



ANXIETY RELIEF CENTER

Reduce Distress. Restore Well-Being. Repair Relationships.

Stopping the Cycle of Anger

Keep Rage from Ruining Your Most Important Relationships



Stop Repeating What Doesn't Work, Start Acting Smarter

"If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow." ~Chinese proverb

I think people feel silly or embarrassed by the idea of taking a time out when they are angry. I guess they think it seems childish. More than once in leading anger management and therapy sessions I've heard, "I'm a grown man/woman, do I really need to take a time out? This makes me look like I've got a problem."

Sometimes I reply in this way: watch any sporting event, in the final minutes on the game clock when the pressure is on, what do the coaches do? Take a time out. Multiple ones. Why? To plan the team's next plays. Because he or she knows that left alone, the players will act emotionally, not strategically or consciously. And that's when big mistakes happen. Mistakes you can't take back.

Then I ask, think about why you are in this session (or why you are reading this blog/handout). What mistakes did you make in anger that you would you like to take back? Sadly, you probably can't. But what if you could make sure they don't happen again?

That's what a time out is for. And it doesn't sound so childish, does it?

Benefits of Taking a Time Out

The main goal is to make sure you don't make things worse. Sounds minimal, but it takes practice. If you're doing a time out right, here's what you use the time for:

1. Calm yourself down before acting out
2. Give yourself time to think and solve problems

Another benefit: You get to show respect for the relationship because you're not storming out, acting intimidating, or yelling curse words. Taken properly, as you'll see below, a time out lets your partner know that, right now, you'd rather be careful than win or be right. The relationship means more than your ego or your anger.

Finally you show respect for yourself. How? Because this time you acted like an adult who managed your emotions rather than being managed by them.

How to do a Time Out

The process isn't hard, but it does take practice, conscious awareness and a commitment to make some new, simple -- but powerful -- choices.

Before taking a time out

1. **Have a conversation with your partner before** you ever take a time out. Show them this handout. Let them know the kinds of things you'll be doing, where you might go, etc., when you take a time out and that you will always be back as promised. Otherwise, the other person will think you are abandoning or avoiding the relationship.

2. **Timing is critical.** On a scale of one to ten, when is anger a problem for you? When do you start leaning in, raising your voice, or get intimidating and stop listening? At a 6 or a 7? Okay, then take a time out when your anger is at a 4 or a 5. Take it early, otherwise you might not take it at all.

Starting the time out

1. **Notice your body and your thoughts**...are they showing signs that you want to attack or defend? Are you getting emotionally caught up? Are you talking to yourself like you are a victim or in danger? As if what is happening is unacceptable? Or like the other is not a friend but a threat or an enemy?
2. **Stop talking and moving.**
3. **Tell the other** that you are getting angry and need to take a time out.
4. **Say how long** you'll be gone (*no more than an hour*) and say you want to talk about the problem again when you return.
5. **Do it alone.** This is not a time to talk to others, get advice or sympathy, or get talked into why you're right and he/she is wrong.

What to do during the time out

1. **Temporarily distract.** Some people have a lot of physical energy that surges. If that's you, you need to plan for this and how you'll get rid of it. But be sure you do this in a thoughtful way. You don't want to intimidate or scare others. Some ideas: 5-20 minutes of [calisthenics exercise](#), run, yell into a pillow in private. Don't drive a vehicle.

For others, simply distracting themselves works well. Music, prayer, video games, meditation, walk in nature or with their pet, can all be calming.

Below, list the things you might do on a time out.

2. **Think smarter.** Anger always arises with a thought that something unfair, wrong, dangerous or bad is about to happen or is happening. But if you are getting angry a lot, then it's probably what's going on in your head, not outside your head, that needs to be addressed.

So change your mental focus during the time out. A change in focus brings emotional relief and a sense of safety and control. Ask yourself the questions below. Keep these on a 3x5 card with you so you can use them when you need them:

*Is anger making things better or worse?
What will happen if I lose my temper?*

*What am I not getting that I really want right now?
Is the way I'm acting going to get me what I need?
Is the real problem my anger, or is it other feelings like hurt or fear?*

*Do I want a relationship that works, or do I just want to be right?
An hour from now, how do I want us and me to feel?*

*Have I listened or just been trying to control?
Am I trying to solve a problem, or is this just about pride?
Is a compromise possible?*

When you return

1. **Don't blame.** Rather than get the other person to admit that they're wrong, stay open to his or her perspective. Acknowledge they probably felt angry too. Try to see things from their point of view right off the bat. They'll be more likely to listen to you when they've been heard, and you'll find that it's hard to empathize *and* feel angry at the same time, so you'll feel better too.
2. **Express your feelings openly and respectfully.** Say how you feel without seeking an apology or trying to guilt trip the other person. Saying "I feel hurt and angry when (the problem) happens," is a lot different than saying, "You obviously don't care about me."
3. **Don't unload all your or past grievances.** Focus on the issue at hand and on getting through it so that you both feel okay at the end of the conversation. Giving a laundry list of complaints is not something anyone handles well. Address the other things at some other time.
4. **Focus on creating a solution.** Turn your attention toward solutions that you both can live with. If a solution isn't necessary, the above steps may be enough to get the relationship back on the right track.
5. **Take another time out if necessary.** It may seem like failure, but it's not. Every time you don't make things worse, it's success.

Learning From Your Anger

Taking a time out is a start to changing the way you respond to anger. It's also opens the door to start learning from your anger. Rather than respond to control or win, you learn to really look and know your needs, at how to take care of your relationships, to communicate with the persons you care about most, and to reconnect with your values to be the kind of person you aspire to be.

Worksheet: How do you know when it's time to take a time out?

Here's what I typically think or say to myself when I'm getting angry:

Here's what I notice is happening in my body when I'm getting angry:

Chest _____	Jaw _____
Arms _____	Hands _____
Fingers _____	Eyes _____
Head _____	Legs _____
Heart _____	Lungs _____
Stomach _____	Other _____

Here's what I start to do with my body when I'm getting angry:

When does anger get you in trouble on the ANGER RULER?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Calm										Verbal abuse and Physical violence

Subtract 2 from the number you circled. THAT'S when you take a time out.

About the Author

Aaron Deri is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MFC #48246) and founder of the Anxiety Relief Center in Ventura, California. His clinical experience includes private practice, outpatient community clinic, residential psychiatric treatment, and non-profit settings.



He has worked as a certified facilitator for domestic violence batterers treatment groups, has led traumatic grief bereavement groups for adult survivors of violent loss, anger management for teens, crisis intervention for domestic violence and sexual assault victims, is certified in child and adolescent crisis intervention (*Life Space Crisis Intervention*), and has completed an externship in couples Emotionally Focused Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Mr. Deri holds a Master of Science degree in Counseling from San Diego State University and is a published researcher.

The Anxiety Relief Center's mission is to help you: 1) overcome anxiety, anger and depression; 2) effectively and safely feel and manage intense negative emotions; and 3) create a rich, secure and full life. We do this by teaching skills that let you preserve and grow in your family relationships, careers and communities. Your world gets bigger and better as you rediscover love and joy in family, work, friendships, and in yourself.

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