

# Coping with Anger

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## Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

### Background and keywords:

Generally we can see anger as a positive and powerful emotion, a natural feeling. But there are some situations and cases where anger could be a problem and it is difficult to handle and manage and it can have devastating effect on our relationships, activity and our overall wellbeing. Anger is often connected with aggression but there are also other reasons for aggressive behaviour. Problems with anger are seen more as boys' problems because of their higher score of physical and verbal aggression compared to girls. Also if we compare models for boys and girls behaviour, anger occurs in boys' behaviour more often than it does in girls. Anger that is uncontrolled could have serious consequences, and we can expect worse behaviour in boys because of their physical dispositions.

And when we can say we have problems with anger? Here are some of them:

- when we become angry we feel out of control;
- when we become angry we say or do things we later regret;
- because of anger we have difficulties with relationships;
- feelings of anger make it difficult to concentrate on our activities;
- we may have verbally or even physically attacked someone in an angry moment (e. g. shove, slap, punch, kick, ...).

As we said previously, anger is not our enemy. We do not need to fight against it. Anger is a normal process which has allowed humans to evolve and adapt. It is not a bad thing in itself. Anger only becomes a problem when it is not managed in the right way. The aim is to keep our anger under control, to know how to manage it.

Keywords: Anger, aggression, violence, control, boys.

### Similar topics:

Aggression, violence, emotions, hostility

### Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils

### Duration:

1 hour in class or hobby group

### Number of participants:

15 to 20 boys

### Age:

9 to 11 years old boys

**Aims:**

- To learn how to keep feelings of anger under control.
- To know how to manage anger.

**(Short) Explanation:**

We can see many boys who are socially aggressive. One of the reasons could be the fact that they do not recognise or acknowledge their own feelings. To be able to "read" emotions by others they should be able to "read" their own ones, to understand them. They should know that anger is a natural emotion related to all people. And anger can be controlled and constructively managed when we know the sources of it and we have no need to suppress it. The group discussion about what makes us angry leads to reciprocal understanding and boys can better learn how to deal with anger too- how to ventilate it without injuring others.

Guidance for the game or exercise:

**Angry cake**

Each boy "cooks" his own angry cake. He splits his cake on different parts in different sizes. The pieces are associated to sources of personal anger. The size of each piece varies depending on the degree of anger generated in a given situation. The important point is that boys should think about and compare the sources of anger and try to find the appropriate associations and name them. Post- work discussion helps boys to realize that also the others could have the similar problems. In some cases they discover other sources of anger which have been unconscious.



**Reflection:**

Everybody should think about following:

- What makes me angry?
- How do I react?
- How my anger could help me?
- What can I do to be well- balanced?

**Variations (continuation):**

**The anger protocol**

Some boys can remain composed easily without getting angry, others suppress it and the others react explosively. This exercise develops the ability to manage feelings of anger.

Group discussion about what are the good reactions helping against anger and which are not is the opening part of the exercise. Then the individual work begins. Boys write their thoughts on pre-prepared paper, see below.

**Step 1**

What made me angry today?

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**Step 2**

How did I react? (Did I ignore it; did I scream, did I cry, did I run off, did I beat anybody else, did I try to find help by an adult person?)

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**Step 3**

How do I want to react next time?

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**Step 4**

Think about the situation that made me angry and consider the better, positive, constructive reactions which I identified in number 3 - I will breath more deeply, I will try to see the situation from different perspective.

**Step 5**

Each boy should have time to discuss the "anger protocol" with a pedagogue or parent. They should positively evaluate this work, give him an advice and stimulate him toward continuance.

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information



The first important question is what is anger. Anger is, as we mentioned above, a natural feeling experienced when we are frustrated, hostile, hurt, mistreated, injured, opposed etc. New World Dictionary defines anger as: "...feel of displeasure resulting from injury, injustice, offence, bad treatment, aversion etc. (in.: Dentemarová, Kranzová, 1996, p. 7). Spielberg refers to anger as an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage (1).

Anger is the emotion which can be both constructive and destructive. As constructive emotion anger signals that there is something out of order in our environment, something that could endanger us, what we feel as a difficulty on the way to our objectives. Anger as energized emotion gives us the energy and power to deal with obstacles. Anger can even save us when we express it in the right way and in the right moment. We can show definite and readable signals- "be careful because I do not agree with this, I do not like that"....! Anger can provide us with the other feelings of vulnerability, and provide us with an opportunity for venting our tension and frustration.

When we summarize, the positives of anger can help us mainly in areas of:

- release, catharsis of our tension;
- better understanding;
- negotiation of barriers and our aims reaching;
- mobilizing against an enemy and dangers;
- delimiting boundaries between us and the others;
- feeling of our own individuality (in Dentemarová, Kranzová, 1996).

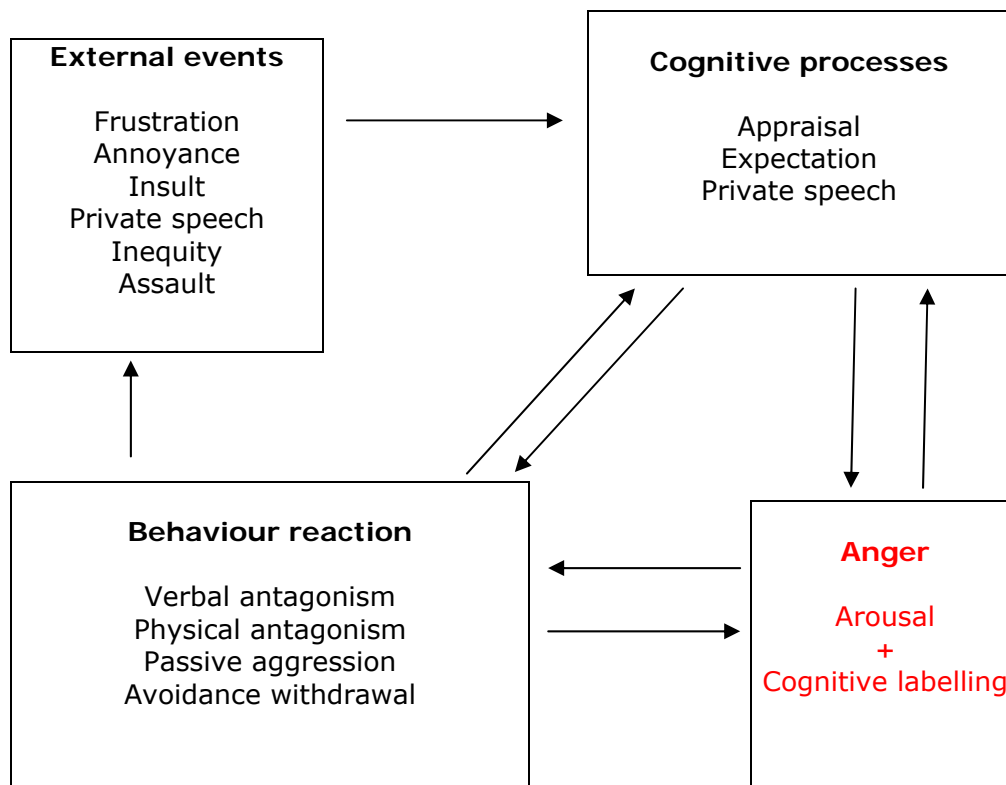
But there could be some negative motivations to anger too. Anger can reinforce a false sense of our self-esteem, illusory feeling of our moral superiority, to bully people into doing something we want to do against their will etc. So anger has a destructive aspect too. When the anger becomes out of control, behaviour starts to be very destructive. People are physically or verbally aggressive and consequences of such behaviour could be tragic. The intensity of anger depends mainly on determinations of anger and residual arousal. The anger also can lead to:

- feelings of injury;
- problems with relationship or its ending;
- feelings of guilt;
- revenge;
- fear of consequences (in Dentemarová, Kranzová, 1996).

The determinations of anger are seen as a combination of psychological arousal and cognitive labelling of that arousal. These cognitions are themselves influenced by internal and external factors and the behavioural responses to the situation (Browne, Howells, 1996, p. 195, 196). Anger may be elicited by both the environment and imaginative cues (Pankratz, Levendusky, Glaudin, 1976, p. 174).

A very important factor is arousal, Zillmann (1983, in Baron, Byrne, Suls, 1989) claims that arousal is a state of mind which supplies behaviour with energy, makes behaviour more intensive. Arousal usually comes out from sources such as participation in competitive games, some exercise, intra or interpersonal conflicts. As he claims in his "theory of excitation transfer" the physiological arousal diverts slowly during time. A part of the arousal can persist from one situation to the other namely on an unconsciousness level of mind. The cumulative arousal leads to reinforcement of future emotional experiences and we deal with the transfer of anger. At too high arousal the cognitive mechanisms are usually ineffective for behaviour correction and we cannot control our feelings.

### Determinants of anger arousal



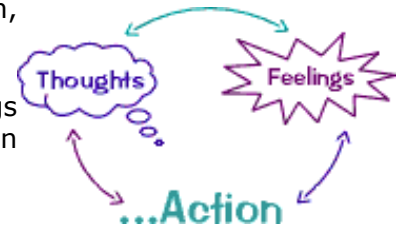
(Novaco, 1978, in.: Browne, Howells, 1996, p. 196)

As far as the manifestation of anger is concerned Spielberger (1985, 1988) differs three varieties of that:

1. The first component includes anger manifestation against people or objects in the surroundings. It expresses itself through physical or verbal aggression: anger - out.
2. The second component of anger directs in the subject. There is a tendency not to express the angry feeling, respectively to keep it in check: anger - in. In spite of this repression of anger it manifests itself for instance as:
  - misunderstanding;
  - depression, desperation, anxiety;
  - feeling guilty;
  - negative self-picture;
  - over excitability;
  - physical problems (e. g. headaches, stomachic disorders etc.);
  - affectionate explosions (in.: Dentmarová, Kranzová, 1996).

3. The third component determines individual differences concerning the range of management: anger - control (in Stuchlíková, Man, Spielberg, 1994).

So our behaviour, our actions depend both on our feelings and their intensity and on our thoughts, let us say on cognitive labelling.



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