

Unit 4

Handout

Groupwork in Anger Management Techniques for Handling Anger

The techniques outlined in this unit can be taught to young people either individually or in a group situation. A suggested outline for six group sessions is given in Handout 3. Feindler and Ecton (1986) give more detailed outlines of programmes that can be used. The following techniques are of benefit in learning to deal with tension, anger and aggression.

1. Relaxation

There are many forms of relaxation. We will cover two in this section, deep breathing and visualisation. These are elementary techniques. Your school psychologist will be able to discuss more advanced forms with you, such as progressive relaxation.

a. Deep breathing

The first skill to teach with regard to relaxation is deep breathing. Some people confuse the quick shallow breathing that comes with anger with deep breathing, so it is vital to distinguish the two. Deep breathing will help an angry person to calm down. One way of teaching deep breathing to young people is to ask them to visualise their favourite colour. They should be encouraged to see this in as much detail as possible. Vague descriptions like 'blue' should be discouraged. They should try to visualise and describe the exact shade of blue. For example, the turquoise blue that is seen in shallow water in the Mediterranean; the deep velvet blue of the sky in summer after the sun has set; the rich blue of a sapphire surrounded by diamonds. Once they have visualised and described their favourite colour they should repeat the process for a colour they dislike intensely. Again, this should be as explicit as possible. That particular shade of lime green that almost glows in the dark and reflects onto skin, giving it a sickly pallor; that shade of taupe that looks like muddy mushroom soup. Participants should then sit comfortably in a chair with their backs against the chairback and their feet flat on the floor. They should close their eyes and begin to breathe deeply. As they breathe in they should imagine their favourite colour coming in through their nose. As the colour floods in, it begins to displace the disliked colour. Breathe in and a little more of the good colour comes in, breathe out and the bad colour goes out too. This should continue for a short period of time, perhaps a minute or so. The young person should try to use this technique whenever they find themselves becoming agitated.

b. Visualisation

Visualisation starts with the person being seated comfortably as above. The group leader should then talk through a peaceful scene. The secret is to be as detailed as possible and to involve as many senses as possible. A favourite visualisation for many people is a beach and an example is given below:

Imagine that you are lying on a beach (pause). It is a hot summer day and you are feeling very relaxed. You are lying on a beach mat and you can feel the smooth surface beneath you. You wriggle slightly and you can feel the sand beneath the mat shift to your shape. You stretch out an arm and your hand touches the sand. You pick some up. It is very fine. As you lie there with your eyes shut, you let it trickle through your fingers, feeling its gentle touch. In the distance you can hear the faint cry of a seagull. There is no other sound apart from the waves lapping the beach and a slight breeze rustling in the palm tree above you. You are feeling very relaxed (pause). You open your eyes and look up into the sky. It is pale blue and shimmers in the heat. There is a very fine haze but no clouds. You hear the seagull again and can see it, just a dot in the sky (pause). You close your eyes again. You can smell the salt of the sea. You are very, very relaxed. There is a drink by your side. It is your favourite drink. You can hear the ice cubes clinking against the glass. You touch the glass and it cools your warm fingers. You make yourself comfortable and take a sip of the drink. Bubbles tickle your nose and you can feel the drink sliding down your throat, cooling and refreshing you as it makes its way down. You lie down again and feel at peace with the world (pause). The sound of the sea soothes you, the wind caresses you, the warmth of the sun comforts you. You are relaxed (pause).

Note how every sense is brought in. This helps to build up the picture. It is important to speak slowly and to pause frequently to allow the picture to build up. Some soft music in the background can also help.

Relaxation is taught as a technique for the young person to use. It needs frequent practice and this should be emphasised with the young person.

2. Self-instruction training

a. Reminders

A reminder is a word or phrase that we say to ourselves to help guide our behaviour. It involves saying a word or phrase over and over again to oneself to calm oneself down. The phrase should be related to calming down and should be chosen by the person so that it is meaningful to them. Some possibilities are:

- Stay cool
- Be calm
- Relax
- Chill out
- Easy
- Mellow
- Untie your knots

Some people find it helps to make a movement with their hands to emphasize the chosen phrase. For example a soothing motion could be made as they say the phrase, 'calm down'.

b. Thinking ahead procedure

This involves learning the statement 'If I (*specify the behaviour*) now, then I will (*Specify the consequence*). The group leader will need to discuss negative consequences with the group. These may be covert (people dislike you) or overt (punishment exercise, suspension, being grounded). Each group member needs to identify negative consequences that they feel they can use to control their behaviour.

3. Assertion not aggression

Two assertive techniques that are useful are 'fogging' and 'broken record'. It can be difficult for many young people to break out of the mould of aggressive responses, so it is recommended that role-play be used to develop and practise these techniques.

a. Fogging

This is useful in a situation where an individual is at risk of becoming riled by others. Rather than retort angrily to a windup, the young person is encouraged to confuse the

tormentor by fogging the issue. For example, rather than get into an argument or slagging match, they can defuse a situation by seeming to agree with the aggressor. 'Yeah, you're right, I probably am thick.' This can help to turn the situation around.

b. Broken record

This involves repeating something over and over again. For example, if someone takes your pencil away then they can be asked repeatedly, 'Can I have my pencil back please, can I have my pencil back please?' The voice level should remain the same, as the effect is lost if you start to raise your voice or if you show other signs of losing control (such as over-use of gestures).

4. Becoming self-aware

During the period of the group sessions, participants are encouraged to keep 'hassle logs' or behaviour diaries. This is to encourage the awareness of both their own actions and the consequences of their actions. From the beginning of the group-work, each individual should be asked to keep a log or diary of times they get into conflict. This is their homework every week and should be taken very seriously. An example of a hassle log is given below and a full-size version is provided, titled Handout 4.

The concepts of antecedent, behaviour and consequence are important ones to pass on. As the group progresses, each student is encouraged to think about the consequences of their behaviour. They should be taught the phrase, 'If I (*specify the behaviour*) now, the result will be (*specify the consequence*)'. Students will require some time to practise such reflection, and time should be set aside each session for consequences to be discussed. Pupils will also need opportunities to discuss what their own triggers are. Some pupils will claim not to know. For these pupils, use a list of possible triggers as a discussion point - Faupel et al provide such a list (1998, p88).

Hassle log				
Keep a note of conflicts. Before you write, think about what happened just before the conflict (antecedent), what you actually did (behaviour) and what happened as a result of <u>your</u> behaviour (consequence).				
Antecedent				
Behaviour				
Consequence				
How angry were you?				
1 not at all	2 a little	3 simmering	4 heated	5 boiling mad
How did you cope?				
1 nice and cool	2 kept the head	3 warming up	4 got mad	5 lost it

Perceptions are very important in anger and an important part of becoming self-aware is to realise that there are different ways to view a situation. For example, the antecedent to an outburst might be as follows: 'I was in the corridor and Darren Green pushed me.' The feelings about this push need to be explored further. Presumably the young person had angry feelings about this. 'He wanted to fight me.' or 'He was looking for trouble.' If there were no angry feelings, the thoughts about the push would be different. 'It was an accident.' Young people who have anger problems tend to have angry feelings about incidents even when there is no real cause for this to be so. Some psychologists believe this is due to distorted thinking, where everything is seen as black or white (Beck, 1988). Others, such as Ellis (1994), believe that angry people have irrational beliefs. Young people working on anger management will need the opportunity to discuss how to re-frame a situation, so that they can discuss re-interpretations of an event. This can be done by worksheet / discussion or by using the hassle logs. An example for a worksheet is set out below:

Antecedent

He looked at me

Angry feeling

He wants a fight

Neutral feeling

He's daydreaming

The young person could then be given a number of antecedents to interpret with angry and neutral feelings.

5. Anger spoilers

There are a number of simple activities or 'mini-strategies' that an individual can use to prevent anger building up. Faupel et al (1998) list the following:

- count to 10 (*before taking action*)
- punch a pillow (*this can be cathartic*)
- take exercise
- tell someone your feelings
- turtle technique (*pretend to be protected by a shell; provocation bounces off*)
- walk away
- be disarming or charming.

You will be able to add your own suggestions and generate others from the pupils in your group. They should be used by the individual when a trigger has been spotted but before the fuse is lit. By the end of the group sessions, pupils should know what their own anger spoilers are and which of all the techniques they have learned are of most use to them. This can be reinforced by written feedback. Each pupil should be interviewed individually and the usefulness of the techniques discussed: which ones have they employed; what worked for them; what else might work? A simple outline of the techniques could then be given to them as a reminder, with those that they find most useful ticked or highlighted. An example is attached in Handout 5.

References

Beck A T (1988) Love is Never Enough New York: Harper and Row.

Ellis A (1994) Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy (2nd Ed.) New York: Birch Lane Press.

Faupel A, Herrick E and Sharp P (1998) Anger Management: a Practical Guide
London: David Fulton Publishers.

Feindler E L and Ecton R B (1986) Adolescent Anger Control, Cognitive Behavioural Techniques New York: Pergamon Press.