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Keys

A CounselCare Connection Publication

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Keys to *Defusing Anger and Hostility* in Marriage

Real Skills for Positive Change

Expanded Anger Management Book and Workbook for Couples

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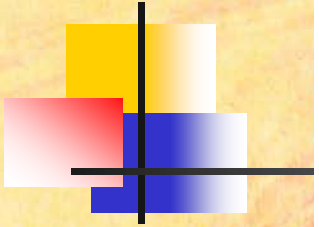
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Defusing Anger and Hostility in Marriage



Questions:

- What is at the core of anger and hostility in marriages today?
- How can you motivate resistant couples and spouses to change?
- What are the most effective skills and interventions you can use to help couples overcome anger and hostility?



Defusing Anger and Hostility in Marriage



- Keys to helping couples move from anger to compassion.
- Motivate couples to change through: **interrupting escalation, developing empathy, problem-solving, calming skills, thinking ahead reminders, handling anger effectively, connecting through assertiveness and forgiveness.**

What is Anger?



- “Anger is a negatively toned emotion, subjectively experienced as an aroused state of antagonism toward someone or something perceived to be the source of an aversive event.” (Novaco)
- “In Marriage – anger gets more complicated because spouse’s are dealing with each other’s triggers and emotional history.” (Steve Yeschek)

Anger

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- At the heart of resentment and contempt: Couples have unresolved resentment and this plays into conflicts.
- Antecedent to *aggression*: the behavioral component intending to cause psychological or physical harm. The Goal is to move couples from aggression to valuing love and wanting the best for their mate: "What is it that you really want for your marriage/mate?"

Hostility

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- “perceiving others as harboring ill will and as deserving of punishment or harm.”
- It’s all about perception and what the spouse really believes.
- Teach couples what they are thinking and believing really matters.

When Anger Wakes Up

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The Physiological Mechanism involved in Anger Arousal:

- **Threat or provocation...**□
- **Internal fight/flight response**□
- **Increased breathing, heart rate**□
- **Hormonal surge**- lasts up to 30 min.
- Awareness is the key. "If this anger response can be interrupted (time-out), anger arousal can be curtailed"
- Example

Other Sources of Relationship Anger



- Attachment Styles
- Love Languages
- Flooding (4 horsemen)
- Triggers
- Resentment
- **False beliefs:** *One spouse has sense of entitlement; the other spouse thinks should please*



Help Couples to:

- Move from disconnect to connect
- Stop avoiding dealing with emotional/painful feelings with each other.
- Move from avoiding to staying present to work through issues
- Face conflict
- Move from controlling to non-controlling

Long-term Goals for Anger Management Treatment with Couples



- Learn & implement anger management skills to reduce level of anger – not just reduce anger but include the goal of valuing communication & loving each other.
- Increase respectful communication.
- Develop awareness of angry thoughts, feelings, actions in order to reduce negativity and enhance thinking about what can benefit the relationship

Defusing Anger and Hostility in Marriage: Key #1



- **Interrupt Escalation with:
Physiological, Cognitive,
Behavioral and Spiritual changes**

Goals:

- **Identify triggers, skill deficits**
- **Recognize cognitive distortions,
false beliefs, hot self-talk**
- **Intervention: Practice communication**



Motivation enhancement

- Existing theories in anger management treatment fail to address anger disorders adequately because designed for self-referred clients who desire change. Spouses who are stone-walling, defensive and ready to divorce resist services/treatment.

Goal: *promote internal attribution for change* versus feeling coerced or pressured. Identify how treatment/services will help in the long-

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Motivation Enhancement

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- As each spouse implements thought change – he/she realizes the answer lies within self.
- Questions for dealing with resistance and ambivalence: *“It’s possible you feel hesitant about working on change because of the issues you brought up. Since you stated that “what we are doing isn’t working” -- I am wondering if you were to try something new - what skill you might consider?”*

Motivation Enhancement

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“So coming here is a last resort which sounds like you are feeling pretty hopeless. On the other hand, you did come -- so I am wondering if you might be ready to try something different to help your marriage?”

- *“Maybe you are having difficulty making a change right now – but if you were to change just to help your relationship improve– what skill might you consider applying first?”*



Principles for Couples

- Empathize with each spouse – validate frustration and disappointment
- Assess their relational goals
- Work with any ambivalence about changing
- Increase awareness of negative outcomes associated with angry and hostile episodes
- Identify more constructive ways to experience and express anger (Understanding Anger Disorders: R. DiGiuseppe; R. Tafrate)

Disorders: R. DiGiuseppe; R. Tafrate)

Cognitive Restructuring

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- **Cognitive strategies** can be used to guide behavior during the provocation itself (termed “reminders”) or to counter irrational beliefs that set the stage for overreaction.
- **A-Activating Event**
- **B-Belief about event**
- **C-Consequences**
- **Example:**

Objectives for Cognitive Restructuring

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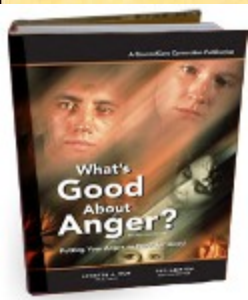


- Identify, challenge and replace anger-inducing self-talk with self-talk that facilitates a less angry reaction.
- **Interventions:** Rehearse thinking ahead reminders; log conflicts; challenge biases – generating appraisals & self-talk correcting distortions. Combine new self-talk with calming skills to manage anger. Role-play scenes; identify self-talk through thinking logs. Generate alternatives.

Thinking ahead reminders: interfere with impulsivity

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- Coping self-talk is an incompatible behavior that blocks the processing of “hot” thoughts.
- Write out sequence when it has been different in the office.
- Reminders can be prompts to activate predetermined coping efforts. “Maybe I can give him/her the benefit of the doubt” or maybe “he/she is wanting the best for our relationship”



Thinking ahead reminders with Self-Control Focus:



Approaching the situation:

- Keep your breathing even.
- "What is it that I have to do"
- "Take one step at a time.
- "Stick to the issue and don't take it personally."
- Scenario:

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Defusing Anger and Hostility in Marriage: Key # 2

Emotional Intelligence



- **Self-Awareness:** Capacity for knowing and understanding one's emotions, one's strengths, and one's weaknesses.
- **Self-Management:** effectively manages emotions appropriately; regulates behavior.
- **Self-Motivation:** monitors and controls emotions in order to achieve goals.
- **Social Awareness:** able to empathize -- understand what others are saying and feeling; why they feel and act as they do.
- **Relationship Management:** acts in such a way that one is able to get desired results from others and reach personal goals. (Daniel

Spiritual Truths Encouraging Empathy

- Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephes. 4:29
- Be kind and tender-hearted towards one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephes. 3:32

Empathy Goals

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- To sense your spouse's feelings and perspective, and take an active interest in their concerns.
- Attend to his/her emotional cues and listen well
- Show sensitivity and understand his/her perspective
- Help out based on understanding his/her needs and feelings



Comforting One Another:

- 1-Seek Awareness
- 2-Engage with feelings and acknowledgments of the others needs
- 3-Exploration of the speaker's feelings and thoughts: listening, validating and asking what the person needs;
- 4- Resolve...needs verbally and with touch, seeking how and when needs may be met in the future. (How We Love by Yerkovich)

Moving Towards Problem-solving: Key #3

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- What can we do? What are our options? *"How can we address the issue of our teen staying out late?"*
- List and choose one or two. (healthy options)
- How can someone else help?
- What resources are available?
- What support can we ask for? What steps can help from the Handling Anger Effectively model?
- Try out one of the options for a week and re-evaluate.

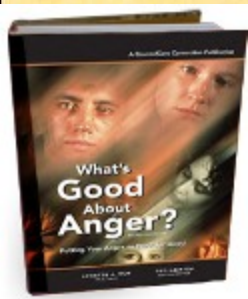
Calming and Coping Skills for Couples: Key #4

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- Calms the physiological arousal.
- Desensitizes clients/couples to arousing effects of particular situations.
- Relaxation training plays major role in the empirically supported cognitive-behavioral treatment for anger control problems

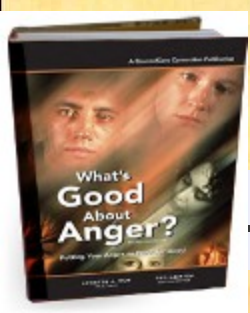
Objectives of stress management & relaxation training



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- **Learn and implement calming and coping strategies** as an overall approach to managing anger.
- **Interventions:** teach couples calming techniques: muscle relaxation, breathing techniques, cue-controlled relaxation, calming imagery, prayer, thought stopping to reduce physiological tension accompanying angry feelings

Handling Anger Effectively: Key #5



- *"Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way - that is not easy." Aristotle*



Handling Anger Effectively

Initial Hurt or Anger: * Early Awareness is Key

1: Recognize feelings

2: Take a time-out to reflect. "Be slow to anger"

3: Pray (many find this helpful)

4: Identify true issue

5: Evaluate validity of issue

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Assignment for Couples

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- Write out scenario and apply the Handling Anger Effectively Steps
- Emphasize Reflection during Time-out
- Explore underlying beliefs

Handling Anger Effectively (cont'd.)



6: Address Issue- Express feelings

Ask: How are we going to go about doing this?

- Establish plan of action**
- Provide options for change**
- Negotiate a resolution**
- Plan time-frame**
- Express how you will help**

7: Get guidance.

8: Put issue in perspective.

9: Forgive and forget --> Resolution

“I don’t understand a word of what you are trying to say, Harold, but one thing is perfectly clear- I certainly don’t agree!”



Time-out: Purpose and Guidelines



- Helps couples cool off so that heated exchanges can be averted.
- Even as little as 2 minutes has been shown to reduce the incidence of volatile exchanges.
- Agreement needs to be made about when to call a time-out.
- Spouses engage in relaxing activity during time-out.

Connecting Through Assertiveness: Key #6

Resource: Evidence-Based Treatment Planning for Anger Control Problems by A. Jongsma, Jr.; T. Bruce © copyright 2011)



- Verbalize understanding of assertive communication & how it can be used to express thoughts, feelings of anger in controlled, respectful way.
- Learn and implement assertive communication skills in daily life situations
- **Scenario Interventions:** Use "I" statements; stay on one topic; control volume and tone (education, modeling, role-playing communication)

Training in Assertion

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Provide information and education about: aggression, assertion, passivity.

"Assertiveness is not aggressive or passive. Assertive people express their thoughts and feelings forthrightly without getting squashed or squashing others in the process." Lynette Hoy

- Give scenarios for spouses to identify whether assertive or otherwise.
- Ask couples about what rights each individual has and how rights can be violated through aggression.

Principles for Couples: Defusing Hostility



- Deal With Spouse's Feelings First
- Begin To Defuse Early
- Be Assertive, Not Manipulative, Passive or Aggressive

For Counselor: be client-centered but directive. Apply Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approaches.

Breaking the Chain of Resentment: Key #7



- "Resentment is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die."
Malachy McCourt
- Healing Wounds and Hurts in Marriage depends on letting go of resentments
- Reframe old memories to move into the present versus living in the past

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Destructive Interaction Patterns

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- Failed Repair Attempts (Missed attempts to put the brakes on or "head-off" harmful communication)
- Bad Memories (Looking back on the relationship and seeing the "good gone bad" or good simply gone)
- Couples' goals: "Put past in the past. Forgive so don't stay stuck"

Letting Go of the Past



**“And then, do you know what he did on our honeymoon,
just 21 years ago...”**

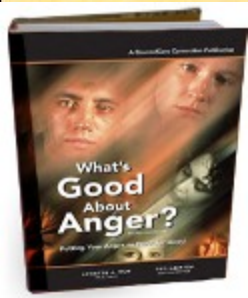


Forgiveness is..

- Letting go of anger, hurt & blame; ceasing resentment, pardoning.
- A debt cancelled.
- The antidote to anger and hostility.
- Another way of saying: "I'm human, I make mistakes. I want to be granted that privilege and so I grant you that privilege" Philip Yancey



Keys to Confession & Forgiveness



- Do I want things bitter or better?
- Let go of excuses
- Practice the Art of Apology
- "A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them, and strong enough to correct them." John C. Maxwell
- Give the Benefit of the Doubt
- Apply Guidelines for Reconciliation & Forgiveness in What's Good About Anger.
- **Scenario:** Spouse apologizes about not being empathic.

Art of Apology: "Never ruin an apology with an excuse." K. Johnson



Steps to Confession

Acknowledge the behavior and take responsibility for it.

Confess the sin and harmful behavior.

If your spouse has been harmed by your action, acknowledge the harm and your understanding of the consequences. Ask for forgiveness.

Take any and all actions to make amends or minimize the harm.

Make a firm commitment to forgive knowing you need forgiveness too. Ask spouse to pray for you.

Letting Forgiveness In



- *"A good marriage is the union of two forgivers."* Ruth Bell Graham

DEFUSE STEPS

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- **Defuse through self-control: self-calming, prayer, thinking ahead reminders, time outs**
- **Empathize with feelings and touch**
- **Forgive by letting go of resentments**
- **Understand by listening and paraphrasing**
- **Share "I think, I feel, I need"**
- **Encourage with love and words of affirmation**

Recommended Resources



- Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do (2009) by Dr. Tim Clinton; Dr. Gary Sibcy
- Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ (2005) by Daniel Goleman
- How We Love (2006) by Milan & Kay Yerkovich
- Keys to Defusing Anger & Hostility in Marriage (2013) & What's Good About Anger? (2012) by Lynette Hoy; Ted Griffin
- Why Marriages Succeed or Fail (1994) by John Gottman

Anger Management Institute: Providing Evidence-based Programs



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