



# Respectful Futures

Shaping Healthy Relationships

## **Module 4**

### **Understanding and Managing Anger**

## Abstract

The goal of Module 4 is to help students understand that anger in and of itself is not a problem. Anger is simply like a red light on the dashboard. When that light goes on, a wise person will pull over and look under the hood. Anger is an emotional response to something that has had an impact on us; if we take the time to “pull over,” anger can help us identify underlying primary feelings, like fear or sadness. People often experience anger as aggression or manipulation. This module helps students understand what anger is, what it isn’t, and how to express it respectfully.

Module 4 includes The Iceberg Model of Anger. This model depicts anger as existing above the surface; even though that can look scary, it is what is below the surface that needs to be addressed. Module 4 gives students an opportunity to unpack that metaphor and understand it more fully. This module also provides opportunity for skill development in taking time-outs, talking themselves down, and re-engaging in a respectful, assertive, and non-harming manner, always recognizing that their goal is to resolve a situation, not win a fight.

Finally Module 4 introduces two models that use the metaphor of an anger mountain: the Stages of Anger diagram reflects the importance of taking a time-out, managing our emotions, and understanding that nobody thinks clearly when their heart-rate is elevated due to stress. The second model uses the metaphor of climbing a mountain, and suggests that decisions we make and act on can either escalate or defuse a situation.

## Big Ideas

Conflict is a natural part of being in relationship with others. How we deal with conflict determines whether a relationship is positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy.

Understanding our own emotional responses to stress and stressors is an important part of gaining control of our lives and maintaining healthy relationships.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Reflect back on the information and skills learned in previous modules and connect them to managing anger:
  - Paying attention to ourselves
  - Power and choice
  - Using the ABCDE Model
  - Communicating effectively (both verbally and non-verbally)
- Understand that anger is a secondary emotion that may be masking primary emotions, such as fear, grief, or rejection
- Understand that anger is an emotional response that in and of itself is not a bad thing and that while it can be a good thing, it may also be harmful
- Understand that our expression of anger can be helpful or harmful, positive or negative
- Recognize that while events may be out of our control, how we think about them and respond to them are within our control
- Recognize that our self-talk has a profound impact on our subsequent behaviours (ABCDE Model)
- Demonstrate how to manage both internal emotions/messages and external behaviours in ways that are respectful and enhance relationships

## Learning Activities and Resources

1. The Iceberg Model of Anger
2. Three Questions to Ask Yourself When You Are Feeling Angry
3. Anger: What It Is (an emotion)
4. Anger: What It Is Not (a behaviour or action)
5. Stages of Anger
6. The Anger Mountain
7. Positive Steps for Dealing with Anger Respectfully
8. The Tool Box

## For Facilitators

If you're mad about something and you're "not going to take it anymore," you're feeling anger: a strong emotion that you experience when you think someone has "done you wrong." If you want to scream and kick, you're feeling anger.

Anger is a powerful emotion that people feel from time to time when someone or something frustrates or annoys them. Anger is what happens when we perceive an event as threatening or experience the frustration of unmet needs. The word “anger” derives from the Greek word “ankhōnē,” which means “a strangling.” This is an accurate description of the way anger feels sometimes. Indeed, anger can make you feel like hurting someone. *Don’t do it!* If you’re feeling a lot of anger, it’s good to take a nice, deep breath.

Anger itself is not a bad thing. As a matter of fact, as an emotion, it can be a good thing. Women in the early 20th century became angry at the injustice of not being allowed to vote. This anger was translated into various social and political movements that led to female suffrage. How we express anger is the critical matter. Like most other things, we can express it well (respectfully) and productively, or we can express it poorly (blaming and shaming).

*Anger is like a red light on the dashboard of your car. When the red light comes on, a wise person will pull over and look under the hood (Iceberg Model of Anger).* At times, however, people want to use anger as an excuse to behave badly. When we do so, we cannot expect good results. Instead, consider this: *In all situations I have power and choice. I have personal power to choose how I behave.*

Anger is an emotion we feel internally; yelling, being mean, pushing, or hitting is behaviour we exhibit externally. We can learn to manage both our internal emotions and our external behaviours.

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### **Let’s get started**

*The following facilitation notes provide context and strategies that instructors can rely on during their delivery of the resources. PowerPoints have been developed and a small number of short videos have been selected to correspond with the module’s materials. Those are located on the Respectful Futures site.*

## **Facilitation Notes**

### **The Iceberg Model of Anger**

The Iceberg Model of Anger is a robust one that sets out very clearly that much of what we feel as anger is actually the result of other powerful emotions lying beneath the surface of our awareness. Unless we understand how anger works and make

efforts to contain it, we could react thoughtlessly rather than respond thoughtfully. The results may worsen the situation and the relationship.

Using the Iceberg Model of Anger, have students recall some situations where they were angry. Ask them to examine the feelings they had at the time and determine what they were experiencing beneath the anger. This exercise can be very personal and should be debriefed only to the extent that students are open to sharing. If no one is comfortable, you may want to use a personal example to open up discussion.

## **Three Questions to Ask Yourself When You are Feeling Angry**

This handout brings together the ABCDE Model, the concept of positive self-talk, reaction versus response, and the Me+You+Us Model to help us defuse anger and respond thoughtfully.

1. Ask students to consider how this approach might have worked in situations they have faced.
2. Follow up this discussion with the handouts on what anger is and is not.

## **Anger: What It Is (an emotion) and What It Is Not (a behaviour)**

These handouts contain a great deal of information that will help students understand more fully the ways in which anger can cause damage. However, the handouts also highlight the fact that anger in and of itself is not the problem. Indeed, it is a normal emotion that can be controlled. How we *react* or *respond* to anger is the most important learning in this exercise. Help the group unpack the information, and give it life through concrete examples.

## **Stages of Anger and The Anger Mountain**

These handouts turn to another model of anger to illustrate how negative self-talk is used to rationalize ill-considered reactions that intensify anger and escalate damaging behaviours.

1. Ask students to review The Stages of Anger handout. Facilitate a discussion on it.
2. Have students walk through the scenario provided in the Anger Mountain handout, which “climbs the mountain.” To help them understand how anger builds, assist them in making the connections between all the aspects of anger they have been studying.
3. After this group exercise, have students use the worksheet to work through a situation of their own.

4. Facilitate a debrief on the feelings, self-talk, and reactions that harm, as well as the control, self-talk, and response that benefits everyone in the situation.

## **Positive Steps for Dealing with Anger Respectfully and The Tool Box**

These two handouts summarize the best ideas on managing anger in a way that builds strong and resilient relationships. Have students identify options that might work in situations they have faced.

## **Replay/Assessment**

Here are a few ideas for wrapping up this session. Feel free to choose from among them, depending upon the flow of the class and/or students' preferences.

- Have students work individually or in small groups to design and make a poster that pulls all of the concepts in this module together.
- Ask students to write on the following:
  - What are two or three things you learned today? Why is this learning important to you?
  - What are you prepared to use in your relationships and why?
  - What do you need more information about? Do some research to provide further information that answers your questions.
  - How does the notion of anger management “fit” with the definition of “healthy relationship” that you developed earlier?
  - How do the Anger Iceberg and Anger Mountain models help to explain the mechanics of anger even though one is burrowing “under” anger and the other is “climbing” anger?
  - How does anger management allow us to better follow the Me+You+Us Model?
  - How does anger management help us make good use of the ABCDE Model and the concept of positive self-talk?

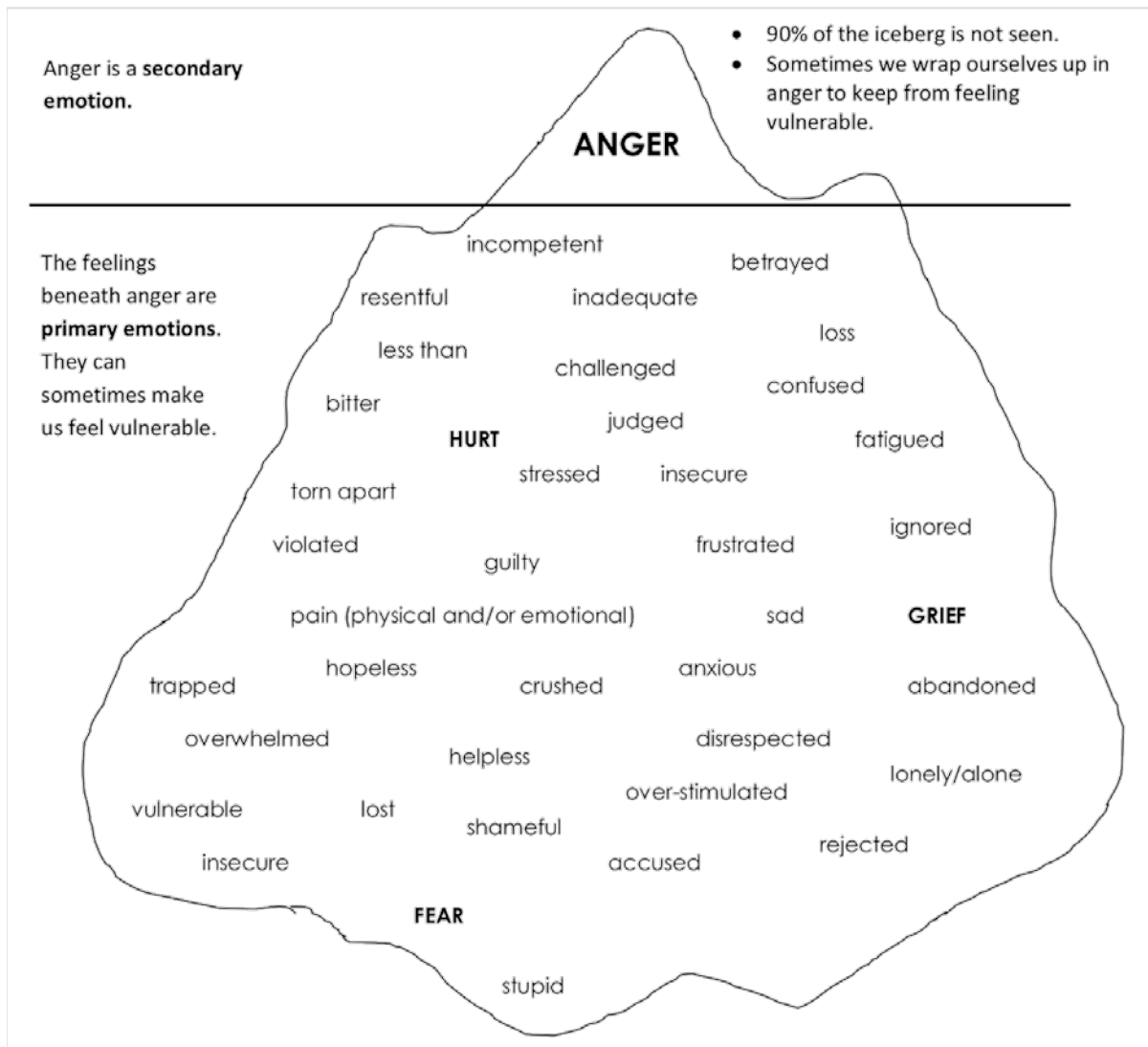
## **In Conclusion**

This module has focused on anger management, what anger is and what it is not, and how to use self-talk and anger management tools to reduce the negative effects of anger. The exercises help students to connect anger and anger management to Me+You+Us, ABCDE, and self-talk.

The next module will focus on unhealthy relationships – what they look like and how the information and skills that have been learned so far can prevent harmful relationships from developing.

**The following pages are the handouts and resources to be provided to learners.**

## The Iceberg Model of Anger



- Anger appears to be the issue, but the real issue is the feelings below the surface.
- It may seem as though anger is all you feel, but if you slow down and breathe, you will discover other feelings.
- *Solution:* Discharge the big energy without harming yourself or others. Then find someone you can talk with, and explore the emotions beneath the anger.

## Three Questions to Ask Yourself When You Are Feeling Angry

### ***Review of ABCDE Model***

- We have no control over what happens out there in the world (Actions, Events).
- We do have (can learn) control over what we tell ourselves about what is happening (Beliefs, Thoughts, Attitudes).
- We do have (can learn) control over our Choices.
- We do have control over our own behaviour, what we say or do, and how we say or do it (Decisions).
- We can determine whether or not the outcome was helpful or hurtful (Evaluation).

### ***Three Questions***

Underlying these questions is the premise that we can all control ourselves and these questions slow our reactions down and allow us to think and respond respectfully.

The answers to the following questions are useful in preventing bad outcomes when anger gets in the way of clear thinking:

- *What do I need to do to take care of myself right now?*  
Breathe, take a time-out, go for a walk, practise positive self-talk, get underneath the anger to the primary feelings
- *What do I need to do about the situation?*  
Focus on what is important and true right now, represent myself clearly and openly, ask for what I need in a good way
- *How can I do that respectfully and continue to be green (I count – you count)?*  
Use “I” statements, take time to cool down before you communicate, resist blaming the other person, choose your words carefully

*Remember: it is always a good time to stop a bad idea!* Just because you have started out expressing yourself poorly doesn’t mean you have to continue.

### **Stop! Breathe! Think! Choose!**

Stop what you are doing the minute you realize what you're doing is hurting you or the other person. Take a breath. Think about your choices. Choose respect.

## Anger: What It Is (an emotion)

Anger is:

- *An emotional response*  
It is a healthy, natural response to something – whether real or imagined – that has had an impact on us. Often we don't immediately know what is beneath our anger (Iceberg Model of Anger), but we do know that something is wrong in our world.
- *A window to other feelings*  
Noticing that we are feeling angry can lead to identifying the underlying primary feelings (just like noticing the red light on the dashboard, pulling over, and looking under the hood).
- *A part of being assertive*  
Expressing anger respectfully is a way to be open and honest about how we feel. Anger is part of having good boundaries. It lets us and others know our limits. We know where we stand and so do they.
- *A doorway to getting to know others better*  
Healthy anger is brief, to the point, open, and direct. Resolving anger respectfully and addressing the underlying feelings will bring people together and build mutual trust and respect.
- *A release*  
It is not healthy to suppress anger and the underlying primary feelings. If they are not expressed, they will leak out in distorted ways, including depression. Suppressing anger is different from controlling your behaviour when you are feeling angry.
- *A form of protection*  
It is a natural defence for the protection of our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

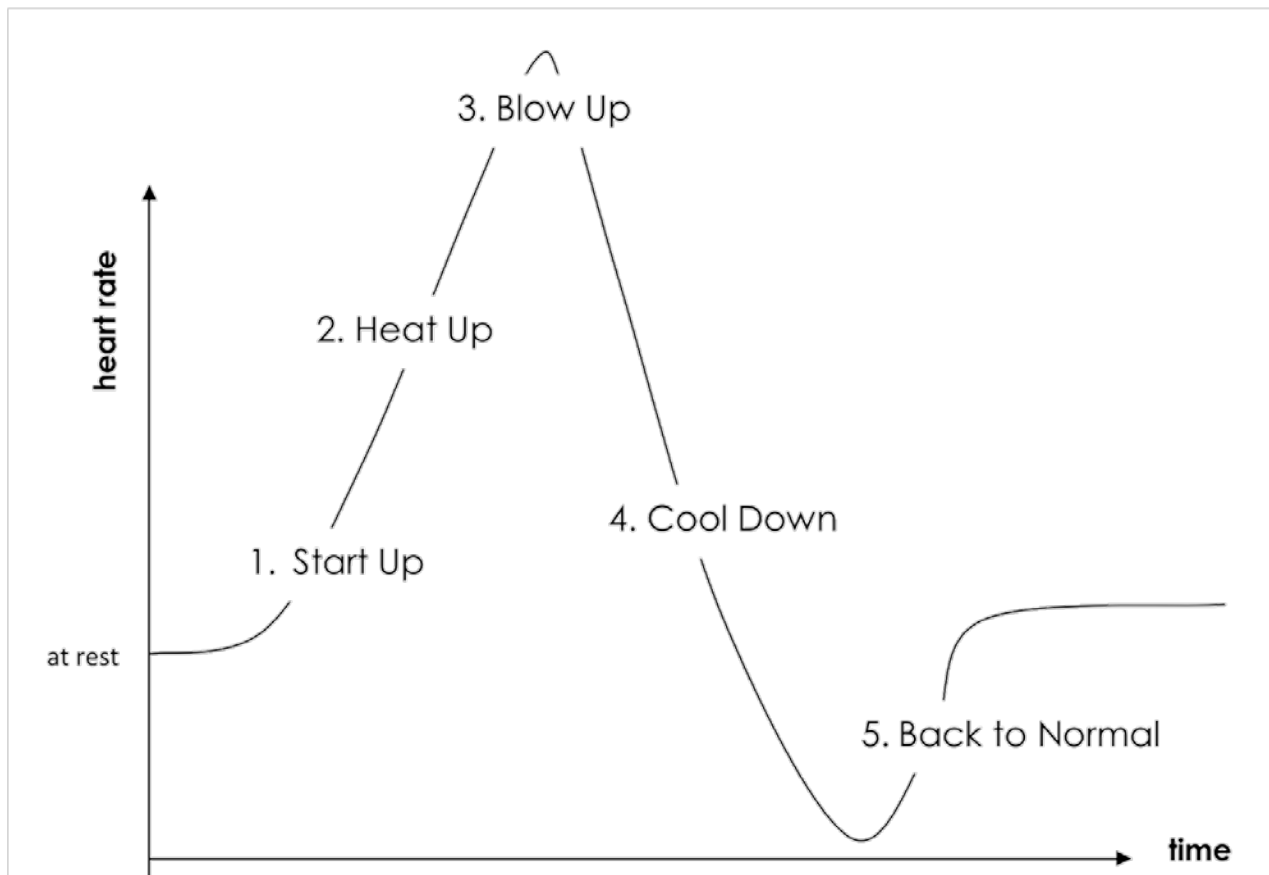
## Anger: What It Is Not (a behaviour)

When we are angry, we act or behave in ways that can be negative or positive. Our actions are the result of the anger, and we can decide how to act so that we improve the outcome of the situation.

The actions listed below are likely to result in an escalation of the anger.

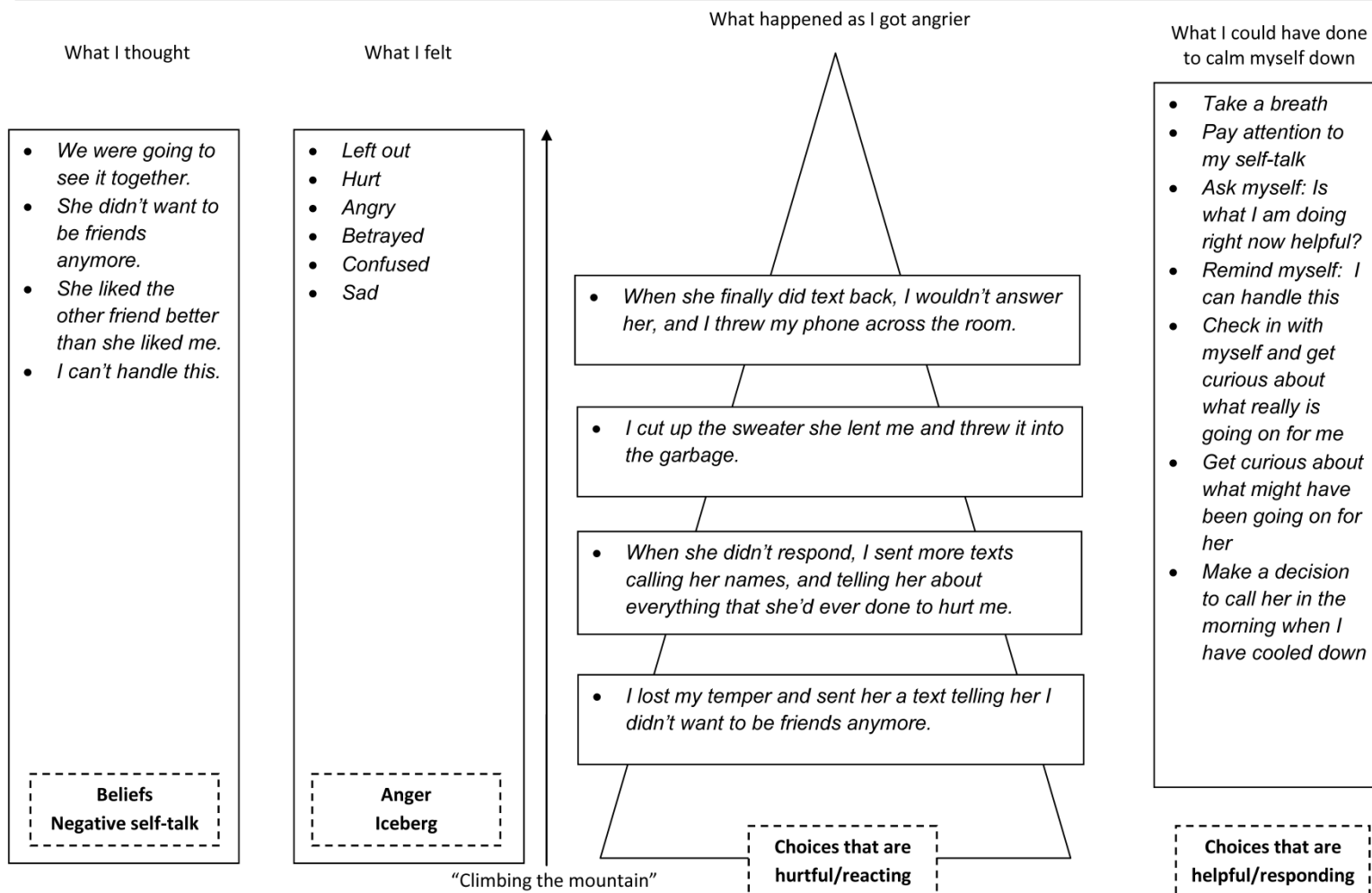
- *Blaming*  
“You did this!”, name calling (verbal abuse), not taking personal responsibility for yourself and how you feel. All these behaviours will lead to a defensive response from the other person.
- *Sarcasm*  
Humour can never trump respect. Sarcasm is hostile “joking” at someone else’s expense. You are not vulnerable and are taking no risk since you can deny that you really meant what you said.
- *Violence*  
Taking the pain you feel inside and directing it at another either verbally or physically. It may seem like an uncontrollable eruption, but violence or abuse is always a choice.
- *Revenge*  
Getting back at someone for real or imagined wrongs done to you
- *Viciousness*  
Going for the throat, hitting below the belt, taking advantage of another person’s vulnerability by being cruel
- *Punitiveness*  
“Teaching someone a lesson,” punishing someone else for what happened to you
- *Aggression*  
Bullying, being rude, giving orders, ignoring the other person’s feelings or rights, not taking responsibility for the impact of your behaviour
- *Sulking*  
Punishing others with silence that is hostile or threatening
- *Manipulation*  
Controlling others indirectly, getting what you want without taking responsibility for asking for it
- *Scapegoating*  
Venting and blaming someone else for your anger instead of figuring out where your anger is really coming from and directing your attention there

## Stages of Anger



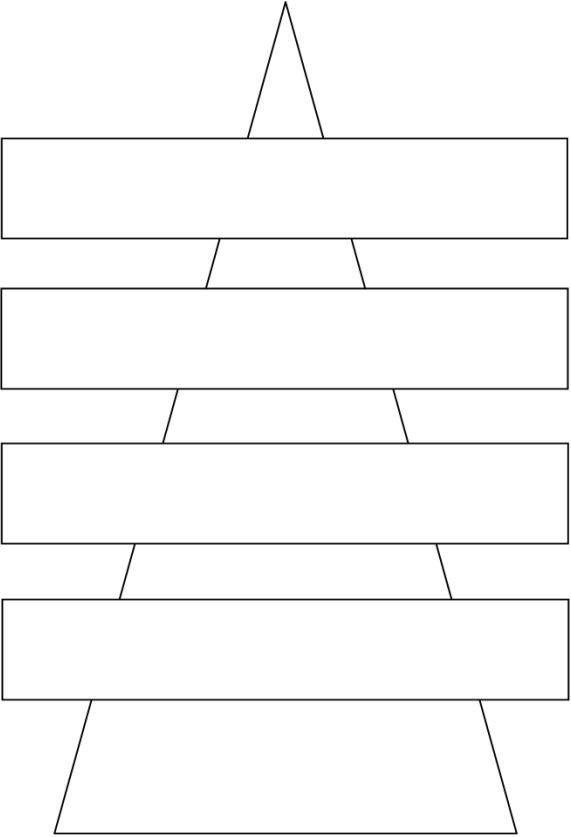
## The Anger Mountain

EVENT (Life happens): *My best friend and I were supposed to see a movie together. She went with someone else and I only found out because she posted how awesome the movie was.*



## The Anger Mountain

**EVENT:**  
 Let yourself remember a time when something happened (life) and you felt angry

What I thought	What I felt	What happened as I got angrier	Things I can do to calm myself down
<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Beliefs</b>  <b>Negative self-talk</b> </div>	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Anger</b>  <b>Iceberg</b> </div>		
	"Climbing the mountain"	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <b>Choices that are</b>  <b>hurtful/reacting</b> </div>	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <b>Choices that are</b>  <b>helpful/responding</b> </div>

## **Positive Steps for Dealing with Anger Respectfully**

### ***Respectful Ways of Feeling and Expressing Anger***

Our response to anger can be healthy and constructive, or unhealthy and destructive. We need to find ways to feel and express our anger that are respectful of ourselves and others:

- Acknowledge and be aware of your anger. Pay attention to what is going on in your body and in your mind.
- Identify your underlying feelings. Take the time to ask yourself what's underneath your anger. You may find you are more hurt or scared than angry.
- Make a plan to express your anger. Decide when and how you will talk about your feelings. Remember: you are responsible for your behaviour no matter what emotion you are experiencing.
- Share your anger in an open, direct, and respectful way with the other person involved.
- Use "I" Statements. This will help you take responsibility for your own feelings and help you resist blaming the other person for "making you angry."
- Recognize when you are angry, own the anger, and express it respectfully. Speak up when an issue is important.

### ***Positive Self-Talk for Dealing with Anger***

What I can tell myself before I escalate the situation (climb the mountain):

- This could be a rough situation, but I know I can handle it.
- Easy does it. Don't take anything too personally.
- As long as I keep my cool, I will be OK.
- I don't need to prove myself.
- Look for the positives and don't jump to conclusions.
- I don't need to win. I do need to be part of a solution that works for both of us.

What I can tell myself to stay in control:

- My muscles are getting tight. Time to relax.
- Take a deep breath and ask, "Is it worth the hurt feelings?"
- I notice my self-talk is negative. I need to take care of myself.
- I need to take a time-out. Go for a walk. Eat a snack.

What I can tell myself after the situation is resolved positively:

- I handled that one pretty well.
- I am getting better at this all the time!

## **The Tool Box**

Making a commitment to treating your friends/partner with respect regardless of how angry you are feeling means doing a lot of work on yourself. Making a commitment to being green in your relationships (I count – you count). Here are some tools others have found helpful.

### ***No Excuses***

The first thing you have to do to stop being abusive is to stop making excuses and blaming others for the way you are behaving. Make a promise to yourself that you will not use abusive behaviour (verbal, physical, or emotional) no matter how angry you are. Remember: in all situations, you have power and choice!

### ***Time-Outs***

The most important tool you will learn is simply to take time-outs when you feel yourself getting angry. It's a simple concept, but not always easy to do.

- Tell your partner/friend(s) about time-outs before you use them so you both know why you are leaving
- Recognize your early symptoms of anger, such as a knotted stomach, clenched jaw, raised voice
- When you feel the symptom, leave the situation immediately. Don't make one more point or have the last word; just get out.
- Stay away long enough to cool down, usually about an hour, but don't stay away to punish or get even with anyone.
- Don't go over the argument and other resentments while you are away. This is a time to cool down, not make a case against your partner.
- If you can talk about what upset you when you return, do so; but be prepared to leave again if necessary. If you are not able to talk then, decide on a specific time when you will try again (tomorrow morning, after school on Thursday, etc.)

Individuals often feel they have to “finish the fight,” not “wimp out,” or “stand up for their rights.” That often leads to abusive behaviour. If you take a time-out every time you need to, you will not resort to mean or abusive behaviours.

### ***Positive versus Negative Self-Talk***

You may not realize it, but often we make ourselves angry. About 90% of anger is caused by what we say to ourselves about the situation – not what happens or what other people do. Notice what you say to yourself when you are upset, blaming,

justifying, name-calling, or threatening to harm yourself or others. These are examples of negative self-talk. You can make yourself so angry that you give yourself permission to behave badly.

Instead of using negative self-talk, try using positive self-talk by finding words that are more helpful, such as, “This really isn’t worth getting angry about.” When you notice yourself saying things like, “I can’t handle this,” try saying something more positive like, “I am an intelligent and creative person, I can handle this!”

## ***Listening***

Most of us are so busy thinking about defending our own point of view that we don’t really listen to the thoughts and feelings of others. Your relationships will improve if you learn to listen deeply. If you summarize for the other person what they said without arguing or blaming, they will know that you have heard and understood them. This does not mean you agree; it does mean that you listened. Listening to others may help you gain a new perspective and feel less hurt or angry.

## ***Remember:***

When you are reactive, you:

- Are focused on what is not in your control (environment, circumstances, and other people)
- Think reactively and use reactive language
- Have a blaming and accusing attitude
- Feel and act like a victim
- Generate negative energy
- Focus on the problem and neglect areas that you have influence over
- Avoid accountability

When you are responding, you:

- Focus on what is within your control (especially your thoughts, feelings, behaviour)
- Ask yourself, “What can I do that will make a difference?”
- Think and act responsively
- Act in self-responsible ways
- Generate positive energy
- Focus on solutions, options, and choices
- Behave accountably

