

Handout 1.3: Is Anger Worth the Hangover? Strategies for Letting Go

Client Initials: _____ Date: _____

1. If I get angry about what someone else did (or continues to do), that person is still controlling my feelings; that is, they are still able to make me feel bad.

Do I want this person to be able to control how I feel?

2. Anger and resentment do more damage to the “container” in which they are stored than to the “object” on which they are poured.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

3. In some ways, getting angry or resenting someone is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

4. To forgive means “to pardon.” To pardon means “to release from punishment.” If I pardon a guilty person, it does not excuse the person’s crimes or suggest that they did not occur. It only means that continued punishment is not worth the energy and cost it would require.

Would I want to spend the rest of my life as my ex-partner’s jailer or warden? What kind of life would that be?

5. What am I going to do tomorrow? Read the newspaper. Go to work. Clean the house. Go shopping. Have a little fun. And spend ten minutes being angry at someone? Would this be a good use of my time? Would I put “spending time being angry” on my daily to-do list? Will getting angry improve my day or my future? If it’s only

going to make me feel worse, I need to take it off of my to-do list. If getting angry isn't going to improve my day, getting angry is not in my best interest.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

6. Letting go of anger isn't some kind of mystical process; actually, it's quite straightforward. Letting go of anger simply involves a decision. Anger requires rumination. It requires a memory or thought about unfair treatment, often accompanied by thoughts of wanting to hurt someone or see them suffer. In other words, anger is a choice. And because it's a choice, anger is controllable. I can choose to stop being angry. If I make a decision to stop ruminating or obsessing about unfairness, I will start breaking the anger habit. Change the subject! It doesn't belong in my head.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

7. "Why would anyone be so cruel?" "Why is the system so unfair?" "Why me?" Immediately after asking why I or a loved one has been treated unfairly, it's important to quickly ask myself a second question—a "what" question: "What am I going to do about it?" If the answer is "nothing" (to improve the situation), I'm wasting my time. Make a decision to change the subject and stop ruminating or obsessing in a way that just makes *me* feel bad. Anyway, there is only one good answer to those kinds of "why" questions. Damn bad luck! What happened may have been tragic, but I didn't deserve it. Now that I know why, I can stop asking why.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

8. "There's no justice! It's not fair. I was set up—deceived! How dare he (she, they)! How could anyone be so cruel? Why would someone do something like that? Senseless! It never should have happened! Pig. Scum. Low-life bastard! I hate his guts. I hope he rots in hell!" Feel better now? Not likely. Using emotionally charged words that convey anger and hostility only makes me feel bad and doesn't solve anything. When thinking about a perpetrator or some injustice, I will feel less bad if I use neutral or descriptive words rather than evaluative or judgmental words—if I talk about it like it's on the front page rather than the editorial page.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

9. Do I want some past perpetrator or abuser to control how I feel? Of course not! On the other hand, if I get angry when I think about him or what he did, that person is still controlling how I feel. If he were watching me, he would be laughing and thinking, "See? I can still get a rise out of her. I can still jerk her around and push her buttons!" If he can no longer get a rise out of me, I have taken my power back. My goal may be something like this: Let's say that the person I've been mad at walks right between me and my therapist. My therapist asks, "Who was that?" and I answer, "Who was who?"

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

10. Directing anger at others antagonizes them, alienates them, makes them angry too, and escalates conflict. It increases the chances they will say something hostile in return and decreases the chances that they'll do what I want them to do. If my goal in communicating is to piss people off or make them upset, by all means, I should get angry. On the other hand, if my goal is to get someone to do what I want them to do, I may want to express my unpleasant feelings as distress, rather than as anger. For example, I can say "I'm frustrated," "I'm upset," or "My feelings are hurt." Expressing negative feelings as distress is much more likely to elicit empathy and compassion and not anger. It's always worthwhile to think about what I want to accomplish in my communication before I express anger.

What do I believe about this statement and how is it relevant for me?

Overall comments on how these strategies for letting go of anger can have a positive effect on my future happiness or quality of life:
