

EXERCISES FOR OVERCOMING YOUR ANGER

1. **ANGER TRIGGERS:** What kinds of situations *trigger* an angry or hostile response in you? What are the things that seem to press your hot buttons? Make a list of everything you can identify that are triggers for your anger and rage.
2. **ANGER RESPONSES:** Review the list you made in Exercise 1, and think about how you *react* or *respond* when you are feeling angry. Is your most difficult problem the fact that certain things *trigger* an angry response in you, or is it how you *handle* your angry feelings once they *are* triggered? Feel free to add to and subtract from your lists as your triggers and responses become clearer to you.
3. **ANATOMY OF AN ANGER TRIGGER:** Write down a specific situation that tends to trigger your anger. Ask yourself, *What is my responsibility in this situation that is causing me to be angry?* (It could be that you maintain too much contact with this person, or give too much importance to the person who treats you badly; or it could be something that you are actually doing to help perpetuate the other person's actions toward you.) Work to identify any role that *you* play in this anger-triggering situation. Next, ask yourself the following questions about the trigger you are now working on:
 - *Is this really going to matter tomorrow, next week, or next month? Or one, three, or five years from now?*
 - *Why should I always have things my own way? Do I know of anyone who doesn't have to put up with some situations or hassles they are powerless to change?*
 - *Is it to my advantage to become upset or to express my anger and rage to the other person? If not, what can I do in order to let go of it?*
4. **ANGER DIARY:** It can be quite helpful to keep track of your anger and its *intensity*. To do this, keep a diary of each time you have an angry thought. Be aware of the time of day and the setting. Then, note the following:
 - What was the actual **situation** that triggered your angry feeling?
 - What were you **thinking** to yourself about the trigger?
 - Next, rate on a scale from 1 to 10 the **intensity** of your anger. (A rating of 1 would be very mild, perhaps a benign feeling of annoyance, and a 10 would be intense blind rage). By rating the intensity of your angry feelings, you will get out of the habit of looking at anger as an all-or-nothing, black-or-white affair. And you will know you are making progress when certain things that you used to become angry about at a 7, 8, 9, or 10 level on the 10-point scale may now only bother you at an intensity of 1, 2, or 3.

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EXERCISES FOR OVERCOMING ANGER, *continued*

- Was your angry response to the situation helpful or harmful? Was it really *worth* all the attention and energy you spent on becoming enraged?
- Was there anything you really could have controlled to make the situation that triggered your anger different?
- If you had it to do over again, how would you react now? The same or differently?
- How would you advise someone else you cared about to react or respond in a similarly upsetting situation?
- Sometimes the best answer is silence. At other times, it is assertion. Did you *choose* your actions, or were you merely reacting too quickly?
- Was this situation really as serious as you may have imagined it to be? Or did you make it way *bigger* than it really is?
- Is there something here that needs to be *accepted, changed, or understood* about your anger and its trigger? If so, what is it? And where would you like to go from here with this issue?

5. PUTTING ANGRY FEELINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE

- Imagine that the two wisest people you know are in the situation that is triggering *your* angry response. Ask yourself, *What would they do or think differently? What would they tell themselves about the situation? And most importantly, How can I benefit from their wisdom?*
- Ask yourself, *What are the advantages versus the disadvantages of holding on to my anger? What are the advantages versus the disadvantages of letting go? Could there possibly be any advantage or benefit from holding on to my anger? And, if not, what do I now need to do in order to let go of it, even if letting go is only a temporary measure designed to distract me (versus one which would allow me to let go permanently)?*

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EXERCISES FOR OVERCOMING ANGER, *continued*

6. **AFFIRMATIONS:** Become aware of what *affirmations* help you in a specific unpleasant situation that you experience as a trigger to your anger. Affirmations are rational beliefs or healthy thoughts which *replace* the irrational, dysfunctional, or self-defeating ones that cause or help you produce that painful emotion of anger within yourself. Think about a situation that could trigger an angry response in you. Keeping this issue in mind, ask yourself:
- *What does my irrational side say about this anger-triggering situation?*
 - *What does my rational or healthy side say about this same situation?*
You may want to try thinking about how you would advise someone *else* whom you cared about to evaluate a similar matter.
 - *Can I now listen to my rational side?* Your rational side is the part of you that *produces* your affirmations. Affirmations come in most handy at those moments when you are beginning to fall prey to that part of you that becomes irrational and is vulnerable to anger.
 - List the affirmations that could most help you with your anger-triggering situation.
 - Next, make a list of your own *customized* versions of these affirmations, or any others that may help you to minimize your anger. Write these affirmations down on 3" x 5" cards. Then carry them around in your wallet or somewhere else where you can have ready access to them at those times (and you know when they are) when you can most use a jolt of rationality.
 - If you are thinking that these affirmations are things you know "intellectually" but not "emotionally," remember that what you know intellectually probably includes the affirmations of which you most need to remind your "emotional" self at those times when you are starting to boil. *Pay special attention to what you know in your head.* Make another list of those items, then add the most helpful ones to your list of affirmations.

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