



Just Cool It!

Managing Anger in Couple Relationships

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to identify what triggers their anger.
2. Participants will recognize the influence their anger has on their children and learn ways to help children deal with anger.
3. Participants will develop strategies to deal with anger and they will commit to using those strategies when dealing with anger in the future.
4. Participants will learn how anger affects their body, both mentally and physically.
5. Participants will talk together about how anger affects their lives.
6. Participants will create goals for managing anger and an action plan for meeting those goals.
7. Participants will access community resources for dealing with anger.

Materials:

- Participant binder pockets with handouts:
 - Experiences with Anger worksheet
 - Keys to Helping Children Deal with Anger handout
 - What's Your Anger Style? Quiz
 - Just COOL IT! handout
 - 12 Effective Ways to Manage Your Anger handout
 - Setting Goals for Managing Anger worksheet
 - List of resources in your area for managing anger (See Preparation Note #1)
- (Optional Activity) Turning Negative Self-Talk into Positive Self-Talk scenario sheets
 - One scenario sheet is to be cut apart and used for participants. The other (which is filled in) is for facilitators only and gives examples of positive self-talk.
- SPEAK/HEAR skills cards
- Flip chart, dry erase board, etc.
- Pens
- Attendance sheet
- Name tags
- Materials for participant tables:
 - Play dough
 - Pipe cleaners
 - Paper and markers, etc.
- Participant incentives

Session Overview:

Welcome and introductions	(10-15 minutes)
Discussion: What is anger?	(3-5 minutes)
Discussion: What makes you angry?	(5-7 minutes)
Activity and Discussion: Experiences with anger	(10 minutes)
Discussion: Effects of anger	(10 minutes)
Discussion: Children and anger	(10 minutes)
Optional activity: Turning negative self-talk into positive self-talk	(10 minutes)
Activity: What's Your Anger Style? Quiz	(10 minutes)
Discussion: Strategies for dealing with anger	(10 minutes)
Talking about it: Creating goals	(10 minutes)
Resources in the community	(5 minutes)
Introduce take home activity	(1 minute)
Wrap-Up	(10 minutes)

<i>Session total</i>	<i>(2 hours)</i>
----------------------	------------------

Preparation:

1. Create a list of resources in your area related to anger management. Include this list in participant packets.

2. Cut apart the scenarios on the "Turning Negative Self-Talk into Positive Self-Talk" handout.

3. Discussions about childhood experiences with anger and issues that trigger anger may be difficult for some participants. Let participants know that they should only share what they feel comfortable sharing. Go over ground rules (including a statement about confidentiality) at the beginning of the lesson.

Procedure:

1. Welcome participants to the session and reconnect (10-15 minutes).

- Introduce yourself to the group and the title of today's lesson, "Just Cool It! Managing Anger in Couple Relationships."
- Welcome participants and, especially if you have any new participants, go around the room and have everyone briefly introduce themselves.
- Ask about take home activities from the previous session (if applicable).

Say: *"Today we are going to talk about managing anger in relationships."*

2. Discussion: What is anger? (3-5 minutes).

Ask: *"What are some words that come to mind when you think of anger?"*

Sample responses:

- Mad
 - Furious
 - Yelling
 - Rage
 - Arguing
 - Raising your voice
 - Feeling tense
- Write participant responses on flip chart paper or a dry erase board.

Ask: *"Is anger always bad?"*

Say: *"No. Anger is a natural emotion. It is a sign that something needs to be changed, and if it is handled appropriately, it can be positive. For example, if you are angry about something that you think is unfair and you use your anger to motivate you to make a change or to do something positive, your anger can be good. What's important is how you deal with or express your anger."*

*One important thing to remember is that **how we deal with our anger is something we learn.** If you can learn how to express your anger aggressively, you can also learn how to express your anger in a more positive way. Later on we will discuss some different strategies for managing anger."*

3. Discussion: What makes you angry? (5-7 minutes).

Ask: *“What makes you angry?” “What are some things that trigger your anger?”*

Sample responses:

- Stresses at work
- When my child misbehaves
- When I am running late
- When trust is broken
- Traffic when I am in a hurry
- When someone criticizes me
- When I’m disrespected

Say: *“Different things cause people to get angry. Once you recognize what triggers your anger, you are better able to learn how to manage your anger when you are in those certain situations.”*

4. Activity and discussion: Experiences with anger (10 minutes).

Say: *“Everyone has different experiences with anger. Some people grow up in families where anger is shown aggressively and frequently, and there is a lot of fighting and yelling between family members. Others may have experiences seeing anger managed more effectively. How you experienced anger growing up can influence how you manage anger today.”*

- Have everyone take a few minutes to fill out the “Experiences with Anger” worksheet. Have them think about how their parents or caregivers handled anger, how they handled their own anger as a child, and how they handle anger now. (Participants may write their responses in their journals if they have them available, and if they would prefer).
- Read the statements on the handout to the participants.
- Ask for volunteers to share experiences, if they feel comfortable.
- An alternative would be to read the statements and have participants discuss as a group (rather than taking time to fill in the worksheet).

5. Discussion: The effects of anger (10 minutes).

Ask: “How does anger affect your body?” “How does anger affect your mind or your mental health?”

Say: “Health problems have been linked to anger that is not managed appropriately. These health problems include:

- *Effects on the body:*
 - *Headaches*
 - *Digestive problems*
 - *Insomnia*
 - *High blood pressure*
 - *Heart attack*
 - *Stroke*
- *Effects on the mind:*
 - *Increased anxiety*
 - *Depression*

Ask: “How does your anger affect your partner? Your children? Your family? Your friends?”

Say: “If you have a hard time expressing your anger in appropriate ways, your friends and family are likely affected.

If your friends or family would say that you have an anger problem, that you get angry easily, or that you have a bad temper, you may need to think about some new ways to manage your anger.”

6. Discussion: Children and anger (10 minutes).

Ask: “How does your or your partner’s anger affect your children?” “How does the way you show anger affect how your child will show anger?” “How do your children learn to manage anger they feel?”

Say: “A lot of conflict between parents has been found to be related to aggression and behavior and emotional problems in children. Your children learn how to manage their anger by watching how you manage anger.

There has also been some research on the effect of couple conflict on children’s sleep. For children to sleep, they need to feel relaxed and feel like they are in a safe environment. If children are worried about their parents fighting, they are more likely to feel tense, stressed, and possibly scared, which affects their ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

*Researchers have found that **children who do not get enough sleep are more likely to gain weight**, especially those who are not able to deal effectively with stress.*

So you can see why it’s important to be a good role model for your children. Helping your children learn how to manage anger will help them be better able to deal with anger when they grow up.”

- Go through the “Keys for Helping Children Deal with Anger” handout.

7. Optional activity: Turning negative self-talk into positive self-talk (10 minutes).

Say: *“Many times anger results from the negative things you tell yourself. This is called ‘negative self-talk.’ How you view a situation and whether you think someone did something on purpose or by accident can affect the anger you feel.*

Try to recognize when you have negative self-talk and try to turn it into something positive. We are going to practice turning negative self-talk into positive self-talk. Let’s start with an example.”

Ask: *“If someone cuts in front of you in traffic, what is something you might say to yourself that could be considered ‘negative self-talk?’”*

Sample response: *“He did that on purpose!”*

Ask: *“What is a more positive way of looking at the situation?”*

Sample response: *“Maybe he is going to the hospital or he is in some kind of emergency. He probably didn’t mean to cut me off, but he was so focused on where he needed to go.”*

- Have participants get into groups of 2 or 3.
- Hand out the “Turning Negative Self-talk into Positive Self-talk” scenarios, one scenario per group of 2 or 3 participants.

- Have each group read the scenario on the slip of paper and the negative response, then have them think about how to turn the negative thoughts into something positive. Give groups about 3-5 minutes to work.
- Go around and have someone from each group share the scenario, the negative response, and the positive response they discussed.
- Expand on participant responses.

Say: *“There are different types of negative thinking that can lead to anger.*

- **Exaggeration:** *When you make things seem a lot worse than they really are.*
- **Jumping to conclusions:** *When you interpret a situation before you know much about it. You may assume the worst about a situation.*
- **All or nothing:** *When you think about things as being either all bad or all good. If things aren’t perfect, you see it as a failure.*
- **Dwelling:** *When you obsess over a negative thought and think about it over and over again.*
- **Focusing on the negative:** *When you overlook the positive and focus on the negative about a situation.*
- **Personalizing:** *When you take something personally and blame yourself for something bad that happens.*

Ask: *“Can you think of times when you’ve had these types of negative thoughts?”*

8. Activity: What’s Your Anger Style? Quiz (10 minutes).

- Introduce the activity by telling participants that you are going to talk about different ways that people might handle anger.
- Have them refer to the “What’s Your Anger Style?” quiz in their packets.
- Read through each question and the answers.
- Ask participants to circle their answers as you read through the choices.
- After everyone is finished, read the scoring section of the quiz.

Ask: *“Were you surprised at all by your score?”*

9. Discussion: Strategies for dealing with anger (10 minutes).

Say: “People have different ways of dealing with anger.”

Ask: “What do some people do when they are angry?”

Sample responses:

- Yell
- Become violent
- Say hurtful things
- Keep all the anger inside

Ask: “What are some better ways to deal with anger?” “What are some strategies you’ve used to deal with anger?”

- Write participant responses on a flip chart or dry erase board.
- Go through the “Just COOL IT!” anger strategy below, which is also on a handout in participant packets.

When you feel yourself getting angry, remember to **Just COOL IT!**

Stay **C**ALM

Think p**O**sitively

Speak from your **O**wn point of view

Wa**L**k away if your anger is out of control

Listen to music, write in a journal, or do something that relaxes you

Take deep breaths

- Read through the “12 Effective Ways to Manage Your Anger” handout.
- On #9, have participants fill out other activities they can do to calm themselves down when they are feeling angry. Ask some participants to share what they listed.

10. Talking about it: Creating goals (10 minutes).


- Have participants write their goals on the “Setting Goals for Managing Anger” worksheet.
- Have participants talk with their partner (if present) about goals they have for managing anger. If some participants do not have a partner to work with, you may have them talk with another participant about their goals.

- Distribute the SPEAK/HEAR skills card for participants to use during the dialogue. Some participants may be familiar with these skills from attending a previous session. However, the skills may be new to some participants.
- Briefly read through the skills listed on the SPEAK/HEAR skills card, and then allow participants time to talk with their partners.

11. Resources in the community (5 minutes).

- Briefly go over the resource list for your area in participant packets and any other anger management resources in your area.
- Remind participants that they can visit <http://ncfamilies.com/jitp/> for more information and resources in their area.

12. Introduce the take home activity (1 minute).

 **Say:** *“If you have not done so already, finish creating your goals for managing anger and make an effort to use some of the strategies we talked about.”*

13. Wrap up the session and give out incentives (10 minutes).

- Ask if anyone has any general questions.
- Thank participants for coming and participating in the lesson.
- Make sure everyone knows the day and location of the next session.

*This lesson was possible thanks to a grant from ACF