

HOW TO TELL WHETHER YOU HAVE REALLY CHANGED THE WAY THAT YOU EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESS YOUR ANGER

One of the most critical aspects of truly changing what you do with your anger involves having some specific criteria that you and others can use to determine whether you are actually making progress and transforming this part of yourself. Below are some very concrete and pragmatic ways that you can use to measure what you are doing with the anger you experience. See if you can think of others as well that will be important to you in your own healing and recovery process.

You realize that anger, that normal and natural human emotion is very different from your disrespectful anger expressions; your negative, cynical, and hostile attitudes; and your hurtful and punishing behaviors. You also realize that these distortions of anger the emotion arise from within you and have to do with your own inner feelings of self-doubt and insecurity and an unrealistic vision of the world around you that you have developed through your childhood and your life experiences.

You realize that a strong desire to control is underneath your negative and destructive attitudes and behaviors and you work hard to recognize and intervene in your desire to control people and situations around you.

You become more aware of your shame and the negative self-talk that it generates and you work actively to decrease and intervene in these before they contribute to your becoming controlling, disrespectful, and punishing with others. You also begin to notice that your negative, victimized, cynical, entitled, and hostile thoughts are less frequent and less intense.

You understand what abuse is and you can talk about and admit openly and honestly to all your punishing, disrespectful, controlling, and abusive behavior in the past with your partner and others.

You acknowledge clearly and unconditionally that disrespectful and punishing behavior is wrong and is not the way you want to treat the important people in your life.

You acknowledge that how you express your anger is a clear choice and that you were, at no point, “out of control” either in the past or in the present.

You accept fully and completely the consequences of your hurtful, punishing, and disrespectful attitudes and actions toward others.

You recognize and acknowledge the destructive impact your controlling, hurtful, and disrespectful behavior has had on your partner(s), your children (if you have any), and others and you develop and show empathy and compassion for the people you have hurt by your attitudes and actions.

You make clear and concrete amends for the damage you have caused by what you have done in the past and for mistakes that you have made in how you have treated others.

You learn to recognize and monitor your anger triggers and cues and your personal pattern of escalation in your daily life.

You recognize and acknowledge your feelings in the moment and handle them in a respectful way with your partner, your children, and others in a consistent and ongoing manner, which includes taking respectful time-outs whenever necessary.

You develop positive and respectful attitudes and behaviors toward other people to replace the disrespectful and hurtful ones you are working to decrease.

You are willing to accept full and complete responsibility for your past, present, and future actions. This means that you recognize your tendency to blame your partner and others for your feelings and actions at times and intervene in this tendency that you have whenever necessary.

You are willing to listen to your partner and others, are willing to accept feedback and criticism, and are able to recognize and intervene in your tendencies to interrupt and become reactive and defensive. You show a genuine interest in your partner by asking questions of her or him and then truly wanting to hear and working to be open to what they have to say to you.

You make a clear and genuine commitment to working an ongoing anger management program so that you will not repeat the disrespectful and punishing behaviors you have done in the past. Then you actually follow through with this commitment you have made in your day-to-day living. This means continuing to learn about yourself from a variety of sources and sharing these insights with your partner and the other important people in your life.

You think about and notice the impact you are having on other people when you are angry, you listen to others' feedback about how you are actually affecting them, and then you take this into account when deciding how to share your anger and other feelings with them in the future.

You realize that anger and conflict are natural parts of an intimate relationship and you are willing to listen to your partner, even when she or he is angry with you or critical of you. You work hard to effectively move through conflict even when your partner is angry or sees things differently from the way that you do. You start to understand that your partner truly is a different and separate person and has a right to his or her unique perspective and identity.

When you make a mistake in how you express your anger in the present (as you undoubtedly will, at times), you will see them clearly within a reasonable period of time, take full and clear responsibility for what you have said or done, apologize and make amends, and work actively to learn from the mistake you have made so you don't do it again in the future.

You demonstrate in an ongoing and consistent way, over an extended period of time, that you are truly changing this part of yourself by responding to your partner, even when you are angry with her/him, with respect, caring, support, affirmation, empathy, and ultimately, love.

You clearly understand that “anger management” is really “life management” and you identify and follow through with a variety of ways to take good care of yourself in the broadest possible context of living your life.

You clearly realize and accept that intervening in your punishing and disrespectful behavior takes daily focus and effort and is a lifelong process and you continue to stay aware of and work at this in an ongoing way.