YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Understanding and Reducing Anger

Facilitator Guide

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Understanding and Reducing Anger

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 (computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;
✋ (hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.

Essential class content is noted in ***bold****.*

All class handouts are available for download on the [YRRP website](#) at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified as online only in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

Participants will define anger and learn facts about anger, including what triggers anger and how to handle their anger in various situations. Using the Anger Episode Model as a tool for understanding anger, participants will discuss three skills to reduce and manage anger and examine positive and negative short-term and long-term outcomes, problem-solving techniques, and solutions.

Stage:

Pre-deployment, During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Projector
- Laptop
- Pencils or Pens
- Note Cards

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Understanding and Reducing Anger
  2. Objectives
  3. Facts About Anger
  4. Personal Triggers
  5. Scenario: Mike and Jen
  6. An Anger Trigger
  7. Appraisal
  8. Experience
  9. Expression
  10. Outcomes
  11. Anger Episode Model Wrap-Up
  12. Avoidance and Escape
  13. Problem-Solving and Cognitive Restructuring
  14. Solutions
  15. Assertiveness
  16. Building an Assertive Statement
  17. Review of Objectives
  18. Understanding and Reducing Anger
- Handouts
  1. Problem-Solving Worksheet
  2. The Anger Episode Model (online only)
  3. How to Take a Time Out from Anger (online only)
  4. Assertive Statement Script (online only)

Exercises:

1. Personal Triggers
2. Problem-Solving Strategies

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Define anger and describe its triggers.
2. Explain the Anger Episode Model.
3. Recognize three anger management skills and apply those skills to personal situations.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Understanding and Reducing Anger

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

During this class, you will begin to understand ways to reduce potential anger you experience. You will learn about the Anger Episode Model, and you will be introduced to three anger management skills that you may be able to use in situations of conflict.

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

After completing this class, you will be able to do the following:

1. **Define anger and describe its triggers.**
2. **Explain the Anger Episode Model.**
3. **Recognize three anger management skills and apply those skills to personal situations.**

Let's get to know each other a little bit. I would like to ask you a few questions. Please raise your hand to respond to the following questions.

PAUSE for a show of hands after each question.

How many of you are going on or returning from your first deployment?

Your second?

Your third or more?

How many of you came here today with your partner or spouse?

How many of you came with a parent or another family member?

Now, for this next set of questions, you do not need to respond or raise your hand. I just

want you to think about your answers.

PAUSE to allow participants to think after each question.

Can you remember a time when you became angry?

Do you think you could have handled that situation differently?

Facts About Anger

SHOW Slide 3: Facts About Anger

Anger is a normal human emotion that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage (American Psychological Association, n.d.)**. It usually arises in response to a mismatch between what we want to happen and what actually happens and tends to motivate us to take action** (Kassinove et al., 1997).

The average American becomes angry two to three times a week (Gates, 1926; Kassinove et al., 1997). **If you include times when you feel annoyed, that number could be even higher.**

Sometimes, anger can be helpful (van Doorn et al., 2014). For example, a person who fails a test and is told to just let it go might become angry and study harder to prove she or he can pass the test. **But, anger can also be a real problem. It may lead to actions that damage relationships and lives** (Dahlen & Martin, 2005; Mahon et al., 2000).

So, **when does anger become a problem? The first question to ask is "Do you find your anger to be excessive?" Here, there are three basic dimensions to consider: frequency, intensity, and duration.** First, how often do you become angry? Second, how powerful is your anger when you feel it? Anger ranges from mild annoyance to wild rage - with a range of intensities between the two extremes. Third, how long do you stay angry? Most people report no longer feeling angry after about an hour. But, sometimes grudges are held, and anger can persist for hours, days, weeks, or longer (Tafrate et al., 2002).

The outcomes of your actions are also important to consider when deciding if your anger is problematic. **If you find yourself getting into trouble or regretting what you have done as a result of anger, that should make you stop and think** (Deffenbacher et al., 2003; Tafrate et al., 2002).

Finally, **anger may be a problem if it negatively impacts your relationships** (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). While you may not be particularly distressed with the frequency,

intensity, duration, or outcomes of your anger, your loved ones may be! They may be frightened. They may be angry themselves. They may feel as if they are being pushed away.

We will discuss what anger is to help you identify triggers and understand why certain things might make you angry. We will also discuss a few techniques that can help you pick the most effective plan of action when you are angry.

SHOW Slide 4: Personal Triggers

EXERCISE 1: Personal Triggers

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to identify personal anger triggers. Participants will think about the situations presented. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

Many everyday events can provoke anger. **Anger can come from the following**:

- **Frustrations**: For example, something standing in the way of success or not being able to get something that is important to you; a perceived injustice or unfairness (Russell & McAuley, 1986).
- **Daily hassles and stressors**: For example, you keep getting interrupted; your bus is late; standing in line at the grocery store (Thomas & Williams, 1991).
- **How you evaluate the situation**: For example, thinking that your spouse is late because he or she does not value your time may be a more anger provoking situation than thinking that your spouse is late due to traffic (Thomas & Williams, 1991).
- **Your expectations about how things ought to be, especially if they do not work out as planned** (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000).

Let's take a look at some possible scenarios that may evoke anger in you. Take a minute to think about everyday events you experience that could be possible sources of anger. On the note card provided, please write down an example of a time you became angry and what you did about it. If you feel comfortable, share your experience with a tablemate.

PAUSE for 5 minutes for participants to write and share, then PAUSE for responses after each question.

Did you identify at least one situation?

Could you identify with more than one?

How many of you wish you could have another chance at your reaction to that situation?

How did you feel sharing your experiences with someone else?

Why do these situations become anger provoking for us?

SHOW Slide 5: Scenario: Mike and Jen

One possible trigger could be the renegotiating of roles after deployment (Camara & Resnick, 1989). Let's look at the example of Mike and Jen. **Take out Handout 1: Problem-Solving Worksheet** and read the scenario.

The following scenario is listed on the handout:

Before his deployment, Mike regularly took his son Jacob to little league practice. After Mike was deployed, Jen took over. Now that Mike is back, Jen does not want to give up this activity. She enjoys watching Jacob practice and talking with the other parents with whom she has made several friends. When Jen says she will be taking Jacob to little league this week, Mike sees himself as being left out. He becomes really angry and argues with Jen. During the argument, Mike calls Jen derogatory names and says she should not get in the way of him reconnecting with his son. He throws a coffee mug against the wall and storms out of the house.

This sort of situation may be extreme, but sometimes when people are very angry, it does happen. Luckily, something can be done about it. We will return to the example of Mike and Jen throughout the class, but, for now, let's look at the way anger usually unfolds.

Understanding Anger

SHOW Slide 6: An Anger Trigger

The Anger Episode Model is a tool that can be used to look at the process of anger. It all starts with an anger trigger. This is what sets the stage for anger (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011). **An anger trigger can be anything.** It can be a person, place, or thing. It can be certain word, a memory, a thought, or an idea. We can learn to become angry in response to anything.

While most of us share common triggers, we all have a personal set of situations that set off anger. Our society, culture, and upbringing teach us about triggers and the triggers to which we might react (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011).

In the case of Mike and Jen presented in the handout, **what do you think Mike's anger trigger was?**

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: Jen saying that she would be taking Jacob to little league practice; feeling left out of something he used to do with his son)

SHOW Slide 7: Appraisal

The difference lies in **how you think about, or appraise, the trigger** (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011).

Let's say you are at a bar, and someone spills a drink on you. Imagine that your first thought in response to this was "What a clumsy idiot! This jerk should watch where he is going! Now my whole night is ruined!"

How strong do you think your anger would be in response to that thought? Pretty strong, right?

PAUSE for agreement.

Now imagine that your first thought after getting the drink spilled on you was "This guy just spilled his drink on me. I guess he was not paying attention. This is unfortunate, but I can deal with it." How strong do you think your anger would be in response to this thought? Probably much lower.

In the case of Mike and Jen presented in the handout, **what was Mike's appraisal of Jen saying that she would take Jacob to little league?**

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: Jen's getting in the way of reconnecting with Jacob; Mike feels left out)

By understanding the appraisal of the trigger, we may be able to start to see why Mike became so angry.

SHOW Slide 8: Experience

So, you encounter the trigger, you make an appraisal of the trigger, and, in response, you have an **anger experience** (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011). **This is what your anger feels like to you – the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of being angry.** Physical symptoms are frequently felt when angry. For example, you may experience an increased heart rate, faster breathing, sweating, and/or muscle tension (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011).

There are also certain thinking patterns that commonly accompany feelings of anger.

You may dwell on the anger provoking event or fantasize about getting revenge (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011). **The strength of your anger, the length of time it lasts, and the anger-produced thoughts and physical symptoms constitute what is called the anger experience** (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011).

From Mike and Jen's story, we know that Mike became really angry, but do we know much else about his experience after the episode?

PAUSE for responses.

We do not know how long Mike stayed angry after storming out. We do not know if his heart pounded or if he got a headache from his neck and shoulder muscles tightening. We do not know if thoughts about what Jen said kept circling in his head. We would have to ask Mike. When you are angry, ask yourself questions like these.

SHOW Slide 9: Expression

OK, imagine you are angry. What do you do about it? **Anger expression is the action that you take when you feel angry** (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011). You can choose to express your anger in a variety of positive or negative ways. You might do so through problem-solving, screaming, talking it out, being aggressive, writing a sarcastic letter, or doing nothing. Just as our society, culture, and upbringing teach us about triggers we may react to, they also teach us how to express anger in various situations (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011).

While aggressive behavior, such as hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, or throwing things, may spring to mind as the classic anger expression, **only 10% of anger episodes actually involve aggression** (Averill, 1983).

In the example of Mike and Jen, **Mike had several anger expressions. What were some of them?**

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: he argued; called Jen names; threw a mug against the wall; stormed out of the house)

Fortunately, he did not hit her, push her, or throw anything at her directly. However, that does not mean Jen was not disturbed by his expressions.

SHOW Slide 10: Outcomes

Finally, we should consider outcomes. **Outcomes are what happens as a result of your anger expression** (Kassinove & Tafrate, 2002; 2011). **Consider positive and negative outcomes in the short term and long term.** For example, a positive outcome of knocking out a loud-mouthed stranger in a bar is that he does not talk any

more. At the same time, a negative outcome is that the police might be called, and you might be arrested. In the short term, loudly arguing with your spouse might get you your way. In the long term, it may damage your relationship.

We do not know the outcome in the story of Mike and Jen, but we can probably take a few guesses. Jen may consider letting Mike take Jacob to practice, or this could become a recurring argument and could negatively impact Jen and Mike's relationship. There could be positive or negative short- and long-term outcomes.

SHOW Slide 11: Anger Episode Model Wrap-Up

That is the Anger Episode Model – a trigger occurs; your appraisal of the trigger leads you to have some kind of anger experience; this experience prompts your anger expression; how you express your anger creates various outcomes. Handout 2: The Anger Episode Model is available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

You have now learned what anger is and how it ensues. If you decide that you could benefit from working on your anger, and most people can, there are many more helpful skills and techniques available. Today, we will briefly discuss anger management by going over some basic skills that you can start using now: avoidance and escape, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring, and relaxation.

SHOW Slide 12: Avoidance and Escape

The first set of skills that may help with anger management involves avoidance and escape. **Avoidance and escape entail the prevention of anger episodes. In order to use this set of skills, you need to know what your anger triggers are, think about when and where you may face them, and prevent those situations** (American Psychological Association, n.d.). For example, if you know that long lines at the grocery store upset you, you may be able to avoid this situation by rescheduling your weekly shopping to another day or time.

Escape requires that you take some time, tune into yourself, and become aware of situations that are stressful and may make you angry. Then, you can prepare yourself to respond in an appropriate way. For example, you could schedule 10 or 15 minutes of quiet time right after work or in the morning before rest of your family wakes up. This quiet time allows you to mentally prepare for stressful events that regularly occur in daily life (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Similarly, **if you feel like you are getting angry, you could communicate this and ask to address a specific situation later after you have had a chance to calm down**. You could say, "I am feeling a little angry right now. I would like to take a time out

to cool off; could we talk about this later when I will be more receptive to your ideas?" Let the other person know how long you will be gone and where you will be while taking your time out. While you may need as little as 5 minutes, it may take longer for stronger anger to dissipate. Try to estimate how much time you will need and communicate this. Once out of the situation, go to a place you can relax. At home, this could be your bedroom or backyard. In a public place, you can go outside or to the bathroom. If you plan on taking a longer time out, you can choose to take a walk or drive to another location to cool off.

Use your time out to do something you find calming or distracting. After you have calmed, **collect your thoughts and decide how to best deal with the situation once you re-enter it.** Finally, you can **re-engage and address the situation that prompted your time out.** This last step is important, as it allows you to deal with the problem. There is an example of how to take a time out from anger in Handout 3: How to Take a Time Out from Anger available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

SHOW Slide 13: Problem-Solving and Cognitive Restructuring

EXERCISE 2: Problem-Solving Strategies

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to practice problem-solving. Participants will complete the steps to the problem solving method that is discussed through the next two slides. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

Simply put, **cognitive restructuring means changing the way you think**. Some things that make us angry are problems that can be easily solved, but other times there is no clear answer. In an effort to reduce your anger, try to focus on how you are handling the problem rather than just on what could solve it. **Avoid absolute language, like the words *always* or *never* when describing your feelings.** For example, saying, "Jen never lets me have time with Jacob," is not true and could be hurtful to Jen. **Restructure your thoughts, so they are less dramatic and more logical and remind yourself that staying angry is not going to solve your problem** (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

When attempting to problem solve, start by defining the problem. Stick to talking about specific behaviors in specific situations (Gorenstein et al., 2007). In the case of Mike and Jen, Mike's problem is that he wants to start taking Jacob to little league again, but Jen does not want to give up that activity.

Turn to **Handout 1: Problem-Solving Worksheet**, and take a minute and complete the first step of this problem-solving method by writing down a specific problem you would like to solve. Define the problem specifically and objectively.

PAUSE for participants to write.

Once you have clearly identified the problem, decide what result you want (Gorenstein et al., 2007). In some cases, your problem may not be that important, and you may decide to do nothing other than to try to avoid it next time. For more important problems, use a statement, like, "I want to take Jacob to little league practice myself." This is a much clearer goal to work toward than "I want Jen to stop being so hateful."

Now, complete step number 2 by writing down your goals specifically and objectively.

PAUSE for participants to write.

SHOW Slide 14: Solutions

Next, **think of as many possible solutions as you can** (Gorenstein et al., 2007). Write down all of the ideas that you produce, and keep trying if only a few come to mind at first. You can also add to your list by combining or changing ideas already recorded.

Considering Mike's problem and his goal of taking Jacob to little league practice himself, let's brainstorm some possible solutions. All ideas are welcome!

PAUSE for responses.

You can see that Mike has many options for solving this problem.

Now it is your turn. Using **Handout 1: Problem-Solving Worksheet**, go to step number 3 and write down as many solutions as you can think of.

PAUSE for participants to write.

Finally, **consider the pros and cons of each of the possible solutions that you wrote down.** Next to each idea, write down the positive and negative outcomes that you foresee. Give some thought to how likely you think these outcomes are. Also, **consider the degree to which each solution solves the problem; the effort it requires; and the effects the solution will have emotionally, socially, and physically on you and those you care about** (Gorenstein et al., 2007).

PAUSE for participants to write.

After you have finished recording the positives and negatives, go to step number 4 on **Handout 1: Problem-Solving Worksheet** and determine which solution strategy

seems best. When possible, try for the solution that will benefit everyone. As I said earlier, **remember that not every problem has an easy solution. Do not be hard on yourself if you cannot come to a solution right away** (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

SHOW Slide 15: Assertiveness

Communicating with another person, either to express your feelings and thoughts or to enlist support, can be useful in helping you reduce stressful situations and avoid anger. The words that we use and the way that we phrase words have an impact on how others receive our ideas and solutions. **Assertiveness entails communicating your feelings, thoughts, and desires in an honest and appropriate manner while respecting the rights of yourself and the other person. Assertiveness training focuses on improving communication skills, so you can listen more fully to others and develop a shared understanding of the interaction** (Deffenbacher et al., 1987).

Aggressive communication often includes threats, put-downs, and other coercive language. When you speak in harsh ways to others and try to get what you want at the expense of someone else's feelings or rights, you may be engaging in aggressive communication. **Overall, aggressive communication is not a good strategy when seeking to maintain relationships and solve problems** (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978). Now, let's look at the other side. When you do not express your feelings and desires at all, you are not respecting your own rights and are also not being assertive. **Keeping quiet about what you are thinking and feeling is called ineffective or non-assertive communication** (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978).

Speaking assertively - and not being aggressive or non-assertive - ensures that you represent your own interests. It increases the chances that the other person will comply with your request (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978), **that you both will understand each other** (Deffenbacher et al., 1987), **and that you will feel less anger during the interaction** (Deffenbacher et al., 1987; Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978).

SHOW Slide 16: Building an Assertive Statement

When entering a situation in which you intend to speak assertively, a good way to indicate your respect of the other person's rights and, thus, increasing his or her receptiveness to you, is to ask for permission to speak with him or her. This usually sounds something like, "Do you have a minute to talk?" **By leading with this type of question, you ensure the person is paying attention, and you have indicated that you care about him or her and want to discuss the situation not just state your perspective.**

Once you have the person's willing attention, you need to say what you want to say. One method of assertiveness is to use "I-messages" (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978). They start with, "When x happens, I feel…" or "When x happened, I felt…" followed by an emotion word. An example I-message is, "When you borrow my things without asking, I feel angry." You can also switch the order of the emotion and the situation, for example, "I feel unhappy and frustrated when you say that I spend too much time with my buddies."

For the situation with Mike and Jen, what would an I-message look like for Mike?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answer: "I felt angry when you said that you wouldn't stop taking Jacob to little league practice")

An alternative model for creating an assertive statement is the Verbal Response Model (VRM; Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978; Winship & Kelley, 1976). **The Verbal Response Model allows you to construct an assertive statement by focusing on three things: an empathy statement, a conflict statement, and an action statement. The empathy statement enables you to take the perspective of the other person. The conflict statement allows you to communicate the reason you feel conflict. The action statement lets you ask for what you want** (Winship & Kelley, 1976). For example, Mike could say the following to Jen, "I realize that you enjoy taking Jacob to little league practice, but not being able to do that myself makes me feel left out of his life. I would like to take Jacob to practice next week."

When you have finished speaking, the other person will likely want to say something. In the spirit of assertiveness, respect his or her rights and listen to what that person wants to say. For example, if Jen were to say to Mike, "I just really value little league practice as a chance to be involved in Jacob's life," Mike could demonstrate that he heard Jen by saying, "Little league is a chance for you to be involved. I understand that."

To help you speak assertively in the future, you can download Handout 4: Assertive Statement Script from the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

You can use this to help you determine what to say to others when you are angry or feeling any emotion that is motivating you to take action. Assertiveness is definitely more than just this script, but it is a good place to start and a tool to help you practice until you are more comfortable with the concept.

Summary

SHOW Slide 17: Review of Objectives

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What is anger?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (*Possible answer: anger is a normal human emotion that usually arises in response to a mismatch between what we want to happen and what actually happens and tends to motivate us to take action)*

2. **What happens in the Anger Episode Model?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: A trigger occurs; your appraisal of it leads you to have some kind of anger experience; this experience prompts your anger expression; how you expressed your anger creates various outcomes)

3. **Can you name one of the three specific anger management skills and tell me how you might apply that skill to your own situation?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (*Possible answers: avoidance and escape - taking a time out to temporarily escape from an anger-provoking situation in order to calm down before re-entering and addressing the problem; problem solving and cognitive restructuring - help to guide logical thinking and find solutions; assertiveness - a direct and honest communication that shows respect for your own rights and the rights of others by using I-messages and the verbal response model)*

Whether or not anger has caused problems in your life, everyone can benefit from knowing the information and skills we talked about today. Hopefully, this knowledge will serve you well.

SHOW Slide 18: Understanding and Reducing Anger

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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