

This factsheet aims to assist mentors in dealing with an angry mentee. It provides strategies for dealing with conflict situations and further resources to assist your mentee develop positive behaviours.



Introduction to Anger Management

Anger is “an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage (Spielberger in Ozhelp 2009). Anger is a normal and healthy human emotion, however, if it is not controlled or is misdirected, it becomes destructive leading to difficulties at home, at work and with friends.

When faced with an angry mentee the situation needs to be handled very carefully. Your continued relationship with your mentee can depend on how you manage conflict situations. The strength of your relationship will also determine

whether your mentee is going to be honest with you and listen to what you say. Always be nurturing your relationship (see Fact Sheet – Building Relationships).

If your mentee turns up to meet you and is angry or gets angry while you are together, it isn't the time to lecture yourself or them about anger management. Make sure you set aside time later to discuss how things could be managed better. This is vital as you will then have the opportunity to reflect and to try and promote change.

Dealing with Moderate Anger

1. Don't assume your mentee is angry because of something that you have done. It is important that you are not on the defensive but take the approach of understanding where the anger is coming from.
2. You need to manage the emotion so that you can then manage the issue.
3. You could say something to your Mentee such as ' Hi.. you seem upset about something today, is everything OK?'
4. Don't try to do any work until they are settled as it will most likely be unproductive, unless they tell you that is what they want to do. Some sessions can be spent entirely on managing emotions depending on your target group.
5. Your mentee may not open up straight away. You could try going for a walk, or shooting baskets which can help to get them talking. Depending on their reaction so far you can ask them if that is what they would like to do or just say, lets go for a walk. It is amazing what a bit of space can do for intense feelings.
6. Your mentee may just wish to vent and asking questions may increase their irritation. If this is the case then it is best to;
 - Listen and say nothing for the moment
 - Give them room to discharge their emotions
 - Respect their communication of feelings
 - Observe your reactions
 - Ask yourself what you are picking up from their communication
 - Separate feeling from content
 - Reflect back what they are saying
 - Clarify the issue and explore it if they are ready.

It is very important though that you stay calm yourself (or at least appear calm). Your voice needs to be low and what you say measured. As with all people, but particularly young people, they pick up on our emotion and respond accordingly. You also need to check your non-verbal cues.



Dealing with Extreme Anger

In dealing with extreme anger you need to manage the emotion only to avert immediate crises.

1. Non - Verbal Signals

- Stop Everything
- Give space
- Offer calm eye contact and open posture (not crossed arms or hands on hips)
- Avoid quick, defensive or aggressive gestures

2. Verbal Signals

- Let the person know you accept that they are angry, yes, right, you are angry, you are upset
- Ask an open question - What is it? Tell me about it, I want to understand?
- Verbally reflect you are 'getting it'.

3. Additional strategies

- Take a deep breath and try to relax shoulders
- Move back, assess escape route, if safe, sit down
- Do not argue
- Judge the behaviour not the person. There is a reason they are



- Do not take criticism personally
- Let the irrational remarks go
- Allow the person to set the pace
- Avoid excess smiling or patronising remarks (don't say 'calm down')
- Do not make promises or lie - undertake to try and help resolve the issue.

(Dealing with moderate anger and extreme anger are adapted from information provided by the Department of Psychiatry, LGH).

Each mentee will react differently because of their own patterns of behaviour, the way that they have been responded to in the past, and their individual level of control. Be very aware of needing to change tack if their anger increases. There is no prescriptive response but a variety of strategies you can try.



What to do after your mentee settles down



Once your mentee has settled down there may not be much of your session left. Spend the rest of your time just being together and nurturing the relationship. You could let them know that next time you meet it might be good to have a chat about what happened so that they know you will be bringing it up again.

In the mean time have a look at some of the resources that are listed to give you an idea about how you might approach teaching your mentee more productive ways of managing their anger. Much of the information deals with recognising when there is a problem, indicators of anger, and how thoughts about a situation can create the emotions that can fire you up.

It is also important to look at how other's around your young person manage their anger. You cannot do much about changing them BUT you can provide options for your mentee. It may also prompt you as a mentor to examine your own responses.

References & Further Information

- **Managing your anger** - what is anger? When is it a problem and how do we manage it? - www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/12.5_12.asp
- **Why do people get angry?** www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=257
- **What is anger?** - What are the signs and causes of anger and how it is treated - www.mentalhealth.asn.au/resources/anger_management.htm
- **Anger, how it effects people** - The unhealthy side effects of anger and how to deal you're your anger in a positive way—www.disability.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Anger_how_it_affects_people?open
- **Controlling anger before it controls you**, How to deal with your anger, strategies for keeping anger at bay <http://www.apa.org/topics/controlanger.html>

References:

- Ozhelph Foundation - Workplace Life Skills Tool Box
- [Comment Trainers Manual](#)
- Anger: Responding helpfully to children and Young People who are angry
- www.handsonscotland.co.uk/topics/anger/bullying.html
- Children, Youth and Womens Health Service. Young Adult Health. www.cyh.com.healthtopics

