

Resolve Anger Workbook

Emotional Maturity Series

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Introduction

Some people condemn anger, some are afraid of it, and some can even be "addicted" to anger as a source of strength and motivation. Anger can sometimes be a healthy emotion, but few of us, when we were children, had enough chances to learn how to express it in constructive ways. As a result, most people feel that anger brings them more problems than benefits.

Through this program, you can learn about healthy aspects of your anger, as well as how to recognize the unhealthy ones, which often stem from childhood experiences. Some of the exercises will guide you to explore unconscious aspects of your anger. Others are focused on helping you change your anger, explore different perspectives and create a constructive motivation.

To achieve an optimal success with this program, it is crucial to repeat the exercises regularly. Our subconscious minds contain emotional and mental habits that were enforced for decades, and are often based on early childhood experiences and interpretations. Such deeply ingrained habits are not likely to change if you only exercise occasionally. Therefore I recommend that you apply this program regularly for a long period of time.

Purpose and Mechanisms of Anger

The role of anger

Anger is one of the most frowned upon emotions. It is commonly considered a destructive emotion and an indication of character faults. Few people feel safe to express anger, and many were raised to feel guilty about feeling anger. In Christian religion, anger is one of the mortal sins. Most other religions and societies put anger close to the top of unacceptable behaviors, too.

However, anger is an emotion equally natural and valuable as any other. Just as other emotions, anger has its purpose. Problems arise when, through long-term conditioning, we learn to deny our anger or cope with it in less than healthy ways. Few people are taught how to express anger in constructive ways.

Healthy anger arises to warn us that something important is threatened – our personal space, sense of justice, dignity, important people, sometimes also our more abstract values. Anger gives us strength, energy and motivation to actively defend those values. By itself, such anger is normally constructive, but **troubles occur when its intensity is exaggerated, or its expression is inappropriate**. Also, we can easily feel anger even in situations in which it is not a realistic and appropriate response.

How we accumulate anger

You might have noticed that many people get angrier with age – perhaps, as you get older, you have become grumpier and less tolerant yourself? Perhaps you feel that things were better and people were nicer when you were younger?

Every day, in every moment, our brains scan our current environment and search through all of our memories to compare them with what is going on around us. This is an important survival mechanism that helps us react to things swiftly and efficiently. Without it, we would be as little babies all the time. However, as with most things in life, there are disadvantages. As a result of this process, **most of our emotions come from our pasts, not our present.**

What happens if you are married, or a parent with a child, and most of your emotions are a reaction to your past? You can see the results everywhere around you, in broken marriages, parents estranged from their children, petty conflicts, crime and even wars.

An aspect of this survival trait is that **we have evolved to notice and search for signs of danger** in our present – anything that feels threatening to our physical bodies, emotions, beliefs and social status – and mostly ignore non-threatening information. Therefore, we are more likely to (unconsciously) scan our brains for unpleasant and threatening memories, rather than pleasant or neutral ones.

The older you get, the more unpleasant memories you carry with you. Worse, in your everyday life, you might repeatedly react not just to one or a few such memories, but to an endless, piled up cluster of them. Most married couples or long-term partners eventually start to react to parts of each other's behavior in ways that reflect not only all the unpleasant memories from their lives together, but also all of their (not nice) expectations from the future.

It is also good to mention that we even “scan” our future for potential threats, not just our past. Predicting problems, knowing when to expect danger, preparing for it and finding ways to deal with it was vitally important in dangerous nature in which we evolved as a species.

You might remember your childhood with nostalgic feelings, believing it was much happier than it perhaps was, and that people were nicer, less corrupted and more honest. In reality, as a child or a young person, you simply had fewer unpleasant experiences to remember and so were less likely to notice and be aware of unhealthy behavior around you. You were also less likely to comprehend all the consequences of toxic behavior. **As we get older, our understanding of complex causes and consequences gets better – and so we are more likely to notice potential threats and react to them.** This might eventually lead to a judgmental and irritable attitude.

With such aspects of our nature, people sometimes want to feel different and prove themselves better than others. They might try to suppress such instincts and even lie to themselves that they have risen above them. This can only make you more likely to act with hypocrisy and lack of integrity. The fact is, **you cannot change your biological heritage and neurological structure.** Human brain developed in this way because of vitally important needs. It won't change just because we think it should.

It is similar with **prejudices towards groups of people**, such as different races, different sexual orientations, different religions, the opposite sex ... Filing labeling people into categories is one of our brains' strategies of predicting what follows and preparing for possibilities. You cannot change this principle and ignoring it won't help – **the solution is in**

ongoing awareness, responsibility and carefully correcting your thoughts (that is, reminding yourself of many other possible perspectives).

How we avoid our emotions

If our feelings were mostly realistic and appropriate to the situations we experience, our relationships would be much easier, our lives happier, and the world in general far more peaceful and pleasant place to live. We all, however, struggle daily with emotions that we have learned to suppress and dismiss at a very early age. We were probably never taught how to deal with them in a mature manner.

An additional problem is that these **repressed emotions are usually associated with very strong unpleasant beliefs about ourselves** (I'm not good enough; I do not deserve love; Something is wrong with me ...) **or about the world and other people** (The world is a dangerous place; Life does not make sense; People hurt me ...).

Such beliefs are so uncomfortable that, even as adults, we struggle against them in any way possible. Often we fight them so well that they do not have time to even reach our consciousness. Struggle, however, does not bring a solution - it creates further problems.

Defense mechanisms are strategies we use automatically and often unconsciously to avoid such unpleasant feelings and beliefs. Some very common defense mechanisms focus on criticizing or humiliating others, as a way to feel better about ourselves. This shows as arrogance, power struggle, false superiority, ruthlessness, intolerance, and very often anger.

One of the most basic ways to avoid unpleasant emotions, and one of those most difficult to give up, is **making other people responsible for our feelings by finding faults in their behavior.** Even if we have been objectively wronged, if we find ourselves compulsively thinking about how horrible someone's behavior was, how troublesome their personality, we can be certain that in this way we try to avoid some kind of fear, shame or inferiority feeling. Such defensive thoughts are usually accompanied by bodily discomfort, while we imagine what we wish we could have said to the other person. This is an **immature way to try to feel better about ourselves.**

It is especially easy to get caught in this process if we notice that the other person blames us in a similar way. Then we can get ourselves caught in a more or less subtle game of ping-pong called 'Who started it first', which results in both parties increasingly feeling attacked - and attacking in turn.

Anger as a defense mechanism

As anger often appears as a defense mechanism, it is a secondary emotion more often than primary. This means that it emerges as a reaction to certain emotions that precede it.

Healthy anger “works together” with the primary emotion (e.g., fear, hurt) and helps us to take the necessary action. Immature anger, on the other hand, is usually an attempt to avoid or hide these primary emotions not just from others, but even more from ourselves. **Emotions most commonly concealed and suppressed beneath anger are fear, humiliation, shame or guilt.** These emotions are among the most unpleasant of all and therefore we feel the strongest need to avoid them.

Depending on which emotions were safe to express in our early families, and which were punished or ignored, so will we behave throughout our adult lives. Then those emotions with which we feel safe can serve to conceal those we feel as dangerous, vulnerable or shameful. Thus, in some cases, **anger can be a safe way to compensate for expressing another emotion that was not allowed in our families.**

A common example is traditional, patriarchal upbringing of boys. According to its “ideology”, sadness or fear are weak and shameful, while anger is allowed because it is considered more powerful and energetic, “manly” emotion. People who grew up conditioned like this can use anger to conceal sadness, insecurity or other more vulnerable feelings. **Sometimes even affection and love can be expressed through some kind of aggressive behavior** such as sarcasm, criticism or blame. This can be changed through committed work on self-improvement.

What if you hide anger?

If your family used to punish expressions of anger (whether through physical punishment, criticism, withdrawal or victim games), you will probably not feel safe to show anger, or even to feel it. You might feel sadness, guilt, shame or fear as soon as there is a chance to feel anger. You can believe in idealistic attitudes such as "turning the other cheek", "mature people do not argue", or that love means to give in and sacrifice.

Such attitudes are not entirely without foundation; sometimes it is better not to express anger, instead of expressing it in some of the common immature ways we learn from our environment. **Thoughtless angry communication usually enhances conflicts rather than clarifying them.** However, if you learn to express anger in healthy and appropriate ways, you can stand up for yourself without attacking others.

That doesn't mean everybody will react in a mature way to you, though. **Quite a few people feel threatened even if you express anger carefully and respectfully.** They might start defending and justifying themselves, attacking you or playing victim games. You will need to learn to face such reactions and cope with them. It will still feel much better than prolonged inner conflict, passive aggression, self-aggression or psychosomatic symptoms, which are all common consequences of avoiding your own anger.

I often help people with low self-esteem. Some of them grew up in such difficult families that their overwhelming fears, guilt and exaggerated sense of responsibility leave no space for any stage of anger. Some may say that they never even remember experiencing anger. Still, after we spend some time resolving their fears and building confidence, anger will surface sooner or later. It was there all the time, as a natural response to abuse and injustice, but it was either denied or turned inward.

Once experienced, anger can cause confusion and frustration, or a person can feel righteous, energized and motivated. There is some danger that the pendulum might swing to the other extreme – unprovoked brash and defensive behavior. This stage usually does not last long, though, and with some work, a satisfying balance can be achieved.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a nice, ancient idea – and most of the time it doesn't work. People normally decide to forgive when they want to feel righteous or get rid of their own emotions. Since emotions have a purpose, a struggle between emotions and rational mind is usually futile. When people try to forgive, they normally approach forgiveness rationally, treating it as a decision to think differently about another person. This **usually means avoiding unpleasant emotions rather than exploring them.**

Forgiveness doesn't work because anger has important benefits. First, it helps us feel better about ourselves. Events that cause long-term anger usually also imply humiliation, helplessness, shame and similar painful emotions. Anger hides those emotions and makes us try to humiliate the other person to "even the score". **Focusing on resolving humiliation, shame and similar feelings usually brings fast relief from anger.** Once we learn to feel at peace with ourselves in such a context, there is no more need for anger and forgiveness follows spontaneously and naturally.

Another benefit of anger is to remind us of imbalance and injustice. Even some social animals have an instinct for balance in relationships. **If balance is disturbed, it is our deep need to restore it.** This is often not easy to achieve without the other person's cooperation. In such a case, what we can do is to make our own lives as happy as possible, to treat ourselves as well as possible, as a way to "make up" for the pain in the past. If you combine this approach with re-building your self-esteem, this should resolve most if not all of the anger. If some anger remains, it will probably be mild and won't interfere with your general happiness.

Finally, forgiveness can be achieved when we fully understand others' behavior. Some people act in hurtful ways because of their own fears, lack of self-awareness or self-esteem, toxic beliefs or toxic communication habits. If we are able to fully comprehend the background of their behavior, we might understand that their behavior wasn't motivated by conscious malice and we might find it easier to let go.

Unhelpful Ways of Expressing Anger

Passive Aggression

Whether we dare not express anger, or we don't know how, or we fail to recognize it because it is concealed by "safer" emotions, our anger still needs an outlet. It can be found through various circuitous strategies of passive aggression. Some people may be (partially) aware that this is not a healthy solution, but might **convince themselves that it is their only choice**. Others may be completely unaware of the strategies they use and may perceive their passive-aggressive behavior as natural, acceptable, and perhaps the only possible way to react in certain circumstances. Such people may be shocked to recognize the error in their behavior, and they might be intimidated by the idea of changing it.

Strategies of passive aggression by definition are more or less covert. They can range from silence, criticism, rejection of love, denial of support, assistance or participation in joint activities, to subtle strategies such as withholding information, being late (not to be confused with simple lack of organization skills), illness, depression, and even various forms of self-harm (e.g, rejecting food, self-sabotage). Such subtle strategies might be fully unconscious. They are more likely to occur if people fear revealing their anger.

Passive aggression is an attempt to simultaneously express anger (because the need to express it is strong) **and to conceal it** (for fear of consequences or punishment). Usually, these are behaviors designed to slightly hurt another person, but in safe ways, not obvious enough to provoke confrontation.

Understandably, the receiver of passive aggression can be confused or anxious, wondering if there is any reason for such behavior, and if so, what is it? Many people, especially children, tend to imagine the worst possible scenarios. The reaction is usually fear, guilt and hurt, followed by anger – and that anger might result in more (passive or active) aggression in return.

Delayed and misdirected anger

A common issue is expressing anger only after prolonged accumulation of frustration and discomfort. This is another consequence of being taught not to express ourselves. When they first experience someone's uncomfortable behavior, people often avoid confrontation thinking: "It's not so bad, I can tolerate this for a while, no need to argue." If you have a small problem with somebody who you meet rarely and for short times, perhaps this is a smart reaction. However, quite a few people apply this attitude at the beginning of all of their relationships, hoping that somehow such problems will spontaneously disappear.

You might express anger only when you can no longer endure frustration. By then, your anger is probably exaggerated in relation to the problem, and so will be your reaction. You might feel a need to hurt other people in order to punish them for all the irritation you have previously suppressed, or to draw attention to your own prolonged hurt.

The longer you suppress an emotion, the stronger it becomes. It will seek to penetrate through your defenses. It searches for ways to perform its function and to convey its message. Thus it can become excessive and exaggerated. When it finally breaks out, **you might not be able to control yourself anymore and might burst into heavy criticism, generalizations and insults.** Of course, this will only deepen the conflict instead of solving the problem.

Next consequence of not expressing anger is the mechanism of **misdirected aggression**. It means **venting our anger at people with whom we feel safe**, instead at the person who originally provoked it. The most common victims are children or timid, insecure people, those in a subordinate position or people who are naturally gentle and quiet. This is one of the main causes of bullying, domestic violence and violence in business environments.

We may be unaware or partially aware when we do this. If we vent on children when the real cause of our anger is something else, we might recognize that a child's fault is not great, but we will justify our behavior by reminding ourselves of their previous errors, or of our right to be respected and have boundaries. However, the intensity of our reaction will not match the child's misbehavior, and we might find it difficult to control anger. The relief in being able to vent anger in a safe (for us) way, might be just too great.

The smaller the children are, the more difficult it will be for them to understand that our response is exaggerated and is not actually caused by their behavior. Therefore, **our angry venting might cause shock and trauma to such children who see our behavior as justified.** This can result in fears, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and consequential defense mechanisms - probably similar to those the children learned from us.

Active aggression

Some people become "addicted" to anger because it provides a sense of strength and energy. This is also why we so often spontaneously use anger as a defense against painful and vulnerable emotions. In particular, people who were abused as children can come to conclusion that anger and even aggression give power and keep people at a safe distance (the way it worked for their abusers). They might feel the **need to control other people through anger**.

Children who are exposed to aggressive behavior, may perceive the aggressor as powerful, confident and out of reach - just what they long to be in such moments. Children can also get the impression that other people respect such a person. Whether the respect is real or faked, it will be difficult for children to discern, but they will note that many people are more careful and less persistent around an aggressive person. In addition, if other different models of behavior are lacking, such children can accept angry and aggressive reactions as something natural and expected. They might stop – or never even learn – to question such behavior. Being exposed to different models of behavior is often a crucial element in the development of such children.

Some **cultures or family traditions** appear to operate from a belief that being kind and polite means weakness, while anger and even rudeness show strength. This attitude reflects how deep is a society or a family still immersed in patriarchy, which values power and physical strength over a complex personality or relationships. Rudeness in such cases becomes a way to assert one's social status.

Constructive Expressions of Anger

Becoming aware

Some people might have grown up in families in which expressing anger was so severely punished or shamed, that they learned to fear or be ashamed of even feeling anger. Perhaps they hid their anger so well from themselves that they forgot how to recognize it, or how to notice it in time for an appropriate reaction. Others might have difficulties with recognizing when is their anger overly intense, or when do they express it in immature ways, or when do they conceal their anger with other emotions.

Some **manifestations of anger** are:

- **Physical:** depending of the person, some of the signals can be: a feeling of heat, pressure in your chest, tension, shivering, blushed or paled skin, increased physical energy, and urge for action and similar.
- **Mental:** you might think accusing and critical thoughts, emphasize others' wrongful behavior, exaggerate their "bad" intentions, create dialogues in your head in which you criticize others or are sarcastic to them.
- **Emotional:** discomfort, hurt, frustration, but perhaps also a certain pleasure in increased feeling of power and energy, in feeling just and righteous. Your ability to empathize, tolerate and understand other people probably decreases. You might feel like losing control. Anger might alternate with fear, confusion, shame or guilt.
- **Behavioral:** abrupt movements, for example slamming doors; swearing, raised voice, inconsiderate behavior and similar.

Increased emotional awareness is useful to everybody. You can recognize an emotion while it is still mild and therefore prevent it from getting out of control. You can learn to **notice different layers of emotions** that intertwine together, and become able to understand your inner processes much better (including when you delude yourself). It will become easier to **distinguish between mature and immature emotions**, which can spare you many unpleasant consequences of immature behavior. You can learn to understand other people much better. Finally, increased emotional awareness brings richer and fulfilling inner life and ability to enjoy small details in life.

You can practice to take a moment every now and then to listen what is going on in your body and emotions, and to translate it into words. You can take some time daily for quiet contemplation and building a relationship with yourself. You can even mentally increase the intensity of your emotions, so that you can explore them better. In time, your ability to recognize what is going on within you will develop and become more and more acute.

Recognizing immature patterns

Once we decide to express ourselves honestly and clearly, we face another risk. Focused on our own emotions, **we might forget to see other people as human beings** who feel fear and lack information, who try to do their best based on their previous experiences. Led by our own fears, past hurts and defensive behaviors we learned, we are likely to express our anger disrespectfully. Such communication easily turns into a power struggle, which usually ends with worse feelings than it started.

However, **even if you express yourself respectfully, do not necessarily expect an appropriate reaction.** Most people have experienced too much criticism, humiliation and aggression while growing up, to be able to ignore those mental filters. Many will react in immature, defensive ways – be prepared for this.

We learn such immature patterns since the youngest age. They are handed down through generations. They get advanced, perfected and polished with each subsequent generation. We grow up watching people playing games and trying to use hurtful shortcuts in communication. Some adult people cannot handle children's spontaneity and lack of social experience. They might silence their children in different ways, some of them rough and manipulative. They might make the child feel guilty even when other people should take responsibility for their own emotions. Some parents might use aggressive humiliation to control their child, who cannot defend against it. Many people use continuous criticism.

Sometimes parents teach their children not to defend against aggression and injustice, giving them well-meaning advice to ignore such behavior and pretend they are not hurt. Such parents are often worried that their children would be hurt even worse if they confront the attacker. School staff might blame and punish both children, regardless of who was the attacker. This might save time in a frenzied school environment in which the truth often cannot be determined – but it does not make sense in most other social situations. Self-defense is considered rightful in adult life – why not for children? On the other hand, schools in their current form are not a natural environment for children anyway. But I digress.

Parents usually want their children to avoid trouble, and sometimes ignoring it appears the best solution. Yet, how can children learn to resolve conflict in assertive and constructive ways, if they never practice, if they never learn from their mistakes? Not to mention that **lack of reaction might encourage many bullies to continue with their aggressive behavior.** Childhood is the ideal time to make mistakes and learn from them.

As a result of all these influences, few people had enough chance to learn how to express themselves clearly, respectfully and constructively when they feel irritation or anger. For similar reasons, most people also find it difficult to consider other people's objections and criticism. When we hear an objection, our unconscious minds are instantly reminded of criticism and complaints that were expressed in humiliating ways. **We fear more humiliation, and trying to avoid it, we might start fighting against other people even if their complaints were justified.**

Timely reaction

It is important to **express disagreement or discontent while it is still mild** and while we can still communicate it in a friendly and respectful way – instead of waiting until we accumulate so much frustration that we feel like exploding. Whatever we feel, we can express in many different ways. We need to practice new ways instead of repeating the old ones.

When you notice subtle, sometimes unrealistic, frustration and irritation in a relationship, do not wait for it to build up. Admit it firstly to yourself, explore it and hopefully you can express it to the other person too, even if it feels stupid and ridiculous. Sometimes seemingly irrelevant details can trigger disproportional emotions, if they remind us unconsciously of something else.

By being honest, you can avoid what otherwise would inevitably follow: your anger would build up, other people would consciously or subconsciously notice your criticism and they would feel first confused, perhaps insecure, and then defensive and perhaps angry in return. A vicious circle of irritation and blame is then started, which can result in the relationship ending or gradually cooling down, without a really good reason. On the other hand, **each of these situations is an opportunity to improve your relationship**, if you can communicate without blame. Perhaps you can even learn to smile at your own internal patterns.

In the beginning, you might be afraid or ashamed to voice your objections; they might feel petty or not relevant enough to waste time on them. Sometimes this can be a defense mechanism – we can convince ourselves that it is “not so bad” to avoid the risk of confrontation. Sometimes it can really be a petty detail – but which reminds us of something much more important. In both cases, a way to introduce the topic can be something like: “This is perhaps irrelevant and ridiculous, but it still bothers me for some reason, can we talk about it?”

Be aware that there is also a **possibility that your emotions are a reaction to the past**, rather than the present. Still, it's good to explore it together with the other person, so that he or she can hopefully understand you better.

Reactions of other people will reveal their characters and emotional maturity. Well-meaning, emotionally healthy people will take what you say in consideration even if they disagree. They will communicate peacefully and respectfully. Immature, self-centered people will show no compassion or willingness to consider your words; they will dismiss them as stupid or angrily defend themselves, often criticizing you in return. This can be an indication of how much sense does it make to invest time in that relationship.

With time, after resolving several such issues in a constructive way, you will start to feel much more confident about your communication. **If other people are healthy, they might feel that you trust them if you reveal your little weaknesses in a friendly way.** Then your relationship can become even better than before.

Choosing a quality reaction

Always take a pause before saying anything when you are upset. **Focus within and check what do you truly feel and what do you want the other person to understand.** This might help you to find right words and communicate from your true self and adult feelings, instead of using those immature words that imitate what you heard from others rather than reflecting your true feelings.

Instead of “I don't like this”, “I feel hurt” and similar, average communication is based on accusations such as “How can you do such a thing”, “You only think of yourself”, “You are such a (...)”- words most of us have already heard enough through our lives. Do they not sound familiar and worn out? These and similar (and worse) statements are handed over through generations.

These same people will later regret such words, or they will be able to peacefully, rather objectively describe the problem to a third person. When my clients talk to me about their conflicts with other people, their words and descriptions are often quite moderate, calm and do not insult the people they are angry with (even if they might exaggerate sometimes and avoid seeing the other point of view). If I suggest them to explain their feelings and behavior to the third person in the same calm and factual way they did to me, they are sometimes surprised that something so simple and obvious might appear so new and unusual. Mature communication is uncommon, that's the truth – but it does not have to be difficult.

The main cause of conflicts and their escalating, is disrespectful, humiliating communication. This is what hurts us, pushes us into deep childish insecurities and triggers strong defense mechanisms. Very **few people would react in an unpleasant way to honest, respectful communication** which is not meant to control or manipulate. Most people will want to continue deserving such respect and will avoid hurting such a relationship – it is not easy to find. Of course, there are deeply damaged people who are focused on power struggle and dominating others no matter how you might behave – but there are fewer of them than it might seem.

We can express criticism, anger and hurt related to *behavior* of certain people, while still preserving the attitude of respect towards the *human core* of those people. It is important to take time to identify with the perspective of others, to **create the attitude of respect and compassion**, and then we can choose words that represent our feelings. **Keep your body relaxed, and your voice calm and friendly**, as more than 70% of the meaning of communication is transferred non-verbally. Such communication can not only help you to resolve a problem, but can also create a foundation for more trust and better relationships in future.

Part 2: EXERCISES

Introduction

Our deepest (unconscious) limiting beliefs (such as: I'm not OK; I don't deserve; I'm not lovable; I cannot trust people) can be opposite of what we consciously believe. Still, they influence our behavior, especially in stressful situations. Most people can recognize such beliefs if they exercise feeling their subtle emotions, as well as observing patterns in their behavior and reactions.

The earlier a belief is created, the stronger its influence. Early beliefs become like filters for subsequent experiences and influence how we interpret them. Thus a stable belief structure is slowly created, which, as we grow up, becomes so normal that we rarely if ever question it.

Such beliefs can be adopted following our parents' and caretakers' examples, or during unpleasant experiences that a small child cannot understand. Children perceive the world as "black and white", i.e., they are likely to create extreme conclusions. As they also perceive themselves as the cause of other people's behavior, such extreme conclusions are usually related to their own selves.

Toxic emotions and beliefs are usually triggered when some external details remind us of painful experiences in the past. Then we can react with irrational, exaggerated emotions and behavior. We can have unrealistic expectations of other people and **try to get from them what we couldn't get from our parents**. It's like parts of us are stuck in the past and are not likely to change under influence of rational insight or external experiences. People can read many insightful books, create relationships with people who love and support them, but in most cases, it doesn't help enough.

These exercises are designed with the intention to reach parts of your unconscious mind and help those parts reframe specific past experiences and change their beliefs.

The following exercises, being introspective, will likely appeal to introverts. If you are an extrovert, you might feel restless without enough external stimuli. Still, I suggest that you persist. It's worthwhile for an extrovert to develop some "introverted" skills, same as the other way around. This can help your life become more fulfilling and successful.

The exercises in this workbook are primarily based on the method [Soulwork Systemic Coaching](#), which incorporates elements of psychodrama, working with inner child, modeling, visualization and working with metaphors. I only use simpler elements of Soulwork Systemic Coaching in this workbook, as more complex issues are very individual and require expert guidance. Please contact info@mentor-coach.eu if you want individual sessions.

DISCLAIMER: As the exercises in this book can bring strong emotions to consciousness, they are only appropriate for mentally healthy and stable people. Avoid trying to work with strong emotions if you do not feel emotionally stable, especially if you have been diagnosed with a mental disorder, or if you have recently used psychoactive substances (including alcohol) or medications.

If you are going through a life crisis (such as loss of a family member, loss of a job, severe disease...) you might not be resourceful enough to explore your hidden emotions. Focus on resolving your immediate practical issues first.

If at any moment you feel that your emotions might overwhelm you and you may not be able to cope with them, immediately stop the exercise. Remind yourself that these emotions come from past memories. If you feel unstable, please consult a helping professional.

These exercises might increase your emotional sensitivity for days or even weeks. Sometimes painful emotions come to the surface. Remember that those emotions are remains of your past and treat them gently, like you would treat frightened or sad children.

These exercises are not substitutes for medical or psychiatric treatment. Do the exercises only if you are willing to take full responsibility for any consequences.

Do not try to guide other people through these exercises, unless you are professionally qualified to deal with psychological issues.

Instructions and explanations for the exercises

The exercises in this book explore emotional information you might be only partially aware of. Some of these exercises use visual and symbolic approaches, including sensory synesthesia (expression of specific sensory content through a different sensory channel, for example, describing feelings as colors, shapes, etc). Therefore, it is important to avoid rational conclusions and analysis. **Let the information come from your body**, through feelings and images, rather than through brain chatter.

Do not strive for precision and perfection, but allow spontaneous images or feelings, even if they are sometimes subtle and vague.

During the exercises, we will often work with isolated parts of your subconscious mind - sometimes called sub-personalities. A sub-personality can be a dissociated part of consciousness bonded to a very unpleasant emotion or belief. They are often created and repressed in childhood. They might be unconscious most of the time, surfacing only in specific circumstances which trigger certain memories.

When I use the term "part of you" in the following exercises, I mean a complex emotional experience which includes emotions, beliefs, behavioral urges and ideas about yourself and the world around you. This is another way to describe sub-personalities.

In between instructions, I left single line spacing to indicate that relatively short time is usually needed to follow the instruction, and a double line spacing when most people usually need more time. Follow your own needs, however.

I also recommend that you practice these exercises after your tasks for the day are finished, so that you are not distracted or under time pressure.

Exploring anger

Growing up in an environment in which expressing emotions was discouraged or punished, or through traumatic experiences, many people learn to suppress or avoid being fully conscious of their emotions. If we suppress our emotions for a significant period of time, we can develop only superficial level of emotional awareness and our inner world will be impoverished. We won't have a chance to develop skills of interpreting our emotions and using them in constructive ways.

This exercise explores the elements of anger that are often insufficiently conscious: thoughts and beliefs related to anger and what is hidden beyond anger. Use this exercise to explore and familiarize yourself with your emotional processes and to develop a closer relationship with your feelings. Use this exercise often if you have trouble recognizing and accepting your emotions.

This exercise can also help you stop identifying with your anger and perceive it from a more objective point of view. Use this exercise in the moments when your anger is strong enough that you can focus on it easily, but not overwhelmingly powerful.

Close your eyes and sit in a comfortable position.

Breathe deeply a few times.

Imagine that the tension you have accumulated during the day slowly leaks out of you, into the surface under you.

Feel your mind and body relax.

Focus on your emotions and notice how they feel in your body.

Notice how unpleasant emotions are usually related to unpleasant physical sensations.

Pay attention to physical sensations related to anger. Perhaps it would feel like pain, heat, pressure, constriction... or something else.

Allow yourself to fully feel these sensations.

Where in your body is the center of anger?

How much space in your body does it take?

If anger had a color, what color would it be?

If anger had a voice, what would it sound like?
Would it be a female voice, a male voice, a child's voice...?

What would it want to say?

Imagine that your anger has a face.
How would it look like?

Would it remind you of anyone? Perhaps your own face, but younger, or it would be the face of one of your parents, grandparents, siblings... perhaps your anger patterns were modeled after that person?

However, remember that this is still a part of you.
Ask this part of you: What do you really want? What is most important to you? How are you trying to help me?

What is the anger trying to prevent, or protect you from?

If you tried to forgive the person you are angry at, which parts of you would object?

Acknowledge the objection to forgiveness and explore it.

Imagine that you can "look" or feel *under* the anger. What emotions would be hidden there?
Perhaps humiliation, guilt, abandonment...

Focus on the emotion under the anger. How long do you already carry it in your body?

This is probably a part of you that is younger than anger.

Ask this part: How can I help you? What would make you feel safe?

Perhaps it needs your love and support, and perhaps it wants you to change something in the way you live.

Thank this part of you for its message. Imagine to surround it with love and compassion.

Slowly focus back on the space around you and external world with your daily activities.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Exploring the other person's perspective

In moments of anger, most people feel a need to exaggerate the mistakes of the other person, while mentally diminishing their own. That helps us justify our reactions and avoid fear and guilt. Exploring the other person's reality can often help us to react in appropriate ways, with tolerance and compassion.

Close your eyes and sit comfortably.

Breathe deeply a few times.

Imagine the external world, your chores and concerns, slowly fading away. Imagine to leave them far away behind you.

Imagine warm water warming up your feet and slowly rising over your body.

Enjoy the feeling of warm water around your calves... thighs ... pelvis ... back (from lower to upper back) ... belly ... chest ... imagine the water relaxing your hands... arms... neck ...

Relax the muscles around your eyes and jaw.

Imagine to see the person you are angry with in front of you.

Observe mentally their behavior and facial expression.

Now imagine that this face and attitude is yours.

Imagine to be in the other person's body.

Imagine to feel their feelings,
see yourself through their eyes.

How does it feel?

What do you see through their eyes?

Imagine to behave like the other person. What do you feel motivates them to behave like they do?

Explore this feeling. Perhaps it would be fear, hurt, or humiliation. Or something else?

What could have caused such a feeling?

What age do you feel these emotions might belong to?

What is that person afraid of, in this situation?

Imagine to look at yourself through the eyes of that person. Imagine to see your posture, your expressions and gestures. Imagine to hear your words, your tonality. How do you feel they interpret your behavior?

What intentions do they read into your behavior?

Perhaps you can guess, who do you remind them of?

When you imagine to be that person, what do you feel is important to them in this situation?

What do they want from you?

What words from you might be acceptable (while still honest)?

Now imagine to see the two of you as if you were a neutral observer.

What do you see from this point of view?

From an observer's perspective, how old do you appear to act?

How old does the other person appear to act?

As a neutral observer, what advice would you give to yourself?

Come back into your body.
Feel again your body and your identity.

How do you perceive the other person now?

In context of your experience in this exercise, what kind of communication appears mature and constructive?

Slowly reorient into the present moment.

Feel the space around you.

Take a deep breath in and out.

When you feel ready, open your eyes.

Benefits of anger and how to achieve them differently

As any other emotion, anger has its function and benefits. Problems often arise if fear, shame or other adopted patterns make us react with avoidance, aggression or immature communication. This exercise can help you to recognize what do you want and how to express it in a healthy way.

Close your eyes and sit in a comfortable position.

Breathe deeply a few times.

Relax part by part of your body, simply by focusing your attention to them (or you can imagine immersing your body in comfortably warm water):

Feet ... shins ... thighs ... pelvis ... back (from lower to upper back) ... belly ... chest ... pay special attention to your shoulders ... relax your arms ... hands ... neck ... facial muscles, especially eyes and jaw (about 3-4 seconds between each, or according to how you feel)

Remember a situation or behavior that triggers your anger.

Focus on your anger and feel it in your body.

Feel the center of the anger in your body.

Gently ask your anger: what is it trying to tell you?

What is it trying to tell to other people?

In this anger, what behavior do you expect from other people?

What kind of thoughts does the anger stimulate?

In this anger, how do you feel and think about yourself?

How do you think and feel about the other person? Notice if you blame the other person, exaggerate their mistakes, ascribe certain intentions to them...

What words and behavior does the anger stimulate in you?

What do you hope to achieve? What reaction do you hope for?

From whom did you learn such words and behavior? Who does it remind you of?

What is the angry part of you afraid of?

What does this part of you most want?

What kind of relationship does it want with the other person?

Consider, how differently could you perceive this situation?

How could you interpret this situation in the most positive way?

What could be the most peaceful, friendliest way to express your emotions?

Thank the angry part of you for its message. Tell it that you will take care of it.

Slowly reorient to the space around you.

Listen to the sounds around you.

Remember how do you want to spend the rest of this day. What could you do so that the rest of this day would be pleasant and productive?

When you feel ready, open your eyes.

Exploring the causes of anger

The triggers of anger are often tiny details that remind us of unresolved situations from our pasts. In such moments, we might “forget” who is actually in front of us, and feel as if the circumstances from childhood were happening again. This usually results in immature and inappropriate behavior.

Such childish memories come from an age when we saw the world in “black and white”. When we emotionally regress to such memories, our thinking can become rigid and we can temporarily forget about tolerance and compassion. These emotional states are also related to very unpleasant ideas and feelings about ourselves: usually shame, guilt and inadequacy. This makes us even more prone to rushed, unthoughtful defensive reactions.

The purpose of this exercise is recognizing and calming down immature reactions. It can be particularly helpful when you are aware that your anger is inappropriate or overly intense. However, it can also help you **recognize immature feelings even in the situations in which your anger is partly or mostly appropriate.**

Close your eyes and sit comfortably.

Pay attention to the space around you.

Notice the temperature of the air around you. Notice if there is circulation of air.

Notice the feeling of your body on the surface on which you are sitting.

Be aware of sounds and smells around you.

Take a few deep breaths.

Focus on your anger.

Remember the circumstances that caused your anger. Imagine to observe them as if in a slow motion movie.

Determine the moment in which the anger appeared.

Very slowly, go through your memories of the moment before your anger appeared.

What was the first small trigger of anger? Perhaps a specific word, gesture, expression or tonality from the other person?

What were the details that further enhanced your anger?

Focus on the detail that triggers most anger: a word, an expression, a tonality...

What message do you feel the other person was giving to you by such behavior?
Perhaps contempt, manipulation, ruthlessness or something else?

Focus on anger again.

Be aware of other emotions that might be present under the anger: perhaps fear, humiliation, helplessness...

Regardless of your physical age, what age do these emotions seem to belong to?

Are they appropriate for a mature adult age, or do they feel like emotions of a teenager, a primary school child, a toddler, a baby...

Ask the angry part of you, how old does it think you are? Perhaps it won't be aware that you are an adult.

Imagine yourself in this younger age, feeling the same kind of emotions.

In that age, what was causing anger? Which person, or what behavior?

How is that past anger related to the present circumstances? What details of the situation or the other person's behavior are similar?

Say to yourself: This anger comes from my past. I am an adult and much more resourceful now.

Mentally, take a look at the person who triggered your anger.

Say to them in your mind: "You are not the true cause of my anger."

Would you see them differently now?

Perhaps with less emotional intensity; perhaps you can interpret their behavior and intentions in a different way.

Give thanks to your anger. Surround that part of you with compassion and encouragement.

Slowly focus back on the present moment.

Feel the air around you.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Preparing for future

Many times we can find ourselves reacting in inappropriate ways out of habit, even if we didn't want to. **To change your automated habits, you need to exercise new behaviors**, and to do this more easily, it's useful to prepare for such situations up front.

Just like athletes or performers often prepare themselves for a contest or a show by visualizing a perfect performance, so can you prepare yourself for new kinds of behavior. The more often you do this exercise, the more easy it will be to do the same in real challenging situations.

This exercise is easier if you have already done the previous exercises and have determined the key hidden emotions, beliefs and child parts of you related to anger.

Sometimes I find it helpful if I release my anger by going to another room (if I can be alone there) and saying at loud whatever comes to my mind. When I hear it said aloud, my anger is released while in the same time I become much more aware of how inappropriate my automated words might sound. You might want to do this before the exercise, so that pent-up anger wouldn't get in your way or cause stress in your body. You need to find a balance between releasing emotional energy in harmless ways, and calming yourself down when this is necessary.

Sit comfortably and close your eyes.

Breathe deeply a few times.

Imagine to lay on a sunny beach. Sun warms up your body from above, while comfortably warm sand is below you.

Feel your body relax.

Feel the smell of sea and listen to the sound of crickets in the distance.

Listen to the sounds of waves for a while.

Imagine a situation in which you are likely to get inappropriately angry.

Notice the details that make you angry.

Notice how old do you emotionally feel in that anger.

Recognize the underlying painful emotions and beliefs.

Imagine to take a deep breath and say to yourself mentally: "I'm good enough."

How would it feel? Would it change your attitude towards the other person?

Remember a person you know who deals peacefully and resourcefully with such situations.

Imagine to put on that person's perspective.

Imagine to behave like they behave.

How does this feel? What is the emotional background of such behavior?

How does that person feel about themselves in such moments?

Imagine to have such feelings in the situation that angers you.

What would be the difference?

How could you talk to the person who angers you, instead of your usual reaction?

Make sure that you communicate as an adult and avoid trying to provoke a specific reaction.

What could be the worst possible (even if unlikely) outcome or other person's reaction to your behavior if you communicate in a mature way?

Imagine that the worst possible outcome happens. Imagine, in that moment, to again adopt the mature attitude and remind yourself that you are good enough. Perhaps remind yourself that the other person probably feels frightened or threatened for some reason (which doesn't have to be logical).

Again, find an appropriate response from an adult perspective.

Again, imagine the worst possible outcome or other people's reaction.

Focus back on finding the inner sense of peace, reminding yourself that you are OK, and finding an adult response.

Repeat the last 2 steps a few more times.

Notice how do you feel now about the challenge in front of you. You might not feel happy about it, but you might feel more relaxed and less likely to lose control.

Slowly come back to the present moment.

Feel the space around you.

Take a deep breath in and out.

When you feel ready, open your eyes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this workbook is to give you tools to resolve your problematic emotions by yourself, as much as possible. If a problem persists, it's possible that there is a specific issue that couldn't be covered by these exercises (such as: identity conflict, identifications or relationship entanglements). In that case, you might want individual sessions. Please contact info@mentor-coach.eu for information on one-to-one sessions.

I find working with subconscious, emotional mind much more powerful than any kind of rational, behavior-controlling approach or external healing. These exercises are designed to connect to emotional parts of your brain. Still, everybody is different and some people might prefer different approaches depending of their personality and stage of life. That is all normal. Explore to find what works best for you.

Some people might comment on lack of spirituality in these exercises. There are two reasons for this. First, I find that parents leave a huge imprint on our subconscious minds and spiritual experiences might not be enough to change such imprints. I prefer to focus directly on changing the emotional perspective of the relationship with parents, so that our perspective of ourselves and therefore our behavior could also change.

Second, I don't presume to know enough about spiritual reality and I would consider it arrogant to claim that my ideas in this context are accurate. Therefore, I left space in some of the exercises for readers to include their own spiritual beliefs. Further than that, I cannot go with integrity. From my perspective, taking responsibility for our own emotions and becoming mature people is a spiritual goal in itself – perhaps more so than "abstract" spirituality.

Out of the Emotional Maturity Workbooks series, I offer this workbook – "How to Resolve Anger" for free download and sharing. You may also share or use publicly parts of this workbook. My only condition, if you share my work, is to provide my name as the author and the link to my web-site (<http://www.mentor-coach.eu>).

I wish you the best on your journey.

About the author

Kosjenka (pronounced Kos - yen - ka) Muk is a special education teacher and Soulwork Systemic Coaching trainer from Croatia. She coaches [individuals and couples](#), as well as teaching her [workshops](#) on topics of self-esteem, happy partnership, verbal self-defense and others. She also has wide experience working with international clients in English, using Skype and similar programs.

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