

Anger Management Workshop Series

Part III: Physiological Response

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1. Group Check-in (20 minutes)

2. Mind-Body Connection (15 minutes)

- Present the idea that our bodies undergo a reflexive, physiological change, termed the fight or flight response, whenever we perceive a threat or believe danger is near. As a result, we are more likely to react impulsively to situations before we have time to think about the consequences.

A. Fight & Flight Response (sympathetic nervous system)

- Present information on the sympathetic nervous system, and how it is the body's way of preparing us for danger (jaws clench, muscles tighten, heart rate up, blood leaves some of the main organs and goes to the extremities).
- Present the idea that our body (our physiology) hasn't evolved as rapidly as society. We have the same physiology as we did thousands of years ago but our mind and society has developed tremendously (e.g. language).
- Ask participants to think of times when they have responded impulsively because of a perceived threat.

B. An Alternative to Fight/Flight is Mindfulness

- Being mindful as opposed to going with impulses. We can use our mind to decide how we are going to respond to a perceived danger, rather than simply rely on our body.

3. Relationship Between Stress and Anger (10 minutes)

A. Draw Stress Graph

- Illustrate a jagged diagonal line moving from the lower left corner to the upper right corner of a black board.
- Present the idea that stress is cumulative, and doesn't automatically return to baseline.

- Ask participants to think of stressful events that may happen throughout the day, and graph it (wake-up late, miss bus, no coffee!) in order to demonstrate this point. Note that a person's baseline level of stress may be higher than usual due to factors such as illness or major life changes (e.g. marriage, graduation).

B. Stress is cumulative

- The more stressed you are, the less it takes to get you to the overload point. You have a shorter fuse! It will take less to make you angry! The precipitating event may NOT even be something that would normally generate an anger response.
- Thus, it is important to notice if you're feeling especially stressed. Instead of just going about your day, it might be a better option to take some time to de-stress yourself. This is called Stress Inoculation (Meichenbaum, 1985).

BREAK (5 min)

4. Stress Inoculation Training (30 minutes)

A. Define and discuss stress inoculation

- Not anticipating/planning that you're going to get angry. Instead, anticipating that you COULD be more quick to anger, lose your cool, because you're stressed.
- By anticipating what STRESSORS might occur, you can assess your potential level of stress, instead of being surprised, frustrated and caught off guard. The goal is not to stress yourself out by your daily responsibilities, but to be aware of how those responsibilities can contribute to stress, and to plan ways to monitor and lower your stress (e.g. exercise, healthy diet, increase support).

B. We can confuse our stress response with legitimate anger.

- Taking time to recognize when your life is particularly stressed allows you to assess what it is you're really feeling; this helps you to express yourself more authentically.
- If all stressful events evoke an "anger" response, then when you really are angry, you (and others) won't correctly recognize it, or won't respond appropriately.

Note: This method will help reduce the day to day stress but it may not have a profound effect on the stress related to underlying problems that produce stress (e.g. chronic feelings of low self-esteem, chronic feelings of anger related to past

experiences). Those underlying problems require time and patience. It may take months or years before you feel a change.

Discuss

5. De-Stress Technique (10 minutes)

A. Muscle relaxation exercise

- Hand out Progressive Muscle Relaxation and guide participants through the process

B. Handouts:

- Tips for Reducing Stress
- Stress Vaccination

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