our different needs. However, when anger has “lost its temper,” lost its sense of balance and moderation, it erodes the love in the relationship, and eventually leads to loneliness.



Vicious Circle: Breaking Out

- Trigger:
Claustrophobia or
Frustration
- Anger an Attempt to
Create Freedom
- Creates the Opposite
of Freedom: Greater
Restriction

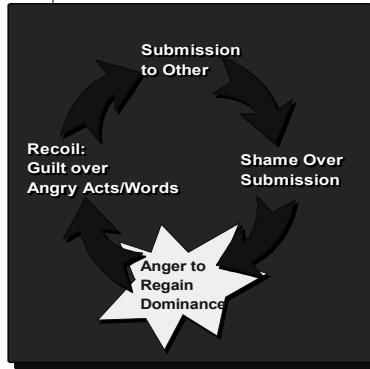


Breaking Out

The value which drives the Breaking Out vicious circle is freedom. There is often a distortion in the value of freedom, where it is seen as “freedom from” something--parental control, societal norms, or responsibility. It is more helpful to see this value as something which attends other great values--as a “freedom for,” a freedom which enables us to pursue a chosen noble goal.

When freedom is seen as “freedom from” something, anger can often appear in the role of liberator--helping us break free from the grip of control by some other person, group, or institution. However, the use of anger to break free generally brings about a recoil from others. If I angrily tell my boss he can't tell me what to do, this may create a temporary feeling of freedom and well-being: “I guess I finally told him off.” But then my boss may fire me, demote me, or trust my judgment less. The end result of the angry outburst is often the loss of freedom and power.

Vicious Circle: Shame-Game

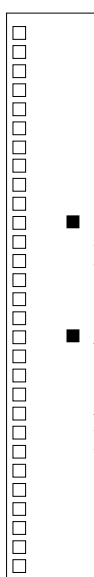


- Trigger: Shame over Submission
- Goal: Respect, Empowerment
- Recoil
 - ◆ Inner
 - ◆ Outer
- Reaction to Recoil: Submission



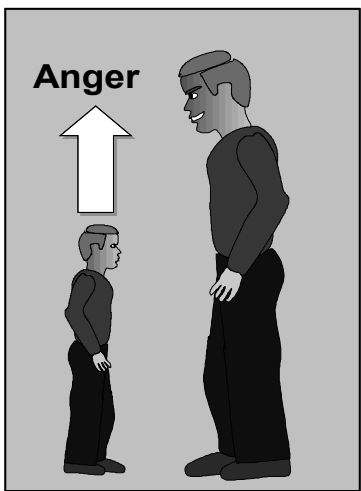
Shame-Game

One of the most common triggers to anger is shame--which is a feeling of relative powerlessness. If I feel shame, I feel comparatively less than someone else—not as powerful, not as big, not as smart. Let's take a side-trip and look at shame for a moment



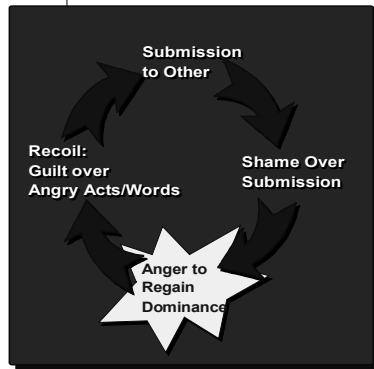
Shame & Anger

- Shame=A Feeling of Deficiency: Too Small, Too Weak
- Anger Compensates for Shame--An Attempt to Regain Power, Quickly



Shame is a feeling of deficiency in comparison with someone else. I am exposed publicly as being less. Anger often works in concert with shame to compensate for this feeling of relative powerlessness through supplying a burst of power. Anger restores a feeling of equality or dominance—quickly.

Vicious Circle: Shame-Game



- Trigger: Shame over Submission
- Goal: Respect, Empowerment
- Recoil
 - ◆ Inner
 - ◆ Outer
- Reaction to Recoil: Submission

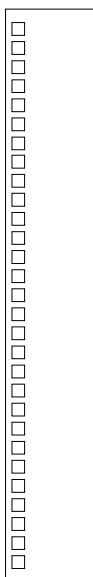


Shame Game (cont.)

The goal which drives this vicious circle is the goal of respect or honor. If I feel disrespected, cast out and banished from the "circle of honor" which I need to feel whole, my world is torn. I have lost my place in the social fabric. Anger is an knee-jerk attempt to restore the sense of balance in the world of honor.

The problem comes when a person reacts to the perceived disrespect by angry action. Again, there can be a backfire: my actions—physical or emotional violence—may themselves seem shameful in retrospect. "What have I done?" If my actions were initiated by my feeling that the social fabric was torn, my actions have only torn the social fabric more.

Now there may be a second explosion of anger, directed towards myself. "I am garbage, I am worse than nothing." The term we use for this anger at the self is guilt. Following this second explosion of anger, I debase myself and take a submissive position towards another person. What started as an attempt to restore respect has turned into a cause for more shame.



Unfair Game

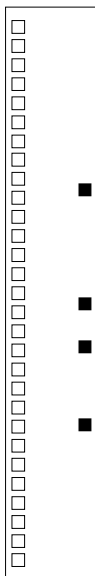


- *Envy* is the launching pad, not injustice
- Anger is aimed at getting equal treatment
- The most common anger-trigger for women



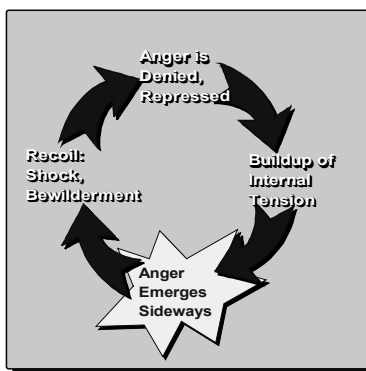
Some people might claim that their anger is triggered by injustice. But that is not true. If it were simple injustice that triggered anger, I would get just as angry when I got the largest piece of pie. But that never happens. I only get angry if I get the smallest piece of pie. What that means is that the core feeling of discomfort here is one of envy: someone is getting preferential treatment.

I once worked with a factory worker who was paired up with another employee. They worked together all day. The other employee was a lazy charmer. He would look for every opportunity for a break he could find. He would chat with the foreman, take long cigarette breaks, and do everything he could to get out of work. My client would fume all day about the unfairness. He would say to himself, "we get paid the same, but I do 85 % of the work. That's not fair. Finally he had it. He confronted his partner and threatened him. The foreman overheard the conversation, and my client was called into the HR office and told that there had been a complaint. He was placed on suspension because of the threat, and told he had to take anger management. He now had an even deeper sense of injustice. Not only did he do most of the work, but now his job was in jeopardy. He could have easily used this new injustice as another excuse for a confrontation, making the vicious circle keep spinning around.



Vicious Circle: Avoiding Conflict

- Anger Regarded as Dangerous, to be Avoided
- Goal: Peace
- Anger-Bank: Builds Interest
- Explosions Disrupt, but Don't Effect Positive Change



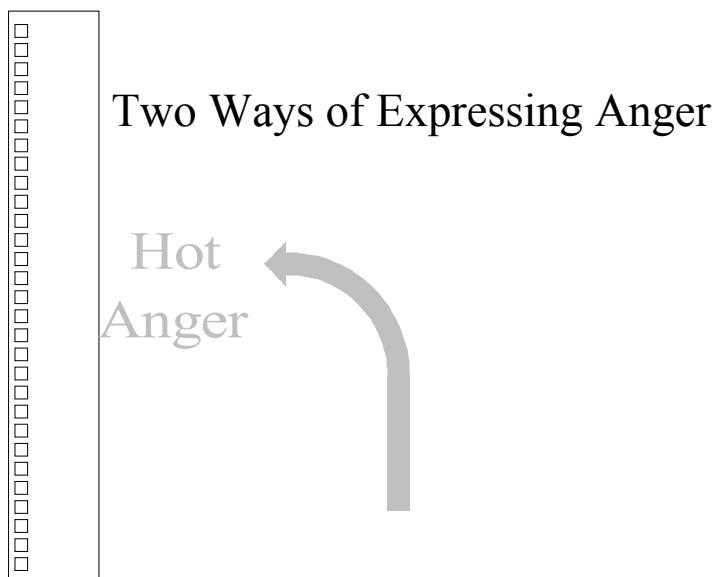
Avoiding Conflict

The final Vicious Circle of anger addiction is Avoiding Conflict. This person has learned from long experience with anger—his own or someone else’s—that anger is toxic, something to be avoided at all cost. Here the guiding value is working counter to the anger, trying to quiet its too-shrill voice. But even this can become a vicious circle.

A person might get the mistaken impression that anger is the enemy—that the goal of anger work is to eradicate anger. But let’s compare the management of anger to the management of money. The goal of money management is not the elimination of money. The goal of money management is the considered, conscious use of money, and the goal of anger management is analogous—the considered, conscious use of anger. Anger has a purpose in human interaction—it is the spokesperson for one’s individuality.

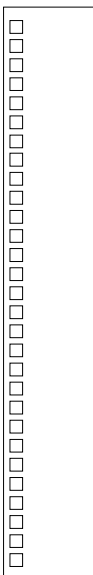
In folktales, when one has banished some character from the city, he or she is often reared by animals or peasants, then returns to the city to seek revenge. When we try to expel anger from our lives, it finds its way back into our lives anyway, and comes as something powerful, disruptive, and wild.

If we try to eliminate anger from our relationships, it can return in a number of ways. It may come back as intermittent anger explosions. When I have a disagreement but say nothing, I shove anger into the closet, where it builds. I shove more anger there, and it builds more. Finally, something small may happen, and it all tumbles out of the closet at once. The anger that emerges is disproportionate to the small thing which triggered it, and this can be confusing in my relationships. “I was ten minutes late meeting you, and that’s why you exploded?”



A second way the anger can return is as an Ice Storm. We know that we can express anger to others in a variety of ways. We can explode in hot anger, which is clearly recognizable as anger. We can also express anger as the Big Freeze, cold anger. “Something’s wrong—he’s not responding when I speak, not making eye contact. Is he mad at me?” If I address this latter type of anger, the person might acknowledge the anger: “You’re darn right I’m mad!” in a hot-blooded way. Or a person might remain within the Ice Storm: “What are you talking about? No, I’m not mad, I’m fine.”

If a person remains within the Ice Storm, winter may descend on the relationship. He may bury himself in distancing activities—television, the internet, work, the shop, or an addiction to alcohol or other substances.



Review: Vicious Circles

- “Circles” which make us vicious
- Characteristic of anger addiction, the addiction to power
- Each is driven by a positive value: love, order, etc.
- Each vicious circle backfires: a person doesn’t get what he wants, becomes powerless, abandoned, chaotic



To review the idea of the Vicious Circles:

- *These are the circles of behavior which make us vicious, and occur in small and large repetitions in our lives*
- *The Vicious Circles are characteristic of anger addiction, which is an addiction to power*
- *Each Vicious Circle is driven by a positive value: Order, Love, Freedom, Honor, and Peace. There is nothing wrong with these values—only the anger in this form doesn’t help us reach them.*
- *Each Vicious Circle backfires: A person doesn’t get what he wants*



End of Session 5

- Read pp. 55-61 in Vicious Circles Manual
- Continue with Anger Record, paying particular attention to the Thoughts column



PROPERTIES On passing, 'Finish' buttons: On failing, 'Finish' buttons: Allow user to leave quiz: User may view slides after quiz: User may attempt quiz:	Go to Next Slide Go to Next Slide After user has completed quiz At any time Unlimited times	 Properties...	 Edit in Quizmaker
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