
Anger Management

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Introduction: Managing patients' anger effectively is critical for both patient well-being and the safety of the hospital environment. This fact sheet provides tips and sample dialogues to assist your patients in identifying their anger triggers, expressing their anger constructively, and reducing aggressive behaviors.

Identifying Anger Triggers

The first step in helping patients manage their anger is to help them identify what provokes it.

- "I know you sometimes have a temper and we want to make sure you don't lose control while you're here, so let's come up with an anger management plan."
- "Tell me about triggers for your anger—feeling ignored by nursing staff? Feeling disrespected by another patient? Frustration from having to wait to speak to your doctor? Being annoyed by your roommate?"
- "Rate your anger on the anger meter: 1 is complete calm, 10 is losing control and doing something that causes negative consequences, like breaking something or hitting someone."
- Explore the aggression cycle, which includes three phases: Escalation, Explosion, Post-explosion. Discussing these phases can help patients recognize and disrupt this cycle before reaching a point of loss of control.

Anger Management Techniques

Help your patients develop a toolbox of different strategies.

- **Timeout.** Encourage patients to temporarily step away from situations that get them worked up or to ask the person with whom they are arguing if they can take a 10 minute break from the conversation.
- **Deep Breathing**
 - Guide them through deep breathing exercises to promote relaxation and reduce immediate feelings of anger.
 - "Get comfortable, close your eyes or stare at the floor. Become aware of your body and scan it for any sources of tension. Let go of any tension. Now pay attention to your breathing. Now take a deep breath and notice your lungs and chest expanding. Hold it for a second then exhale through your nose. Continue to breathe this way for a couple of minutes. When you feel ready, open your eyes. You can practice this anywhere."
- **Progressive Relaxation**
 - Teach patients to tense and then relax different muscle groups, helping to reduce physical tension and calm the mind.
 - "Start with your breathing...Now focus on your hands, clench your fists, now relax your arms,...raise shoulders, neck and face. Now relax completely."
- **Cognitive Restructuring (ABCD Method):** This technique helps patients understand their anger triggers and adjust their responses:
 - A: Identify the Activating event.
 - B: Examine Beliefs about the event.
 - C: Consider the emotional Consequences of the event.
 - D: Dispute the irrational beliefs and replace them with more rational ones.
 - Example: "I should be treated fairly by people", but in reality, we can't expect to always be treated fairly by everyone.
- **Thought Stopping**
 - Encourage patients to consciously interrupt and halt negative thoughts that fuel anger.
 - "Instead of trying to reason with yourself, just try to stop thinking the thoughts that are making you angry."
- **Assertiveness Training**
 - Educate patients on expressing their needs and rights in a respectful, non-aggressive manner.

- “Acting assertively is not about being aggressive—it just means standing up for your own rights in a respectful way.”
- **Journaling:** Encourage patients to journal about their anger episodes—this can help them get perspective on situations and develop healthier coping mechanisms.