

THE ANGER Mini- Workbook

Dr. Les Carter
Dr. Frank Minirth

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Five Ways to Handle Anger

No two people are exactly alike in managing their anger [defined earlier as “self preservation of worth, needs and convictions”. Temperaments and circumstances differ widely. But we can identify five general choices that can be made when anger arises: (1) suppression, (2) open aggression, (3) passive aggression, (4) assertiveness, or (5) dropping it. The first three choices tend to perpetuate anger. The last two can lead to success. Let’s examine each separately.

1. Suppressing Anger

Because all anger is bad, this thinking goes, I can never afford to express it.

Check the items that apply to you to determine how likely you are to suppress your anger.

- I am very image conscious. I don’t like to let others know my problems.
- Even when I feel very flustered I portray myself publicly as having it all together.
- I am rather reserved about sharing my problems or frustrations.
- If a family member or friend upsets me I can let days pass without even mentioning it.
- I have a tendency to be depressed and moody.
- Resentful thinking is common for me, although many people would never suspect it.
- I have suffered with physical complaints (for example, headaches, stomach ailments, sleep irregularity).
- There are times when I wonder if my opinions or preferences are really valid.
- Sometimes I feel paralyzed when confronted by an unwanted situation.

I'm not inclined to initiate conversations about sensitive or troublesome topics.

If you checked five or more of these statements you probably have a well-established pattern of repressing your anger. This represents a type of emotional dishonesty in your relationships.

2. Open Aggression

When most people think of anger, they imagine open aggression, a self-preserving stand for personal worth, needs, and convictions *at someone else's expense....*

Openly aggressive anger can be easily identified because it does not hide in the same fashion as suppressed anger.

Check the items that apply to you to assess your inclination toward this pattern.

I can be blunt and forceful when someone does something to frustrate me.

As I speak my convictions my voice becomes increasingly louder.

When someone confronts me about a problem, I am likely to offer a ready rebuttal.

No one has to guess my opinion; I'm known for having unwavering viewpoints.

When something goes wrong, I focus so sharply on fixing the problem that I overlook other's feelings.

I have a history of getting caught in bickering matches with family members.

During verbal disagreements with someone, I tend to repeat myself several times.

I find it hard to keep my thoughts to myself when it is obvious that someone else is wrong.

I have a reputation for being strong willed.

I tend to give advice, even when others have not asked for it.

If you checked five or more of these statements, you probably have a pattern of open aggressive anger.

3. Passive Aggression

Like open aggression, anger expressed through passive aggression involves preserving personal worth, needs, and convictions at someone else's expense. But it differs in that it is accomplished in a quieter manner, causing less vulnerability.

The following checklist provides some examples of passive aggressive anger.

Check the items that apply to you.

When I am frustrated, I become silent, knowing it bothers other people.

I am prone to sulk and pout.

When I don't want to do a project I will procrastinate. I can be lazy.

When someone asks if I am frustrated, I will lie and say, "No, everything is fine."

- ___ There are times when I am deliberately evasive so others won't bother me.
- ___ I sometimes approach work projects half-heartedly.
- ___ When someone talks to me about my problems I stare straight ahead, deliberately obstinate.
- ___ I complain about people behind their backs, but resist the opportunity to be open with them face to face.
- ___ Sometimes I become involved in behind-the-scenes misbehavior.
- ___ I sometimes refuse to do someone a favor, knowing this will irritate him or her.

If you checked five or more items, you show a strong inclination toward using passive aggression to express your anger. You may think you are succeeding in putting limits on your anger, but you are only communicating the anger in a way that will cause future tensions.

4. Assertive Anger

If anger is identified as preserving personal worth, needs, and convictions, then assertive anger means this preservation is accomplished while considering the needs and feelings of others.

Notice the following examples of assertive expressions of anger:

- An overworked church member can politely but firmly say no to a request to do even more projects.
- A parent can state guidelines for discipline without resorting to debate or condescension toward the child.
- When swamped by more responsibilities than he or she can manage, a person can request help from friends.
- A tired mom can tell her family she will take a thirty-minute break with no interruptions.
- Spouses can talk about their differences, offering helpful suggestions without raising their tone of voice or repeating their messages incessantly.
- A family member may choose to pursue an independent activity instead of succumbing to the persistent demands of extended family.

Assertiveness allows you to keep a clean slate with others. This is consistent with the Ephesians 4:15 instruction to *speaking the truth in love*. Assertiveness is not always easy. It requires self-discipline and respect for the dignity of others. It implies that we are not just pushing selfish agendas on them. And it requires us to put our communications into the context of the "big picture," anticipating how it will affect future interactions. Therefore, caution is needed as assertiveness is used. James 1:19 puts it this way: "*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"

5. Dropping Anger

Of the choices involving anger the most difficult one is to let it go. There are times when you can have appropriate convictions to communicate, yet assertiveness may not work. Or it could be you have succeeded in making as many adjustments as possible in your world, yet imperfections continue to haunt you. At this point one of your options is to choose to drop your anger.

Dropping your anger means you accept your inability to completely control circumstances and you recognize your personal limits. This option includes tolerance of differences as well as choosing to forgive. Notice how anger is dropped in the following examples:

- A wife recognizes that, despite her discussions with her husband, he will always be perfectionistic. As a result, she draws her boundaries so she will not always have to comply with his finicky preferences, but she also learns to accept him as he is.
- An adult son admits that his father has chosen not to love him. So, rather than carry a grudge, he decides to forgive his father while also charting a new style of fathering with his own children.
- Rather than griping about company policy, an employee decides that no job is perfect, so he will do his best work in spite of his differences in preference.

Ephesians 4:31 tells us that such problems as bitterness, anger, and malice can be “put away.” Then Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to choose kindness and forgiveness as a way of life.

Let’s keep in mind that choosing to drop your anger is far different from suppressing it. Suppression represents phoniness while dropping anger represents a commitment to godliness. The person who chooses to let go of the anger is fully aware that grudges are an option, but he or she chooses instead to opt for a cleaner life anchored in kindness.