

ALTERNATIVES TO DESTRUCTIVE ANGER

Destructive anger can take many forms. Anger can be expressed in rage that is out of control, either verbally or physically. We also can express anger through snapping at someone or being unkindly critical. A third form that anger may take is that of cold, icy withdrawal that punishes the other person through shutting them out, shunning them, or refusing to acknowledge their attempts to relate to us. All of these reactions and many more can be destructive to the relationship and to our own feelings of self-esteem. Destructive expressions of anger often generate later feelings of guilt and shame.

This exercise is designed to briefly identify some *constructive* alternatives to destructive anger by giving a brief description of the positive alternative. The goal is for you to consider these alternatives as you seek to replace destructive anger with more constructive behaviors. You will be asked to keep a journal of situations in your daily life that provoked anger and then note how one or more of these constructive alternatives may have been applied to the situations.

Constructive Alternatives

- A. Assertiveness: Speaking forthrightly in a manner that is very respectful of the other person's needs and rights and does not attack anyone so as to make them defensive.
- B. Tune Out/Cool Down: Recognize that the situation has become volatile and nonproductive and suggest withdrawal from the situation to give each party a chance to cool down and collect his/her thoughts and regain personal control.
- C. Relaxation: Learn and implement relaxation skills to reduce stress and tension through the use of words that cue relaxation, deep breathing that releases tension, imagining relaxing scenes, or deep muscle relaxation procedures.
- D. Diversion: When anger is felt to be building, find diversionary activities that stop the build up and focus the mind on more enjoyable experiences.
- E. Physical Exercise: When anger and tension levels rise, physical exercise can be a wonderful way to release tension and expel energy as an alternative to losing control or exploding in rage.
- F. Problem-Solving Skills: Identify or clarify the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, review the pros and cons of each alternative solution, select the best alternative for implementation, evaluate the outcome as to mutual satisfaction, and finally, adjust the solution if necessary to increase mutual satisfaction.

- G. Self-Talk: Take time to talk to yourself in calming, reasoned, and constructive sentences that move you toward anger control and away from hurtful expressions of anger.
- H. "I" Messages: Speak to the target of your anger, describing your feelings and needs rather than attacking, labeling, or describing the other person's behavior, motivations, or goals. Begin your sentences with "I feel ..." or "I need"
- I. Other: Describe your own or your counselor's alternative to rage.

Application to Daily Life

In the columns that follow, describe the date and time, the situation that prompted the angry response, the destructive response, and the alternative constructive response that might have been used. In the final row, instead of writing a full description of the alternative, you may simply enter the alphabetical indicator of the constructive alternative, A through I

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| Entry 1 Day/Date and Time: <hr/> <hr/> | Situation <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | Response <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | Alternative Response <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

EXERCISE I.A

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| Entry 2 Day/Date and Time: <hr/> <hr/> | Situation | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
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| | Alternative Response | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

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EXERCISE I.A

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