

## **Anger Management: Thought Distortions that Create Anger**

**Blaming:** This is the most self-destructive and damaging anger distortion. The mistaken belief that underlies blaming is that other people are doing bad things to you, usually on purpose, and they aren't going to get away with it. Blaming can make you feel better at times, but it leaves you helpless as well. By blaming others, you give up the power to change the situation that is causing you pain.

It is useful to remember that people are usually doing the best they can. Everyone (including you) tends to behave in ways that meet their own needs. The people you are blaming are most likely just doing what they can to take care of themselves as best they know how.

### **Thoughts to Combat Blaming**

- I know that blaming makes me helpless, so what can I do to change the situation?
- I can make a plan to care for myself
- I don't like what they are doing but I know they are just doing their best.
- I'm not helpless. I can take care of this situation.

**Catastrophizing/Magnifying the Situation:** This is more than just making a mountain out of a molehill or making things worse than they already are; it's the tendency to take something bad and really run with it, extrapolating a bad situation into the worst possible scenario. By magnifying events and thinking of them as awful, terrible, or horrendous, you set yourself up to respond in an angry or hostile manner. You may behave as though your distorted or exaggerated view of the situation were actual fact.

Luckily there are things you can do to control this tendency. First, make a realistic assessment. Ask yourself: "How bad is it really?" Make every effort to answer honestly and realistically. Second, be very precise in the language you use to describe the situation. Example: The restaurant bill probably isn't really "exorbitant and outrageous", it's just a lot more than you expected. Third, look at the whole picture, not just the annoyance. Every situation and relationship has its positive and negative aspects. By focusing on the positive, you can neutralize your anger.

### **Thoughts to Combat Catastrophizing:**

- Yes, this is frustrating, but it's not the end of the world.
- This is really no big deal. I don't like it but I can handle it.
- I'll get through this.
- This situation is a problem but I'll do the best I can and not make it worse.

**Inflammatory Global Labeling:** This distortion involves making sweeping, often inflammatory, negative judgments about people whose behavior you don't like. However instead of focusing on the behavior, the label tends to paint the person as being totally wrong, bad, and worthless. This is accomplished by one-word epithets like "loser", "asshole", "jerk" and many others. Global labels tend to fuel your anger by turning the person whose behavior you don't like into a worthless object.

The best way to combat a tendency toward global labeling is to be specific. Focus on the annoying behavior and describe it with precision. What happened? When did it happen? How often? How did it really impact

you? Notice that this does not involve making judgments about the other person or making derogatory comments about his person or parentage.

**Thoughts to Combat Global Inflammatory Labeling:**

- I feel frustrated but I can cope with this situation.
- It's nothing more than a problem. I don't have to make them into a wicked person.
- What is really bothering me? Stick to the facts.

**Misattributions:** This is about jumping to conclusions and mindreading. When you find yourself feeling hurt or annoyed by other people's behavior, the simplest thing is to imagine that they did it on purpose. Rather than thinking about all the other reasons for why things might have happened as they did, you assume that you know the person's "real" motives – they were deliberately trying to be mean to you and cause you upset.

It is easy to guess at other's motives. But if you haven't checked out your assumptions, you are probably wrong. Sometimes misattributions can cause real problems, such as when you act on your mistaken assumptions, only to find out later that you misinterpreted the event.

The best way to avoid misattributions is to pay attention to your assumptions. If possible, check your assumption with the person. If you won't or can't do that, at least assume "the best". This means always making an assumption that this person would never deliberately hurt you. If this seems unbelievable to you, at least get in the habit of developing alternative, kinder explanations for other people's behavior.

**Thoughts to Combat Misattributions:**

There are probably other reasons for the behavior.

I can't decide on other's motives.

My assumptions may not be accurate – I could check them out.

**Overgeneralizations:** Any problem can be made to look bigger by using words like "never", "always", "nobody", and "everyone". In this manner, we make an occasional occurrence feel like an unbearable, ongoing event. Exaggeration is seldom complete truth.

The best antidote for overgeneralization is to make a conscious effort to look for exceptions. Realizing that people act in a variety of ways makes their behavior less upsetting. Ideally, avoid using generalizing terms as much as possible and state clear descriptions of specific situations.

When you think in terms of black and white (polarized thinking), you will tend to overgeneralize. This dichotomous thinking often leads to anger when people behave in less than perfect ways.

One way of dealing with polarized thinking is to get in the habit of "searching for the grey". You can do this by using qualifying adjectives and adverbs such as "a little" "a lot", or "somewhat". Another strategy is to decide to see others as complex, confusing, often contradictory beings. This is actually the truth – people are extremely complex. By looking closely at someone that you are angry with, you may be surprised to find aspects of their personality that you actually like.

**Thoughts to Combat Overgeneralization:**

- I want to be accurate. How often does this really happen?
- This doesn't always happen this way. Look for exceptions.

**Demanding and Commanding:** This is best described as turning your personal preferences into commandments. This often involves words like “should”, “got to”, “have to” and “ought to”. Having a well-developed sense of values is healthy. However, when your values become moral dictates for others, problems with anger will arise.

Anger can be triggered when you judge others by a set of dictates about how they should behave. A common theme involves perfectionism, as in, “that’s not the correct way to do it”. Fairness is another important theme in demanding and commanding. Statements such as “that’s not fair” are indications of a commanding stance.

**Thoughts to Combat Demanding and Commanding:**

- So what if I don’t get what I want. The world won’t end
- I can live with this
- There is no reason they should do it my way.