

Keeping Track of My Anger

It is easy to see how quickly one can lose control of their anger. However, it is quite possible to learn how to regain control, simply by understanding how the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex work. The amygdala is an almond-shaped mass in our brain that handles emotion -- it is related to survival. It gets us reacting before we can really think about the situation. The prefrontal cortex, on the other hand, located just behind our forehead, handles judgment. It is responsible for regulating our behavior and making choices. The left prefrontal cortex, in particular, can help us manage emotions, keeping things under control. Basically, we are wired to react at times before we can really think about the consequences of our actions. Therefore, the more you reflect on how you handled situations, the more you strengthen the connection between your prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, giving the upper hand to logic over emotion. Meaning, you will better manage your response to your anger.

The purpose of the Anger Log is to track situations in which you became angry. Tracking your anger can help you reflect and put things into perspective after a challenging event occurs, potentially helping you prevent such situations in the future. Let's review a sample log.

1. What was the situation? *I was waiting in line at the supermarket. Another register opened, and the person standing behind me rushed to go there.*
2. How did you handle it? *I told him, "Didn't you see me standing before you? You can't just cut in line and think it's okay."*
3. What did you want to happen? *I wanted the guy to know that he was being inconsiderate, and for him to learn a lesson.*
4. Were you able to get what you wanted from the way it was handled? Yes No
5. What thoughts did you have during the situation? *He's so inconsiderate and thinks he can get away with it. What if I was the type of person who couldn't speak up for myself? Guys like him need to learn a lesson.*
6. How did you feel during the situation? *I felt taken advantage of and angry.*
7. What was the outcome of the situation? *He yelled at me and said to mind my own business. The cops came and I got into trouble with the law; now I have to take courses.*
8. Did you get physically violent? Yes No
9. Did anyone get hurt physically? Yes No *Emotionally? Yes* No *If yes, how? He threatened me by saying he's calling the cops. He must have felt threatened as well.*

10. How did you feel after your reaction? *Angry at first, but also fearful that my wife was going to get upset at me for handling the situation poorly.*

11. What could you have done differently? *Asserting to the person, "Excuse me, I was actually here first. The line begins there."*

12. What are some thoughts that could have helped you achieve a better outcome?

a. *It's not a big deal. It's only a few minutes of waiting.*

b. *It's not up to me to teach everyone a lesson.*

c. *People have differences; the more understanding I am, the more patient I am.*

* The last question is the most important aspect of this worksheet. When you are aware of both destructive and constructive thought patterns, then you have the power to choose your thoughts, and ultimately make better choices in handling difficult situations.*

Keeping Track of My Anger

1. What was the situation? _____

2. How did you handle it? _____

3. What did you want to happen? _____

4. Were you able to get what you wanted from the way it was handled? Yes No Somewhat
5. What thoughts did you have during the situation? _____

6. How did you feel during the situation? _____
7. What was the outcome of the situation? _____

8. Did you get physically violent? Yes No
9. Did anyone get hurt physically? Yes No Emotionally? Yes No If yes, how?

10. How did you feel after your reaction? _____
11. What could you have done differently? _____

12. What are some thoughts that could have helped you achieve a better outcome?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

*Keeping track of your angry encounters helps you identify your destructive patterns. Awareness is the first step towards change. *

CALL TO ACTION: For better success in managing your anger, complete the questions thoroughly following each upsetting episode.