

Discipline #2 – Anger Workout

What to Do [Injunction]:

Spend five minutes a day [not more than twenty minutes at a time]

- focusing your awareness on your most intense feelings of anger
- while you are doing something physically active [and thus are aware of your physicality]
- which is safe [both for you and for others].

Why do it [Rationale]:

Paying attention to our feelings connects us to ourselves...to what is going on with us. But we don't like the feelings of being angry so we stuff those feelings until they spew out in an over-reaction to a situation or they fester and poison us and our relationships with others. Anger is simply the feeling we have when we are hurt by what we experience to be the choices of others. Anger is a natural and normal response to some events in our life. But we don't like what we do when we are angry. We don't like what others do when they are angry. We don't like how others treat us when we are angry. So we stuff it...and stuff it...and stuff it. And then, when we give ourselves permission to be angry and so reach for a pinch of anger, we instead pull up a fist-full.

The anger workout is a way to empty the anger bag so that we are not burdened by carrying all that around with us everywhere we go. It frees us to feel our anger and to express it appropriately.

What it will get you [Promises]:

We have spent many years learning to deny our anger and to stuff it. We have very few models for how to be angry in creative ways. Don't expect there to be a rapid shift in how you feel or express your anger. At the very least, you should expect to do the anger workout every day for a couple of weeks before you begin to see a change. But look for these three shifts in your feeling and behavior:

You become less likely to over-react. When you are angry, you will only be angry about the event that just happened and not all of the other events that it reminds you of that you haven't addressed.

You become more aware of being angry. While this may not seem like a good thing at first, you will be able to address issues before they become so overwhelming.

You become more creative with how you express your anger. You become more comfortable with the feelings of anger. This assists you in trying new ways of being versus going back to doing the same old strategies.

Suggestions:

Try to do the anger workout at the same time everyday. Build it into your routine. Many people find that doing it in the morning as a way to start the day works best, but find your own rhythm. Try to do the same activity at the same time. Walking is probably the best thing to do, but it is possible to do an anger workout doing anything that is physically active, even breathing. Just remember, it has to be something that is safe. Don't rehearse violence. Don't put yourself at risk.

Don't get lost in thinking about the events that make you angry or in trying to figure out what to do. Stay in the emotions and sensations as much as possible. Problem solving comes later. This is not about developing a strategy, but about becoming more connected to yourself.

This is not something to do only when you notice being angry. It is fine to take a walk to cool off when you are angry, but this is different. This is spending time every day to go and look for the anger, feel it as intensely as you can, and then put it down and go on with your day.

It may help to think of your anger as being like a big dog, a working dog. It has a job to do and it is happier when it knows what its job is and how to do it. The anger workout is the time each day when you work on training your anger dog. Take it out for a walk and be fully present to it, but in a way that you both know you are in charge. The problem is that sometimes your anger dog leads you around instead of you leading it around. It takes some time to train it but if you don't spend time with it everyday it will get restless and start chewing things up.

Some people have too much anger and some have too little. The anger workout serves to moderate anger one way or the other. People with too much anger harm their relationships with others, but people with too little anger get harmed by others. They can't take care of themselves. The anger workout helps them to know their own anger.

Anger is the feeling most of us are having when we are doing the strategies that we will later regret. But there are other feelings that can be a problem for us. You may want to do a workout around other feelings as well. In general it is best to try to feel the feelings you most don't want to feel. Those are the feelings that are the most repressed and are likely to do the most harm.

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