

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Week 19: Handout A</b> <b>MANAGING CONFLICT</b></p>
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**BASIC DO'S AND DON'TS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU ARE FEELING ANGRY OR TRYING TO SOLVE CONFLICT:**

**1. Do speak up when an issue is important to you.** We do not have to address personally every injustice and irritation that comes along. To simply let something go can be an act of maturity. But it is a mistake to stay silent if the cost is to feel bitter, resentful or unhappy. We devalue ourselves when we fail to take a stand on issues that matter to us.

**2. Don't strike while the iron is hot.** A good argument will clear the air in some relationships, but if your goal is to change an entrenched pattern, the worst time to speak up may be when you are feeling angry or intense. If your fires start rising in the middle of a conversation, you can always say, "I need a little time to sort my thoughts out. Let's set up a time to talk about this later." Seeking temporary distance is not the same as cold withdrawal or an emotional cutoff.

**3. Do take time out to think about the problem and to clarify your position.** Before you speak out, ask yourself the following questions: What is it about the situation that makes me angry? What is the real issue here? Where do I stand? What do I want to accomplish? Who is responsible for what? What, specifically, do I want to change? What are the things I will and will not do?

**4. Don't use "below-the-belt" tactics.** These include: blaming, interpreting, diagnosing, labeling, analyzing, preaching, moralizing, ordering, warning, interrogating, ridiculing and lecturing.

**5. Do speak in "I" language.** Learn to say "I think...", "I feel", "I want". A true "I" statement says something about the self without criticizing or blaming the other person and without holding the other person responsible for our feelings or reactions. Watch out for disguised "you" statements or pseudo-"I" statements. ("I think you are controlling and self-centered.")

**6. Don't make vague requests.** ("I want you to be more sensitive to my needs.") Let the other person know specifically what you want. ("*The best way that you can help me now is simply to listen. I really don't want advice at this time. I just need to hear myself explain what I'm feeling to you.*") Don't expect people to anticipate your needs or do things that you have not requested. Even those who love you can't read your mind.

**7. Do try to appreciate the fact that people are different.** When we recognize that there are as many ways of seeing the world as there are people in it, we can begin to appreciate the other's viewpoint even if ours is different. If you're fighting about who has the "truth", you may be missing the point. Different perspectives and ways of reacting do not necessarily mean that one person is "right" and the other is "wrong."

**8. Don't tell another person what she or he thinks or feels or "should" think or feel.** If another person gets angry in reaction to a change you make, don't criticize their feelings or say they have no right to be angry. Better to say, *I understand that you're angry, and if I were in your shoes perhaps I'd be angry, too. But I've thought it over and this is my decision.* Remember that one person's right to be angry does not mean that the other person is to blame.

**9. Do recognize that each person is responsible for his or her own behavior.** Don't blame your dad's new wife because she "won't let him" be close to you. If you are angry about the distance between you and your dad, it is your responsibility to find a new way to approach the situation. Your dad's behavior is his responsibility, not his wife's fault.

**10. Don't participate in intellectual arguments that go nowhere.** Don't spin your wheels trying to convince others of the "rightness" of your position. If the other person is not hearing you, simply say, *Well, it may sound wild to you, but this is how I feel.* Or, *I understand that you disagree, but I guess we see the problem differently.*

**11. Do try to avoid speaking through a third party.** If you are angry with your brother's behavior, don't say, "I think my daughter felt terrible when you didn't find the time to come to her school play." Instead, try *I was upset when you didn't come. You're important to me and I really wanted you to be there.*

**12. Don't expect change to come about from hit-and-run confrontations.** Change occurs slowly in close relationships. If you make even a small change, you will be tested many times to see if you "really mean it." Don't get discouraged if you fall on your face several times as you try to put theory into practice. You may find that you start out fine but then blow it when things heat up. Getting derailed is just part of the process, so be patient with yourself. You will have many opportunities to get back on track and try again.

(From *The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., published by Harper Collins. Adapted with permission from the author.)

**Week 19: Handout B**  
**LETTING GO : TAKING TIME TO SELF-REFLECT**

**What are some steps to take when I want to let go of anger?**

**Step 1: Relax yourself by using deep, natural breathing and muscle relaxation.**

- Take deep breaths and silently repeat the words "relax" until you are able to calm down.
- Do not say or do anything until you are calmed down.
- Avoid words or actions in the "heat" of the moment.

**Step 2: Recognize what arouses or provokes your anger:**

- Is it a situation, an event, a person?
- Is it real or imagined?

**Step 3: Use a rational approach to "rethink," "reframe," and "reason" in your mind what is going on and why you are angry.**

- Is this a trigger event bringing up old unresolved anger or resentment in me?
- Is what is happening emotionally a product of my past?
- What am I really feeling under this anger?
- Is the person I'm angry with just having a bad day or needing me to understand what s/he is feeling?
- How am I feeling about this?
- What needs to be changed here?
- What alternatives could I use to get the best results in handling this situation?

**Step 4: Once you have a "clearer" idea of what is going on, take steps to change the situation that is provoking the anger.**

- Use "I" statements. "I feel angry when my plans get stalled."
- Clarify your feelings about the situation.
- Point out issues needing clarity.
- Identify the unresolved resentment, frustration, or depression and work on it.
- Inject some humor into the situation to defuse the anger or hostility.

**THE STEPS FOR LETTING GO OF ANGER:**

1. Awareness of your feelings and behaviors.
2. Taking responsibility for your emotions and responses.
3. Attitude—will greatly influence your success or failure. Can you expect positive change?
4. Self-Talk. What you say to yourself effects how you think and feel.
5. Don't take responsibility for people and other things you can't control.
6. Develop resources and a support system which encourage positive changes.
7. People who take good care of themselves are happier people.
8. Develop positive self-esteem.
9. Practice positive boundary setting rather than defensive reactions.
10. Practice rehearsing the new responses.
11. Keep a journal to track and reinforce change. A journal will also clarify issues which require further problem solving, or dysfunctional patterns which are keeping you from the progress and change that you desire.

## WEEK 19, CLOSING ACTIVITY: PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION EXERCISE

**PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION:** It is physically impossible for the body to experience at the same moment both anxiety AND relaxation. “With physical relaxation comes some degree of mental calmness—in any situation.”

### Short version of the technique

Sit comfortably in a chair hands resting on your thighs, or lie down with your legs stretched out and your arms resting at your side. With your eyes closed, or focused on a spot in front of you, relax your body as fully as possible and turn your attention to the breath.

- 1) While keeping the rest of your body relaxed, make a fist with your right hand only, squeeze it for a count of eight as you breathe in, then let it relax as you breathe out. Repeat this movement with your left hand. Breathe normally.
- 2) Point your right foot for a count of five, keeping the rest of your body relaxed, and then flex your right foot up for a count of five. Relax your foot as you breathe out. Now repeat this movement with your left foot, counting five as you point your foot and five as you flex your foot. Relax and breathe normally.
- 3) Clench your buttocks and you breathe in for a count of eight and the release them as you breathe out.
- 4) Shrug your shoulders up to your ears as you breathe in for a count of five, and then relax back to your resting position and breathe normally.
- 5) Now concentrate on your breath as you draw it in through your nose, and exhale it gently out of your mouth. Repeat this breath ten times. If thoughts begin to crowd your mind, bring your attention back, concentrating only on the action of the breath in through your nose, and out through your mouth.
- 6) When you are ready, open your eyes and take one deep breath.

(Linda A. Curran, LPC)

There are longer versions of progressive relaxation that cover the entire body, beginning with the face muscles. Learning to notice the difference between tense muscles and relaxed muscles helps you to mindfully breathe and relax whenever your body begins to tense in any area. (Based on Jacobsen’s Progressive Relaxation Method).