

## ANGER PRE-TEST ANSWERS

Compare the answers below with how you answered the questions on the *Anger Pre-Test*. If the answers that follow don't make much sense to you, talk to a counselor or someone else who can help you understand them.

- 1) **FALSE.** Anger is a normal and natural human emotion. It is how you respond to the anger you experience that determines whether it becomes a helpful or a destructive force in your life.
- 2) **TRUE.** Anger as an emotion is a fact of life. It exists on a continuum from mild annoyance and frustration to feeling rageful and completely “out of control.” Some people get angry less frequently but they still get frustrated and angry at times.
- 3) **TRUE.** Recent and ongoing research indicates that anger, particularly when it leads to a hostile and cynical attitude, can be very damaging to your physical well-being and can play a part in high cholesterol, heart attacks, strokes, and other significant medical problems.
- 4) **FALSE.** Research indicates that, especially for people who are prone to become disrespectfully and explosively angry, ventilation (e.g. yelling and screaming) and catharsis (i.e. acting out your anger, e.g. hitting a wall, slamming cupboards or a door, or throwing things) only escalate you more and, in fact, train you to handle your anger poorly with people in other life situations.
- 5) **FALSE.** If you are explosive and disrespectful with others, it is unlikely that they will actually be open and honest with you about how they are really feeling. In fact, yelling and other forms of verbal abuse push people away and destroy safety and trust. Often, the anger serves as a “cover” and hides other thoughts and feelings that, if they were actually shared, could actually increase the potential for trust, caring, and intimacy in your relationships.
- 6) **FALSE.** It is a myth that angry people can never change. Society frequently tells us this, but it is just not true. Even explosive, volatile, and abusive people can learn to respond differently to their anger cues and triggers, change the negative attitudes that contribute to their disrespectful anger, and make better choices when they are feeling frustrated and angry. This change process takes ongoing work and effort but it can be done if you make the decision to do it.
- 7) **FALSE.** There are many ways to handle anger responsibly and productively. Sometimes you may want to talk directly and assertively to the other person who is involved with your anger. Sometimes you may want to talk to someone else about the anger you are feeling to help you figure out what is actually going on. Sometimes you may want to look inside yourself and think about whether your anger has to do with some current life stressors or past life experiences (you might even decide that it really has little to do with the person you are feeling angry with in the present). Sometimes you may want to handle the anger by on your own in a completely different way (e.g. getting some aerobic exercise, looking at it from a different perspective, distracting yourself). There is no one “right” way to handle your anger effectively.
- 8) **FALSE.** In the past, it was believed that human beings, like animals, experienced an inevitable buildup of internal tension and frustration and that aggressive impulses had to be discharged periodically or they would build to the point where they explode spontaneously and uncontrollably. These hypotheses have been disproved, however, and more recent research indicates that even animals need specific environmental triggers in order to act out in an aggressive way.

**9) FALSE.** It is unrealistic to believe that you will always respond to your anger in a completely calm and measured manner. Expressing anger often involves intensity, increased volume, and firmness in the way you say things. These do not necessarily mean disrespect, hostility, cruelty, intimidation, or abuse. The other person's reaction to your expression of anger is important, however, and can move you in a helpful direction in terms of how to effectively deal with your anger in that particular relationship.

**10) FALSE.** A large study about women and anger by Sandra Thomas in her book *Use Your Anger: A Woman's Guide to Empowerment* (in the *Reading List* at the end of this workbook) reported that women frequently get angry, most often at partners (whether or not they are the actual source of the anger) or at co-workers. The younger a woman, the more likely she was to express it directly (women over 55 reported the least anger). Anger is a part of living for both women and men.

**11) FALSE.** In fact, anger can be a helpful motivator and a catalyst to take constructive action if you respond to the anger you feel in a positive and productive manner.

**12) FALSE.** People often use this excuse to justify disrespectful or abusive behavior toward others. But the truth is that, although people may "feel" out of control, they are continually making clear (though perhaps not conscious prior to counseling) choices and decisions about how they will respond to their anger. In reality, people are never truly "out of control" unless they have a complete break from reality like a person might experience if he or she has a major mental illness like paranoid schizophrenia and has periods of actually being psychotic and completely "out of touch" with reality.

**13) FALSE.** Often, abusive and explosive people appear to others as if they are powerful, confident, "sure of themselves," and "in charge" of their lives. But the reality is that people who allow their volatile or seething anger to control them and their interactions with others actually feel insecure and inadequate underneath this facade. People who basically feel good about themselves do not have a need to try to assume power over others and put themselves "above" other people. Disrespectful and explosive people actually become other peoples' puppets because they are simply reacting to others' behaviors rather than living by the "game plan" they would like to have for themselves in how they live their lives.

**14) FALSE.** Anger is a normal human emotion. Cynicism and hostility are negative and destructive attitudes which color the way that we look at and respond to other people and the world around us. These attitudes, if they become your primary way of dealing with life, eventually lead to lashing out at others verbally or physically or pulling inside yourself, withdrawing, and "stuffing" your anger. Both these behaviors are harmful to ourselves and our relationships with others.

**15) TRUE.** Stress, and the "fight or flight" response that we as human beings are "hard-wired" to experience, is always a part of our becoming angry, especially if we are prone to label or interpret this physical response with a negative conclusion about why the physical sensations are there in the first place.

**16) FALSE.** Put-downs, name-calling, and cussing and swearing are verbal abuse and are always hurtful and destructive in human relationships and have the potential to create fear, intimidation, and emotional distance in those around us.

**17) TRUE.** There is always an escalation, a buildup of stress and tension, that precedes an outburst of disrespectful, explosive, or abusive anger. It is critical to begin to notice, identify, and respond more effectively to the different kinds of triggers that are a part of this escalation process. These triggers can include minor aggravations over the course of a day or a week (e.g. getting stuck in traffic, your partner disagreeing with you, your children not listening to you). But escalations also involve the way that you

look at yourself, other people, and the world around you which generally comes as a result of painful, shaming, and traumatic experiences early in life. This way of looking at life literally “sets you up” to experience stress, frustration, and anger more frequently and more intensely in your adult years.

**18) TRUE.** Taking a time-out, which means temporarily leaving a situation where you notice yourself becoming more and more tense, angry, and escalated, is an important first step in learning to handle anger more effectively. A time-out is not a “magic cure-all,” but, if it is used in a productive and respectful way, this strategy can give you the opportunity to figure out what is going on within you, can help you calm down, and can lead to returning to discuss the issue without saying or doing something that you will only end up regretting at a later time.

**19) FALSE.** Although sharing your anger with someone directly is certainly one option and is important to do at times, talking it out with another person who is not involved with your anger and working it out within yourself and then “letting it go” are other ways to address it. There are many times when our anger may have little, or absolutely nothing, to do with that other person. If you are feeling anxious, tense, preoccupied and unhappy about some other situation in your life, your partner (or others) can become a convenient “dumping ground” for your anger and these other feelings that you are experiencing (i.e., on another day, when you are feeling “pretty good” about yourself and more “centered,” the same behavior by the other person may not have much effect on you at all).

**20) TRUE.** Anger often arises when we feel that things around us are “out of control.” A desire to exert control over people and situations around us is an important part of why we get angry, how angry we get, and how long we stay angry. This is especially true with explosive or abusive anger when we are, in fact, often able to control what happens around us on a short-term basis (i.e. if we blow up, people will do what we want for awhile). The long-term result of control, disrespect, and abuse, however, is driving away the very people whom we want to be close to and the eventual destruction of those relationships.

**21) FALSE.** No one “deserves” to be shamed, punished, disrespected, or abused. It will not work effectively to change their behavior over time and it creates the possibility that you will end up experiencing significant negative consequences for yourself or in the relationship as a result.

**22) TRUE.** Your thoughts and what you are saying to yourself at any given moment are a powerful part of escalating yourself and becoming more tense and angry **OR** calming yourself down and finding effective ways to handle difficult and frustrating situations. Your ways of thinking about yourself and the world around you create your reality and your thoughts, all by themselves, can powerfully contribute to significant escalations even when there is no external stressor at all.

**23) TRUE.** Explosive and hurtful anger creates fear, intimidation, mistrust, and a lack of safety. In a disrespectful and abusive atmosphere, those close to you and other people will be much less likely to take emotional risks and to share openly and honestly with one another.

**24) FALSE.** Even if your anger is “justified” (i.e. if you have accurately perceived that someone or something is really “out to get you”), it is still not okay to become hurtful, disrespectful, and explosive. This is not an effective and useful way to address the ongoing issue or problem that exists between you and the other person and will not help you truly resolve the issue.

**25) TRUE.** Although not everyone from abusive families becomes disrespectful and explosive themselves, this is the primary place where we learn how to experience and express our anger and this is a important reason that many adults do, in fact, become disrespectful and abusive in their own lives.