

## ANGER MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

by Frank D. Young Ph.D., R. Psych.1[1]

As soon as you become aware that you may be angry, begin to break the short circuit to aggression by using these questions and methods:

### A. CHANGING THE ACTIVATION LEVEL

(Take the first steps back from the anger, and begin to lower your breathing rate, heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, etc.)

1. **Do I WANT to be angry?** Often people are surprised to learn that anger is a choice in responding to a frustrating situation. This question starts the process of stepping back from the knee-jerk impulse to react in anger.
2. **HOW angry am I right now?** On a scale where 1=irritated to 10=total rage, where would I rate myself right now? Where would I like to be? This reminds you of previous successes in managing even hotter anger than this situation. Again, as you rate your anger, you learn how to observe yourself in a more detached way.
3. **HOW LONG do I want to be angry?** One minute, 2 hours, 2 days, a weekend, 4 months, a lifetime? This is the point at which you remember that being trapped in anger is a form of attachment to the anger object or person. Do you really want to be that attached that long to that event, that person? Resolve to let go of the anger, but keep the cosmic lesson without the sting, as soon as you can.

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4. **How do I want to EXPRESS my anger**, if at all? What would it look like, feel like, sound like to myself and others? What would then be accomplished? How would everybody get along after that? Revenge fantasies are delicious and self-indulgent, but revenge actions almost always compound the situation and get you stuck even deeper.
  
5. **Which method will I use first to BRING DOWN my activation level?** If that doesn't work, what will I use then? What is my fall-back plan? Use breathing techniques, PMR, imagery, biofeedback, yoga, tai chi, other meditation methods to bring your emotional temperature down. When you have done that, you are ready to ask the next set of questions.

## B. COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION

(Find out what is threatening you, and could there be any other way of looking at this?)

1. **What aspect of the situation is BUGGING me?** Is it the behavior, the number of times, the extent, the frequency, the tone of voice he uses, the gestures, the context, who is present, when it happens or where? (This question suggests possible variations in place, person, or scheduling that could be potential solutions to by-pass the obstacle).
  
2. **What VULNERABILITY in me or my group or family is being THREATENED?** Is it a physical threat, loss of security, loss of status, my sense of order or control, my job, my membership in this group, losing face in front of others? What does this incident say about me and my insecurities? (This question proposes that my sense of insecurity may be part of the problem).
  
3. What does it say about my sense of how reality should be that I feel so offended? **Does REALITY HAVE TO BE the way I would like it to be?** This question examines the issues of egocentricity (why can't everybody else think the way I think and do it the way I do it?) and ethnocentricity (the way our family or group does it is the only right way). Feelings of entitlement (I or my group deserves this and we are going to get our way) can also enter in below the surface when we observe what we judge to be unfair or

outrageous. It can make you hang on so tightly to righteousness (rightness or God is on our side) so tightly that you feel like you cannot function until the wrong is righted. While we can work on in the name of justice, we do not have to be grim and angry while doing so. In the manner of compassion and acceptance, we can surrender attachment to desire while maintaining personal purpose when reality does not match our template of what life should be like.

4. If I were not feeling angry in this situation, **WHAT EMOTION WOULD I HAVE TO BE DEALING WITH?** Could it be sorrow, sadness, worry, the frustration of not having a need met, disappointment, despair, loneliness, powerlessness? How would the situation be different if I expressed my primary emotion or real need instead of the secondary emotion of anger? Mentally play through a scenario where you actually state what your real needs and underlying emotions are and watch the other people deal with your needs rather than your anger. Usually other people respond better in resolving situations if you state a need rather than a threat. This can lead to exploration of a possible solution in the conflict.
  
5. **How can I REAPPRAISE THIS SITUATION so that it does not feel so threatening?**

### **C. EMPATHY, UNDERSTANDING, COMMUNICATION, RESOLUTION**

(including your needs and others' needs in a win-win solution)

1. **What does this situation look like from the VIEWPOINT of the other persons involved?** I know that a genuine solution will not be possible until I have empathy for their perspective, so what resources do I need to gain this understanding? Is there any information that I could be lacking that would help me understand what would lead him to do that behavior? (Indicates the necessity of empathy in problem solving, and begins the search for understanding the issues involved on many sides before rushing to a premature resolution).

2. **What are the NEEDS of others in this situation? What are my needs here?** Do I understand their needs? Do they understand mine? (Communication and feedback are required before problem resolution can occur).
  
3. **How can I construct a WIN-WIN solution for the needs of all to be resolved?** How can I invite others to engage with me in this process? How can I respect and consider their proposals for solution? How can I make my proposals attractive to them?
  
4. **How can we ensure that the ACTION PLAN and its results will be reviewed** and modified in the future? If we neglect to set a meeting to review the plan, we have not acted in sincerity and integrity. This review is a crucial piece of enduring peace.
  
5. **How can we ensure that the 4 elements of an ADEQUATE APOLOGY have been met?** (In an adequate or proper apology, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the hurt of the offended party, an admission of my contribution or role in the mishap, an ACTION PLAN to make it unlikely I will hurt you again in this way, and if possible an arrangement for restitution plus 10% of damages done). If the 4 elements are met, there is a high probability that the relationship can proceed forward beyond this situation. Merely saying you're sorry is not enough to restore the relationship and allow all parties to move ahead.
  
6. **Have I avoided the communication traps of ALWAYS-NEVER and YOU MAKE ME FEEL?** When you describe the other person's behavior with the words "always" (e.g., "You always interrupt me.") or "never" (as in "You never take out the garbage.") you activate the lawyer in the listener and often precipitate an argument. Instead use words like "often" or "seldom" to soft start a request for change. Also, when describing your reaction to another person's behavior, take responsibility for your own feelings. "You make me angry." is technically incorrect and usually leads to further argument. A preferred way of saying it is "When you forget to take out the garbage, I feel let down." These soft startups lead the way to problem solving rather than accusations.

#### D. UNDERLYING ISSUES

(How to deal with problems that keep on recurring)

1.     **How do I INVITE this problem to keep happening to me over and over again?**  
(search for common elements or patterns). What brings back the problem, even when I thought it was solved? (Look for pseudo-solutions, premature resolutions, caving-in to the other rather than a solution where your needs are also addressed)
  
  2.     **With what KINDS OF PEOPLE do I have these problems?** Who or what earlier life situations does this remind me of? (possible transference from mother, father, older sibling, teacher, authority figure)
  
  3.     **Do these outbreaks only occur in family or “SAFE” situations where I can be my true self?** (suggests overcontrol and lack of assertion in other contexts, displaced tension and hostility). Do these problems only occur in intimate relationships? (possible problems with issues of intimacy, engulfment or abandonment fears, extra sensitivity to perceived issues of control and autonomy).
  
  4.     **With whom in my life do I have to MAKE PEACE?** With whom are there unresolved issues or tensions? How can I begin this process, even if the other people are dead or unavailable? How do I make peace with the roles and rules that have held me back from peace and happiness in my life? (types of therapy processes to get there).
  
  5.     **Who can I TRUST to be supportive and firm** in guiding this process of self-examination on the path to internal peace? (guidelines in search for therapist, intimate friend, spiritual guide).
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