

# Managing Conflict and Handling Anger

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- Activity 12-1 **What's New?**  10-15 minutes
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- Activity 12-2 **Why Do We Get So Mad at Each Other?**  15-20 minutes
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- Activity 12-3 **The Aggression Volcano**  
or
- Activity 12-4 **Recognizing Anger Clues**  30-35 minutes
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- Activity 12-5 **“Keeping Your Cool”**  25-35 minutes
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- Activity 12-6 **Feedback/Wrap-up**  10-15 minutes

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## **Key Concepts**

- Conflicts are normal; they arise in all relationships. When people have conflicts in their relationships, they often become angry with one another.
- Anger is an emotion that is normal and natural throughout life. When people get angry, they need to find acceptable ways to deal with it.
- Violence in relationships — using physical force to injure or abuse — is an unacceptable, illegal way to express anger. Expressing anger through violent behavior usually has negative consequences.
- Understanding and recognizing the causes of stress can keep a person from “exploding” or acting self-destructively.
- Learning to recognize anger “clues” reduces the buildup of emotion that can lead to violent behavior.
- People can use various strategies to resolve conflicts without turning to violence.

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## Materials Checklist

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### Activity 12-2 Why Do We Get So Mad at Each Other?

- Handout, “Conflict Inventory”
  - Pencils (for everyone)
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### Activity 12-3 The Aggression Volcano

- Handouts, “Stress Reduction Tips,” “Case Studies: Stress Situations,” and “The Aggression Volcano”
- Newsprint
- Marker

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**Activity 12-4 Recognizing Anger Clues**

- Handout, “Understanding Anger Signals and Behavior”
- Pencils (for everyone)
- Newsprint
- Marker

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**Activity 12-5 “Keeping Your Cool”**

- Leader Resource, “Keeping Your Cool”
- Handout, “Anger Management Skills”

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**Planning Note:** This session on “Managing Conflict and Handling Anger” is very important for the men in the peer support group. It is likely that many of them have had difficulty expressing anger appropriately and may even have become abusive at some time in their lives. It also is likely that they have experienced violence in their families and communities or through contact with police. As the men discuss situations that have been stressful or volatile, they may need help managing the anger that gets stirred up. Remind the group of the ground rules concerning violence, and at all times help the participants to maintain control.

One way to keep the session productive is to use a timekeeper and limit each man’s speaking to 5 or 10 minutes. (You could also have each man schedule his time, writing his name and how long he will speak on newsprint — again using a timekeeper to monitor things.) Limiting and scheduling the time that each father speaks can keep the men from becoming overwhelmed by their situations and may help prevent blowups. Time limits also keep everyone from speaking at the same time, which helps to maintain order. Finally, you can ask the men for their cooperation, recognizing that it may be hard for them to “keep their cool.” Emphasize the importance of giving everyone a chance to speak, and remind them of the need to stick to the group’s rules about violence or threats of violence.

It may be helpful to invite organizations that specialize in conflict management or alternatives to violence to assist you in planning or leading this session. If it appears that any of the fathers are having extreme difficulty dealing with anger in their relationships, arrange to provide follow-up for them after the group, and refer them to the case manager or whoever is responsible for counseling services.

“Keeping Your Cool” (Activity 12-5) gives the men an opportunity to learn and practice nonviolent ways to resolve conflict and manage anger, and it is crucial that ample time be set aside for this. If you do not have at least 90 minutes to conduct today’s session, you may have to omit “Why Do We Get So Mad at Each Other?” (Activity 12-2) and select either “The Aggression Volcano” (Activity 12-3) or “Recognizing Anger Clues” (Activity 12-4) for use with “Keeping Your Cool” (with 10 to 15 minutes left for “Feedback/Wrap-up”). An alternative is to extend the time for this session to allow you to cover all the activities. However, it is not a good idea to end this session without giving the men an opportunity to learn new ways to handle their anger.

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## What's New?

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**Planning Note:** Tailor the following questions to ask the fathers about specific ideas and skills that they reviewed in Session 11 concerning male-female relationships.

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### ▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would somebody please summarize what we talked about last time?
2. What part of last week's discussion of male-female relationships had the greatest impact on you? Why?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about women?
4. Did you talk about the last session with any women in your life? What was the conversation like?
5. What insights did you gain from the last session that may improve your relationships with women?

Did you try any of last week's suggestions about how to improve relationships between men and women? If so, which did you try? How did they work?

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## Why Do We Get So Mad at Each Other?

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**Purpose:** To help each father identify the sources of conflicts between himself and the mother of his children.

**Materials:** Handout, “Conflict Inventory”; pencils (for everyone).

**Time:** 15-20 minutes.

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**Planning Note:** Use this activity if most of the fathers have some contact with their children’s mother. Those who do not have contact may either respond to the checklist based on problems that arose when they *did* have contact (which may help them reflect on what went wrong) or anticipate what might cause conflict if they do reestablish contact. Since most of the fathers probably have had some contact with the mother of their children, this activity should help them evaluate what went wrong in their efforts to get along.

In conducting this activity, it is important to emphasize how *children* are affected when their parents have conflict over issues relating to them. If most of the fathers *do not* have contact with their children’s mother, start this session with “The Aggression Volcano” (Activity 12-3).

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**Procedure:** Explain that today’s session deals with sources of conflict in men’s lives and ways to resolve conflicts nonviolently. This first activity requires the fathers to identify situations that cause conflicts in their relationship with their children’s mother. Begin by saying that there are different levels of conflict. Then make the following points in your own words:

- Conflict in and of itself is OK. Conflicts can help us learn things about ourselves and others.
- Any two people will sometimes disagree, and everyone feels anger at times. However, some relationships have too much conflict. If two people argue most of the time, it’s a sign of serious problems in their relationship.

- Violence never improves a relationship; violence destroys a relationship.
- Some people cross an important line when they get angry; they become violent.

**Distribute** the handout “Conflict Inventory.” Tell each participant to put check marks next to the types of conflicts he has had with his children’s mother and to add any unlisted situations under the heading “Other Conflicts.” Spend a few minutes discussing the participants’ responses.

**Ask** for volunteers to describe one personal experience of a conflict situation with their children’s mother. What happened as a result of the conflict? (Was there a verbal argument, a fist fight, a breaking off of communication?) Exactly how did the father *feel* as a result of this conflict?

**Discuss** the activity by asking the following questions.

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### ▼ Discussion Questions

1. Conflict is usually caused by both parties. What part do you play in creating conflicts with your children’s mother? What part does she play?
2. How does your status as a noncustodial father contribute to conflicts with your children’s mother? (For example, pressure to pay child support, limited visitation rights, interference from grandparents, etc.)
3. How do these conflict situations affect your children? What do your children learn from watching you and their mother deal with conflicts?
4. What kinds of conflicts have you had with bosses or other coworkers? How have you handled these conflicts?
5. What other “red-flag” situations (or people) get you angry or cause conflict in your life?

## Conflict Inventory

I have conflicts with my children's mother when . . .

- 1. We disagree about how to discipline our children.
- 2. She disagrees with how I think things should be done.
- 3. I want to visit my children more often than she likes.
- 4. She feels that I should pay more child support.
- 5. I bring my girlfriend around her or my children.
- 6. She dates other men.
- 7. I challenge the influence of her parents over the care of my children.
- 8. Her mother or father criticizes and disrespects me.
- 9. I hang out with my friends.
- 10. I date other women.
- 11. We don't communicate on a regular basis.
- 12. I fall behind on my child support payments.
- 13. I show up late to visit my kids.
- 14. I don't bring my kids back at the time she wants me to.
- 15. I question how she spends the money I give her.
- 16. She tells my kids things about me that I don't like.
- 17. I drink or use drugs around my children.
- 18. I show up without letting her know that I'm coming to visit my children.
- 19. I move in with a new girlfriend.
- 20. I tell my kids things about her that she doesn't like.



Other Conflicts (Fill in the blanks):

- 21. \_\_\_\_\_
- 22. \_\_\_\_\_
- 23. \_\_\_\_\_
- 24. \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Aggression Volcano

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**Purpose:** To develop an understanding of how stress is caused and how stress affects our behavior and our life.

**Materials:** Handouts, “Case Studies: Stress Situations” and “The Aggression Volcano”; Leader Resource, “Stress Reduction Tips”; newsprint and marker.

**Time:** 30-35 minutes.

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**Planning Note:** Write the following on newsprint, and post it at the beginning of the activity:

- **Stress:** Physical, mental, or emotional tensions that can arise in response to a wide variety of things, including things that happen in daily life.
- **Stressors:** Whatever happens that causes stress. *Internal stressors* come from inside (such as wanting desperately to get a job). *External stressors* come from outside (such as finding out that your child is very sick).

Copy the diagram from the handout “The Aggression Volcano” on newsprint, to be posted later.

This activity requires the men to recall situations in which their anger was out of control. Reliving these situations may generate renewed anger at the persons who upset them. If any participant is visibly upset, stop the activity, ask him to discuss what is upsetting him, acknowledge how hard this is, and spend a few minutes helping him deal with his anger. If necessary, tell the participant that you will talk with him after the session, and refer him to the appropriate person for counseling. Remind the entire group that today’s last activity will give suggestions for managing anger.

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**Procedure:** Begin by explaining the newsprint definitions of *stress* and *stressors*. Ask the group, “Is there anyone here who has never felt stressed?” Expect that most of the men have experienced some form of stress. Then ask the following questions: “Have any of you felt at times that you were under stress because you are a noncustodial father? What are some examples of such stressors?” List all responses on newsprint (and expect comments like these):

- Dealing with child support enforcement is hard.
- Raising children takes money.
- Dealing with my children’s mother is no picnic.
- Everyone expects too much of me.
- I’m worried about the next man she’ll be with.
- Jobs that pay enough to support my kids are hard to find.
- I want to spend more time with my kids but I can’t.

**Distribute** the handout “Case Studies: Stress Situations.” Select at least three case studies to discuss with the men, helping them to identify the stressors in each situation. Read aloud each case study before discussing it, and then ask the following questions:

- How do you feel about this situation?
- How real is this situation?
- What stress is this guy feeling?
- How is he handling his stress?
- Do you think his behavior is reasonable or not? Why?

**The discussion** of case studies should take approximately 20 to 25 minutes. Then say something like, “We have seen that a number of things can cause us to feel stress. The case studies showed how stressors can build up to a point where they cloud our judgment and can even make us explode.”

**Now**, post the drawing of “The Aggression Volcano.” Ask someone to describe a volcano and how it works. Direct the group to the bottom of the drawing, where the first level is simple *stress*. Point out that the buildup of stress and anxiety can result in what is called *multiple stress* (second level from bottom). Multiple stress happens

when *more than one thing is causing strain or tension* in your life. (For example, maybe you lose your job, get put out of your apartment, and break up with your girlfriend all in the same week.)

**The middle** level of stress is *physical problems*, such as headaches, backaches, ulcers, and high blood pressure. The next-higher level is called *overload stress*, which can cause drinking, drugging, and irritability. (Give examples of irritability, such as slamming doors, or “cursing out” everyone who comes near you.)

**Ask the men**, “With all that buildup, what do you think is going to happen?” (Look for comments like “blow up” or “explode.”)

**Then say**, “A person is now at the top of the volcano, at the *aggression peak*.” Ask the men, “What do you think happens when someone reaches the aggression peak?” (Responses should include extreme anger, jealousy, suicide, abandoning the family, child or partner abuse, drinking, and drugging.)

**Explain** that such responses at the aggression peak come about when people don’t have ways to deal with stress as it is building up. Give each participant a copy of the handout “The Aggression Volcano.” Ask each father to think about a recent situation in which he may have reached (or was near) the aggression peak. When everyone has a situation in mind, ask the men to start at the bottom of the Aggression Volcano and to work upward, identifying the stressors they felt at each level. Instruct them to write down next to each level of the Aggression Volcano what happened, who was involved, and what they were feeling.

**When** everyone has finished, ask for volunteers to share their experiences with the group. As the volunteer tracks his progress through the Aggression Volcano, ask participants to suggest different ways that he might have handled his problem and reduced his stress at each level. Remind the group to be supportive of the father who is sharing his experiences; urge the men to offer constructive suggestions.

**Lead** the group in a discussion of ways to prevent and reduce stress, listing all comments on newsprint. Remind the fathers that there are ways to *prevent* stress from building up in the first place, as well as ways to *reduce* stress after they are “stressed out.” Give each participant a copy of the handout “Stress Reduction Tips” to suggest ways to prevent or reduce stress and to avoid the aggression peak. Close the activity by asking each participant to state one thing he has learned about stress.

## Stress Reduction Tips

### To *prevent* stress:

- Eat right.
- Listen to music.
- Pay attention to how things affect you. (For example, listen to your body's signals when you start to get upset.)
- Identify the things that are truly important, and focus on them (for example, your children, your family, friends).
- Talk with someone about any problems you have; deal with problems early.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take time out to visit friends, have fun, and relax.

### To *reduce* stress:

- Identify what's bothering you.
- Think about possible ways that you can react and about their possible consequences.
- Take deep breaths, and think about something pleasant.
- Do deep muscle relaxation exercise (squeeze large muscles — such as shoulders — for a count of 10, then release).
- Exercise to work off steam.
- Take a walk to clear your head.
- Talk about your problems with someone.

### To *avoid* the aggression peak:

- Find someone who can help you regain control (such as your best friend, a family member, or a counselor).
- Leave the situation (take time out) before you do something you'll regret.
- Find a safe place to cool down.
- Take deep breaths while counting to 10.
- Seek help.

## Case Studies: **Stress Situations**

**SITUATION 1:** Joe has recently lost his job and has just been told by his girlfriend, Anna, that she is pregnant. He immediately says to her, “I thought you were taking the pill or something.” An argument starts, and Joe, in a burst of emotion, slaps Anna and storms out of the house. He then sees a man run into an alley after being chased by the police. An officer in a patrol car pulls up beside Joe and asks, “Hey, did you just see somebody run down that alley?” Joe ignores the officer and keeps walking. The officer then says, “Hey, man, didn’t you hear me?” Joe then responds, “I ain’t seen no damn body!” The officer gets out of the patrol car and yells: “Stop! You want to curse me, huh? I’ll show you something. Put your hands up against the wall, and spread your legs.” After frisking Joe, the police officer handcuffs him and takes him to the station.

**SITUATION 2:** Tico lives in Los Angeles, California. He is 22 and has just become a father. He is with his girlfriend, Helena, visiting the baby when four of his friends drop by her house. They yell: “Hey, Tico, come on, man. Let’s go hang out. You don’t need to be taking care of no baby, man. Come on! What are you, a chump, man?” Helena tells Tico to ignore his friends and asks him to stay with her and the baby as he is supposed to. Tico says: “Look, I know this is my baby, but don’t expect me to be hanging around here all the time. I’m still young and still like to hang with my friends. In fact, that’s what I’m going to do.” Tico grabs his coat and heads for the door. Helena asks him where he is going and when he will be back. Tico responds: “Don’t ask me where I’m going. Just because you had my baby, don’t think you control me.”

**SITUATION 3:** Fred is a responsible guy. He is doing well in a training program for auto mechanics, which he expects to finish in about two months. His father died recently, and because Fred is the oldest in his household, he feels a lot of pressure to care for his mother and two younger brothers. Fred begins to miss school and eventually drops out to take a job hauling trash, but wishes he could earn more money. At night, Fred has a lot of trouble sleeping. One day he goes to work an hour

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late. His supervisor comes down real hard on him about being late, which Fred believes is unnecessary. An argument starts, and soon Fred and his supervisor are shoving each other. Feeling he is losing this pushing match, Fred picks up a brick and hits his supervisor on the head, knocking him out. Someone calls the police, and Fred is arrested for assault and battery.

**SITUATION 4:** Elliot has two children from two different relationships. He is living with his younger child, three-year-old Nicki, and her mother. He only occasionally sees his nine-year-old son, Kenneth; the boy has refused to visit him for three years because of Elliot's serious problem with drugs. For the past year, Elliot has been struggling to pay child support for his two kids. Since meeting Nicki's mom, though, he has been working hard to stay sober. He attends meets of AA and NA a few nights each week, and yet he still thinks a lot about getting high. He has also been doing seasonal work as a roofer, but work is slow right now. Recently, Elliot got a letter demanding that he appear in court to answer an old summons from the days when he was getting high. In court, he was told that he would have to pay a \$500 fine or spend two months in prison, and he was given two weeks to come up with the money. Elliot left the court and headed straight for a liquor store, where he bought a bottle of bourbon.

**SITUATION 5:** Carl lives with his five-year-old daughter and her mother, Sheri. He has been working to support his family, but the work isn't steady and pays only the minimum wage. For years Carl had been "hustling" drugs, but he stopped after he met Sheri. He says that he'll "take the short dollar that's long on peace of mind, rather than the long dollar that's short on safety." Although he often sees the guys he used to hang with, Carl tries hard to avoid them, because he doesn't want to be lured back into the "trade." His mother recently got very sick, and they weren't sure that she would live. Carl felt obligated to help out, and so he let his three younger sisters move in with him. With all the extra mouths he now has to feed, he has been looking for a second job, but hasn't had any luck. He has been staying away from home more and more, because he can't stand being around all the kids. He has also been worried about his mother, so he has had little sleep and hardly any food in the past week. One day Carl bumps into a guy he knows who asks if he wants to get in on a drug deal. Carl figures, "just this one time, to get me out of the hole," and he agrees to do it.

**SITUATION 6:** Curt is a 36-year-old divorced father of three children: Bobby, 12; Nicole, 9; and Dave, 7. Two months ago, Curt came home from work and found the locks on his door changed and his clothes packed in boxes, stacked near the front door. After numerous efforts to contact his wife, he learned from his neighbor that she had moved in with a man she met at work. Although Curt was furious at his wife, he was most upset about losing the kids. He decided to go to court to try to gain custody. At the court appearance, his wife showed up with her new boyfriend. When the judge asked the kids which parent they wanted to live with, they chose to stay with their mother. Curt felt so betrayed and hurt that he stormed out of the courtroom, saying, “To hell with the kids! I don’t want them anyway!” Since then, Curt has refused to visit his children, saying that if they don’t want to live with him, they can forget about spending time with him.

**SITUATION 7:** For three years, Henry has been separated from his wife and two children, six-year-old Stacy and four-year-old Henry, Jr. Until recently, he sent his wife money about once a month, depending on how much work he had as a construction worker. During this time, he usually visited the kids once or twice a month, which also depended on how much work he got, because he didn’t like to see them when he didn’t have money to spend. This arrangement worked fine between Henry and his wife, until he lost his job two months ago. Now his wife calls him and nags him for money. Although she threatened to bring him to court for child support payments, Henry didn’t think she’d go that far. But this morning, when Henry answered his doorbell, he was handed a subpoena to appear in court because of arrears in child support payments. Henry can’t believe that his wife would do this to him. He gets in his car, races to her house, and when she doesn’t answer her door, he smashes her window. Ten minutes later, Henry is arrested and dragged off to jail.

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**SITUATION 8:** Joe lives with his girlfriend, Rosa, and their three children: Tavia, 11; Joe, Jr., 8; and Therese, 6 months. Joe and Rosa have been together for fifteen years, ever since they met in high school. They love each other, and yet they have their ups and downs. One big problem is Joe's temper. He is usually the nicest guy around, but when things build up inside him, he's like a volcano that eventually explodes. The problem is that when he explodes, he usually ends up hitting Rosa. Last week, he was really stressed out. Work was slow and money was tight. The baby cried nearly every night because of infection, and Joe didn't get much sleep. So today, when Rosa woke him for work and said that they didn't have any coffee, he lost it. Rosa ended up with a black eye, and this time says she's had enough. Joe feels sorry for hitting Rosa, and he promises once more that it will never happen again. But Rosa thinks to herself, "I've heard all this before."

## The Aggression Volcano

### 5. Aggression Peak

What happened in the case study when the father reached this point?

### 4. Stress Overload

What signs did you have that the father was at stress overload?

### 3. Physical Problems

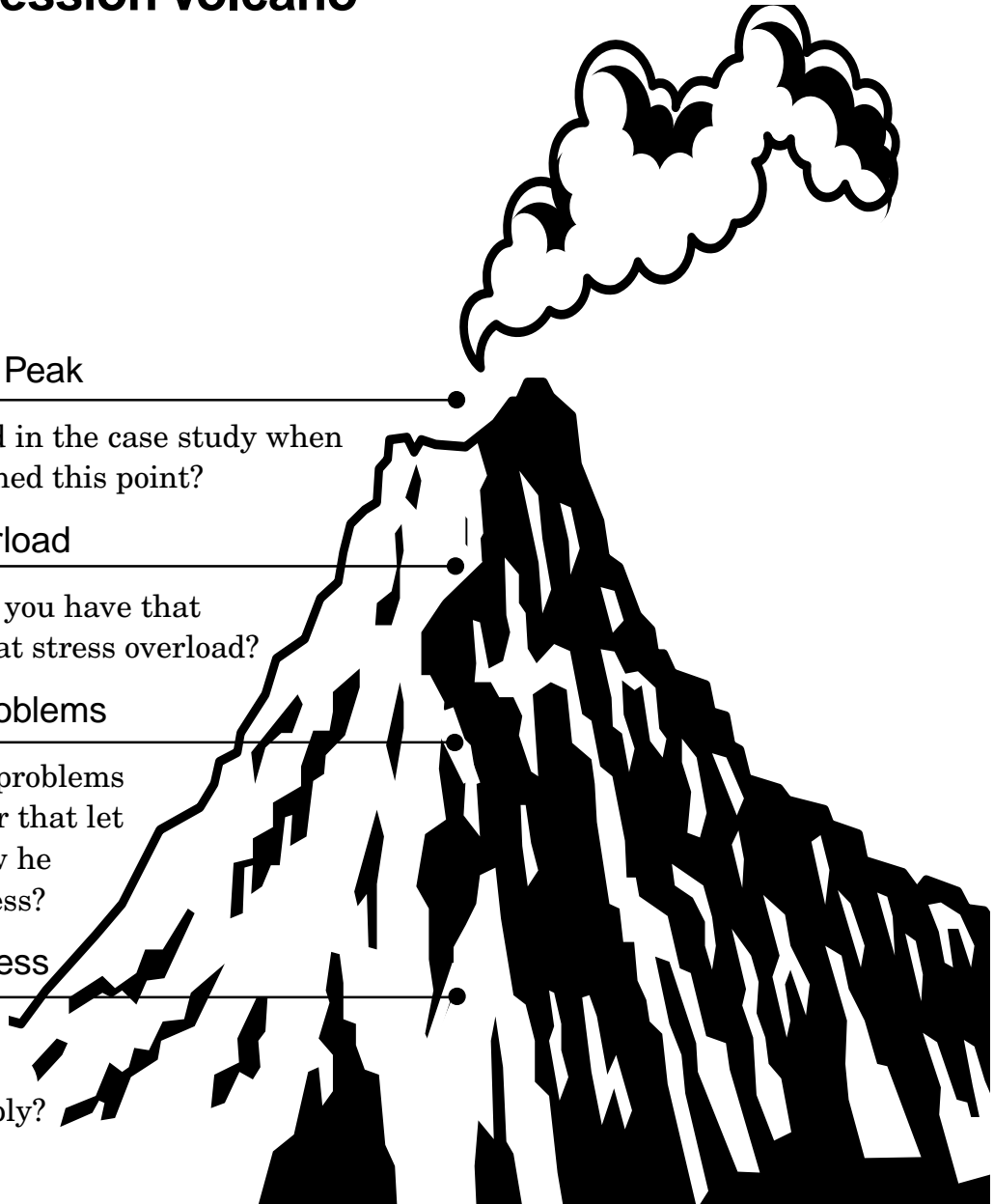
What physical problems began to appear that let the father know he had a lot of stress?

### 2. Multiple Stress

What were the problems that began to multiply?

### 1. Stress

What was the first sign of stress?



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## Recognizing Anger Clues

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**Purpose:** To help participants identify their anger styles and the clues for recognizing their feelings of anger.

**Materials:** Handout, “Understanding Anger Signals and Behavior”; pencils (for everyone); newsprint and marker.

**Time:** 30-35 minutes.

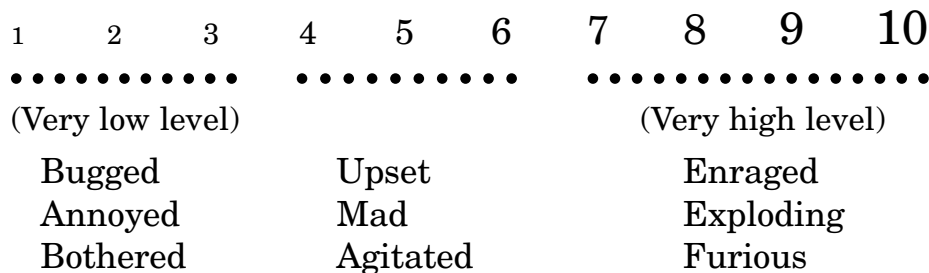
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**Planning Note:** Write the following information on newsprint in preparation for this activity:\*

Definitions:

- Anger is an *emotion*.
- Violence is a *behavior* that can express an emotion (usually anger).

### Levels of Anger




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\*Adapted from Daniel Jan Sonkin and Michael Durphy, *Learning to Live Without Violence* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1989).

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**Procedure:** Remind the men that in Activity 12-2 they identified situations that cause conflict between them and their children’s mother. Explain that the next activity will help them better understand how they show anger in various situations.

**Start** the activity by asking, “What is the difference between anger and violence?” Record all comments on newsprint, and then share and compare the men’s definitions with those you have already prepared (see the Planning Note). In your own words, make the following points:

- Anger is a feeling that is natural and normal.
- If properly controlled, anger can be a constructive emotion. (For example, anger can cause a person to act assertively to reach a worthwhile goal.)
- When anger is not controlled, it can lead to violent behavior.
- Violence is an aggressive reaction — mostly physical — that almost always has a *negative impact* on oneself, other people, and the environment (for example, breaking something, yelling, hitting, shooting a gun).
- The first step in learning to control anger is to *recognize when you are feeling it*.

**Ask**, “What are the first signs that you get when you’re angry?” Explain that our bodies give us anger signals, or clues, in the form of tension — in the chest, arms, legs, face, head, neck, or stomach. Make it clear that anger can lead to cold sweats, a pounding heart, and faster breathing than normal.

**Distribute** the handout “Understanding Anger Signals and Behavior.” Ask the men to choose one of the situations from Activity 1-2 that makes them extremely angry. Encourage participants to close their eyes and visualize the conflict situation with their children’s mother (or, if they prefer, to think of someone else who makes them very angry). Push them to recall how they felt at the time. Then have them complete the handout by listing what they were feeling at the time of the conflict and how they typically behave when they are angry. Allow five minutes to complete the handout.

**Ask** for volunteers to share their responses, beginning with body signals that indicate anger. Then review the “Levels of Anger” scale that you have prepared on newsprint. Ask each father to place himself somewhere on the scale, based on the situation he described on the handout. Indicate that research shows that most men tend to be aware of only the higher levels of anger, from level 5 through level 10. Many men are good at ignoring low-level anger (levels 1 through 4). Emphasize that most people don’t think of level 1 as anger but, rather, as annoyance or irritation; however, it is anger. Tell the group that recognizing lower levels of anger is important in preventing an emotional buildup that can lead to violent behavior.

**Discuss** the activity by asking the following questions.

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### ▼ Discussion Questions

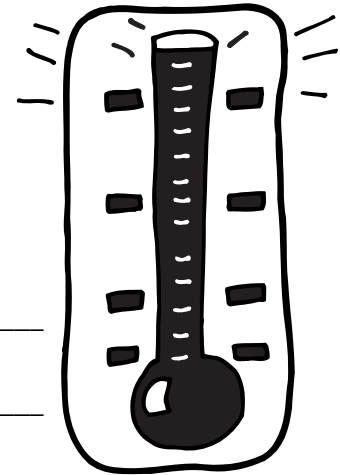
1. What was this activity like for you? What, if anything, did you gain from it?
2. How well do you think you are doing in your ability to manage anger? What works for you? What goes wrong in the way you handle your anger?
3. How have other people described you when you are angry? (If some men say that they have been described as “deadly” or “violent,” ask how they feel about such labels. If necessary, take a few minutes to discuss how boys are sometimes socialized to think they are “macho” when people are afraid of them. Ask the men what happened in situations when they *had* to appear deadly and dangerous. How do such labels limit their opportunities? How would they feel if their sons were given such a label?)
4. What would you like to change about the way you express anger?
5. As a man, what other feelings have caused you trouble? For example, how do you react when you have experienced loss? When you are hurt, disappointed, or lonely?

**Summarize** the activity by saying something like, “We have discussed various aspects of anger that lead to violence. Each of us must recognize our own anger clues, which include both body and behavior signals. The next activity will help you learn to manage your anger — to keep it from progressing to higher levels or exploding into violence.”

## Understanding Anger Signals and Behavior

### How Does Your Body Signal Anger?

Recall a conflict situation that made you angry. Picture what happened. How did your body feel at the time of the conflict? Can you feel any of those body signals right now? List four signals that your body gives you when you are feeling angry:



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

### What Do You Do When You Are Angry?

How do you behave when you are feeling angry? List four ways that you express your anger.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## “Keeping Your Cool”

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**Purpose:** To enable the participants to practice ways of resolving conflicts and managing anger without violence.

**Materials:** Leader Resource, “Keeping Your Cool”; handout, “Anger Management Skills.”

**Time:** 25-35 minutes.

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**Planning Note:** Decide in advance on a situation from the Leader Resource to model for the group. Enlist the support of someone to role-play the situation with you, and rehearse in advance.

Cut apart the situations on the Leader Resource, and make strips to be distributed. If time is limited, choose only one situation, and ask for volunteers to take part in the role play.

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**Procedure:** Tell the participants that they are going to role-play typical situations that might occur with people in their lives, and that they will have to truly immerse themselves in the roles of the characters. Explain that they will work in small groups to plan the role play, and then will perform it for the whole group.

**First,** review the handout “Anger Management Skills,” taking time to explain any strategies that the participants don’t fully understand. Then model the skills in a short role play, and ask the group to critique your portrayal of the anger management skills.

**Next,** divide the participants into small groups. Hand out a situation to each group, and tell the groups that they have approximately 10 minutes to plan a brief role play. Each group should persuade volunteers to play roles, and the other men in the group should suggest lines and help the actors rehearse. The actors should concentrate on expressing the *feelings* of the characters.

**After** 10 minutes of planning, ask each group to perform. Begin each role play by reading the situation. After each role play, ask the following questions.

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### ▼ Discussion Questions

1. How well did the man in the role play manage his anger?
2. What strategies did he use to manage his anger?
3. What were the consequences of his behavior?
4. What could have been done to prevent the conflict from occurring?
5. How would you handle this situation in real life?

**Conclude** the activity by saying something like, “We have seen that there are many ways to resolve potentially violent situations. ‘Keeping your cool’ and taking the time to think through difficult situations will enable you to maintain healthy relationships with those people who are important to you.”

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## Leader Resource

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### “Keeping Your Cool”

**SITUATION 1: CURTIS AND DEBBIE.** Curtis and Debbie used to go together. They have a three-year-old son, Jamal, who lives with Debbie and her parents. Curtis and Debbie have been arguing a lot lately. On a recent visit to pick up Jamal for the weekend, Curtis found that Debbie’s new boyfriend, Chip, was there waiting to take Debbie out. Chip and Curtis have known each other since childhood, and they never got along that well. While Curtis was waiting for Jamal to be changed, Debbie’s father came in and said hello to Chip but not to Curtis. This really agitated Curtis. To make matters worse, Jamal came into the room and hugged Chip before he hugged Curtis. Now Curtis was furious, believing that Debbie had been “bad-mouthing” him to her family and to Jamal.

*Act out this situation so that Curtis manages his anger in a healthy way.*

**SITUATION 2: DARRYL AND HIS DAD.** Darryl is a 17-year-old single father who works at a fast-food restaurant. His girlfriend, Nina, was killed a year ago in a drive-by shooting, so Darryl is raising his daughter, Tiffany, with the help of his parents. Darryl would like to make more money so that he and Tiffany can move into their own apartment, because his parents are always nagging him and telling him what to do. Today Darryl woke up late and ran out of the house so he wouldn’t be late for work. After he settled down on the bus, he realized that he had forgotten to take the trash out the night before — even though his father had reminded him twice. By the time Darryl got home that evening he was really disgusted, because his supervisor had lectured him all morning (in spite of rushing, he was still late). As soon as Darryl walked in the door, his father started in on him about the trash, cursing at him and calling him a “pitiful case” of a man. This really pushed Darryl over the edge.

*Role-play this situation so that Darryl manages his anger in a healthy way.*

**SITUATION 3: LINDA AND MIKE.** It's Friday night, and Linda and Mike are out on their second date. They're at a friend's party, sitting on the couch listening to music. Linda notices Paul — a guy from her neighborhood — and she smiles. Paul walks over, says "Hi," and gives Linda a kiss on the cheek. Paul says, "Did you hear about the block party next weekend?" Linda says, "Yes, I'm planning to come with my daughter." Paul says, "Great. I'll see you there." When Linda turns back to Mike, she notices that he looks angry. When she asks him what's wrong, he says, "Let's get out of here." Linda says, "Why, Mike? The party's just starting. What's wrong with you?" Mike stands up and pushes Linda into the next room where the coats are. They are the only two people in the room. Very angrily Mike says, "You've got to learn how to be with me. Nobody disrespects me that way."

*Act out this situation so that Mike expresses his feelings without violence.*

**SITUATION 4: VANESSA AND KEVIN.** Vanessa has been with her boyfriend, Kevin, for a few years. They live together with their son, Milton. Kevin is very easy-going. He doesn't like to argue, so he usually ignores Vanessa when she gets angry. Today Kevin has fallen asleep in front of the TV, and Vanessa pokes him to wake him up. Kevin looks around confused and says, "Hey, what's wrong?" Vanessa starts screaming, "You are so boring. Why don't we go out and do something?" Kevin says calmly, "Vanessa, I'm tired. You go out if you want to. I'll watch Milton." Vanessa says, "Oh no. I don't want to go out alone. Come on. Get off your tired butt. You act like you're an old man." Kevin just ignores her. He's heard all this before. Vanessa gets in his face again, and this time she smacks him. Now Kevin is really angry.

*Act out this situation so that Kevin manages his anger in an appropriate way.*

**SITUATION 5: BILL AND THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE.** Bill is a 26-year-old father who's been looking for work for several weeks with no success. On a recent trip to the employment service, Bill had to stand in line for a long time. After waiting more than an hour, he noticed that a guy near the front of the line let someone cut in front of him. Bill got very annoyed but let it pass. About two minutes later, someone else near the front of the line did the same thing. Bill was furious.

*Role-play this situation so that Bill handles the problem without causing a scene.*

**SITUATION 6: JAMES AND HIS BOSS.** For three years James has been a maintenance worker in a housing project. He has always had a good employment record and has rarely been out of work. Last month James’s infant son died of SIDS (“crib death”), and James took off three days for the funeral. After returning to the job, he would work for 10 hours straight, then rush home to take care of his wife and two-year-old daughter, because his wife was so depressed.

Each day James was getting more and more tired, but he felt as though he couldn’t stop and that he would explode if he had to deal with one more thing. Today at work the boss told James that he was going to have to be laid off because the city had cut the budget for the Housing Authority. James just looked at his boss and then punched a hole in the wall.

*Act out this situation so that James handles his pain better.*

**SITUATION 7: THOMAS AND STACY.** Thomas and Stacy have been separated for about eight months — since Thomas came home and found Stacy in bed with some guy. Although Thomas tried hard to get custody, his seven-year-old daughter, Tanya, and his four-year-old son, Thomas, Jr., live with their mother. (The judge turned Thomas down because he had been arrested for drunk driving.) At first, whenever Thomas called to see whether he could visit the kids, Stacy refused, saying that she didn’t “trust” him to bring the children back. Thomas then went back to court to get the judge to enforce his visitation rights, which helped things for a while. But recently Thomas lost his job, so he has been behind on his child support payments. He’s feeling really bummed out, because he has no idea where he’s going to find another job. It is Friday night, and Thomas has gone to Stacy’s to pick up the kids. Stacy comes to the door and tells him, “They’re not here. They went to my mother’s.” Thomas is absolutely beside himself: He wants to kill this lady.

*Role-play this situation so that Thomas handles his anger appropriately.*

**SITUATION 8: MIGUEL AND HIS SON, DAVID.** For nine months, Miguel has had “unofficial” custody of his eight-year-old son, David. He agreed to take care of his son because David’s mother needed to enter a drug rehab program. Miguel works nights so that he can keep house during the day and be there when David gets home from school. Miguel’s mother stays with David at night, while Miguel is at work. Taking care of David has been a big responsibility for Miguel. David was really attached to his mother, and so he has been angry and depressed since she left. Miguel hardly ever sees his girlfriend, Maria, because David doesn’t like her. Because Miguel cares about David so much, he believes that all his sacrifices are worth it.

This morning, when Miguel came home from work, he got a call from David’s school, asking where the boy has been. The truant officer said that David had not been at school all week. When Miguel called his mother, she said that David had left for school every morning and that, as far as she knew, he had gone to school every day. That afternoon, when David walked in the door, Miguel threatened to hit him.

*Role-play this situation so that Miguel keeps his cool.*

**SITUATION 9: PAUL AND HIS WIFE, MARY.** Paul is a 33-year-old father who has a history of domestic violence. He recently completed a six-month treatment program to help him deal with his anger without becoming violent. Tonight, Paul’s wife, Mary, went out with his friends, and when she got home, she wouldn’t tell him where she had been. Paul has suspected that Mary has been having an affair. As they began to argue, Paul felt his anger increasing. He became incredibly angry with Mary, and yet he was also really scared that he would lose control.

*Role-play the situation so that Paul manages his anger and confronts Mary without using violence.*

## Anger Management Skills\*

### Level 1-2-3 Anger

- Try to recognize your feelings before they escalate.
- Express your feelings directly — say how you feel and what you want.
- Take a five-minute break or a short walk. Come back and talk about it.

### Level 4-5-6 Anger

- Evaluate the situation before expressing anger verbally. Is this the time and place to do it?
- If yes, say how you feel and what you want.
- If no, take a time-out.

### Level 7-8-9-10 Anger

- Take a time-out.

### Three Steps for Making Time-Outs Work

#### 1. Make a statement about how you're feeling and what you're going to do.

You begin by talking about yourself, and talking about yourself immediately puts you in charge of yourself. You aren't name-calling or blaming.

- I'm beginning to feel angry/pissed off, upset.

You are talking about how you feel. It's a direct communication. There is nothing unclear about this statement. Saying you feel angry may in fact make you feel less angry. Try it; you'll like it!

- I need to take a time-out/get away for a while.

This is another "I" statement. You are also saying to the person that you are not going to get violent; instead, you're going to do something else — take a time-out.

## 2. Get away and cool off.

Leave for a set amount of time — at least an hour. If you stay away for at least an hour, you and the other person should be sufficiently cooled off by the time you return.

- Don't drink, use drugs, or drive.

Drinking and drugs will only make the situation worse. Don't drive, because there are already enough angry people on the roads!

- Do something physical.

Going for a walk, playing some ball, or riding your bicycle will help discharge some of the angry tension in your body.

## 3. Come back and express your feelings calmly.

- Come back when you said you would.

If you agree to come back in an hour — or the next day — live up to your agreement. It helps to build trust.

- Check in — talk about what it was that made you angry.

If you do no more than show up, you've completed the exercise. If you go on to talk about what it was that made you angry, you get experience and practice in communicating and discussing emotional issues.

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\*Adapted from Daniel Jan Sonkin and Michael Durphy, *Learning to Live Without Violence* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1989).

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## Feedback/Wrap-up

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Begin by asking the men to state something they got out of today's session. In particular, ask the following questions.

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### ▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would somebody like to tell us what he thought about today's session?
2. Has anybody learned any new ways to resolve potentially violent situations? If so, what did you learn?
3. Do you think that the things you learned today will work in your life? Why, or why not?
4. How helpful was today's session to you personally? Why do you think so?
5. Can someone give an example of how you can use today's information in teaching your children how to handle their anger?

**Tell** the men that even though today's information can help them handle their lives better, it takes time to change behavior. Ask whether anyone can think of a situation in his life in which a past behavior did change. For example, you can ask them to fill in the blanks, using the following statement:

"I used to \_\_\_\_\_, but now I \_\_\_\_\_."

**Remind** the men that they can control their lives if they work at it, but that sometimes they will have to ask for help — particularly when they are feeling angry, stressed out, or out of control. Reinforce the idea of taking time-outs as a way to avoid violence.