

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills

These are skills that calm you down. You are learning these to use with mental rehearsals, *not* to use when you become angry. Think of using them when you are angry as an added benefit, but it is doing mental rehearsals using them that will desensitize your anger. These skills are presented as four steps, because you do them in sequence. The four skills are:

- Relaxing Breaths
- Soothing Self-talk
- Questions
- Reflecting on Rewards

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills

Step 1—Take 2 Relaxing Breaths

Inhale deeply through your nose so your belly rises, exhale slowly through your mouth with your lips pursed like you are blowing out birthday candles. Let your exhale be long and smooth and at the same time mentally induce all your muscles to relax. Think of your body as going limp (do this twice).

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Step 2—**Talk soothingly to yourself**

Talk to yourself silently, not aloud, saying two short sentences that help you to calm down. You talk to yourself as though you were talking to a young child that is upset and needs to be comforted. Repeat saying the sentences to yourself two or three times in a comforting way.

“I don’t have to get so angry.”

“Don’t over react.”

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Step 3—Questions—ask yourself these questions:

“Am I having a devalued self-thought?”

“How angry do I want to get?” (0 – 10)

“How will that much anger help me?”

The first question needs special attention. Devalued self-thoughts are at the top of the pyramid when it comes to what causes your emotional upsets.

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What is a Devalued Self-Thought?

A *devalued self-thought* is a belief about yourself in which you judge yourself to be either inadequate or unwanted, or both. Your thought is “I’m not good enough.” These thoughts occur whenever the situation or another person does or says something suggesting that you are inadequate or disliked. Devalued self-thoughts are always in the form of a label, “I’m not good enough,” “I’m a loser,” “I’m a failure.” etc. They always follow the format, “I’m...(a something or another).

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Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

If you recognize that you are having a devalued self-thought, or that when the incident happened that you did have a devalued self-thought, you should extinguish it by doing the following: (1) sternly tell yourself to stop it. Tell yourself to: **“Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”** And (2) Say the healing self-directive to yourself and reflect on what it means.

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Healing Self-directive: *(memorize this)*

“Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too. Stop taking myself too seriously.”

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills - The other two questions

“How angry do I want to get?”

This second question asks you to decide how angry you still want to get over the anger episode, or how angry you would like to get if it happened again. Use a zero to ten scale (0 – 10) to rate how angry you want to get. Zero means not angry at all and ten means the most possible (rage). Always pick a number, even if it is a ten.

“How will that much anger help me?”

The last question, “How will that much anger help me?” influences you to be more rational, instead of emotional. Simply ask yourself the question and then think about it for a moment.

Step 4—My Rewards

When your anger causes you to behave harshly or with aggression you lose benefits. Raising your voice, yelling, name calling, making threats and other behaviors that make people feel you are attacking them, may make you feel good in the immediate moment, but when your anger is over you have regrets about your behavior. You lose benefits, meaning your rewards such as, the respect of other people, favors from other people, love and affection from the people you care about, and most importantly your self-respect. These are just some of the benefits you lose due to reacting hurtfully. So, make it a law of life for yourself that you will not react hurtfully. Simply remind yourself to “remember my rewards.”

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Step 4—My Rewards— remind yourself that you benefit from responding non-hurtfully.

Mental Rehearsal Guide

1. Take two relaxing breaths
2. Say to yourself: *“I don’t have to get so angry. Don’t over react.”*
3. Ask yourself: *“Am I having a devalued self-thought or did I have one.”* If your answer is no, skip numbers 4 and 5.
4. Sternly tell yourself to stop it. **“Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”**
5. Say the healing self-directive to yourself and reflect on what it means— **“Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and**

without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too Stop taking myself too seriously.”

6. How angry do I want to get? Pick a number 0-10.
7. How will that much anger help me? Think about your answer for a moment.
8. Reflect on your rewards. Think about what you lose by being hurtful and the benefits you gain when you choose not to.

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills

Mental Rehearsal # 1 – Think about an anger episode you experienced and mentally rehearse it. Begin thinking about it, visualizing it in your mind from start to end. Think about how it prompted you to become angry. When you get to the *anger point*, the point where you feel yourself getting angry, or the point where you would have felt angry, start doing the four skills in their order. Repeat that process two more times, so that you go through the skills 3 times. And think about the anger episode as you use the skills. It doesn't matter whether the anger episode prompts you to become angry or not. You can use it whether or not you still feel angry about it. Have 3 mental rehearsal sessions a day, and do this for 15 days or more. Use a variety of anger episodes over the 15 days. You may repeat the same anger episodes if you like.

MAD+P Thinking Model

Musturbating—(or musting) involves thoughts that are *rules*—e.g. “Things must be the way I want!” It is an obsessive thinking style that is demanding, commanding, insisting, inflexible, and holding to rigid expectations. Key words and phrases in this type of thinking are: *must, mustn't, should, shouldn't, needs to, has to, only if, only when.*

Self-Directive:

Stop musturbating... stop insisting... think I prefer, but I don't insist.

Examples of **M**-thoughts:

M-thought: “She must not criticize me.”

Self-directive: “Stop my insisting. I prefer she didn’t criticize me, but I don’t insist on it.”

M-thought: “He shouldn’t use that tone of voice with me.”

Self-directive: “Stop musturbating. I prefer he didn’t use that tone, but I don’t insist on it.”

M-thought: “This guy shouldn’t drive so slow in the fast lane.”

Self-directive: “Stop musturbating. I prefer he didn’t drive slow, but I don’t insist on it.”

MAD+P Thinking Model

Awfulizing—involves assigning an exaggerated pain rating to a problem. When things aren't the way you want them to be you awfulize over them. You judge the situation to be awful and unbearable. Key words and phrases in this type of thinking are: *awful, terrible, horrible, unbearable, I can't stand it, it bothers me, I hate it when.*

Self-Directive:

Stop awfulizing... stop making it out to be so bad. It's not pleasant, but I'm not going to think it's awful or terrible.

Examples of **A**-thoughts

A-thought: “It’s awful that she criticized me. I can’t stand it!”

Self-directive: “Stop awfulizing. It’s not pleasant, but I’m not going to think it’s awful.”

A-thought: “I hate that he used that tone of voice with me, it’s awful!”

Self-directive: “Stop awfulizing. Stop making it out to be so bad.”

A-thought: “It’s terrible that he’s driving so slow in the fast lane!”

Self-directive: “Stop awfulizing. Stop making it out to be so bad.”

MAD+P Thinking Model

Devalued Self-thought—involves thoughts of negative self-worth (you negatively label yourself): e.g. *I'm not good enough, I'm a failure... I'm worthless... inadequate, rotten, bad, etc.*

Healing Self-Directive:

Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too. Stop taking myself too seriously.

Examples of **D**-Thoughts

D-thought: “I’m a failure.”

Healing Self-directive: “Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too. Stop taking myself too seriously.”

D-thought: “I’m not good enough.”

Healing Self-directive: “Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too. Stop taking myself too seriously.”

MAD+P Thinking Model

Punishment thoughts—involve thinking that believes punishment is justified—in other words you think you have a right to inflict harm, e.g. “*He should be taught a lesson...*,” “*He needs to know what it feels like...*,” “*He deserves to be punished...*,” “*only if I get even will I be okay....*”

Self-Directive:

Stop wanting to punish or hurt. In the long run how will it help me if I am hurtful? And besides, I don't want to lose my rewards.

Examples of **P**-Thoughts

P-thought: “I have a right to get back at her.”

Self-directive: “Stop wanting to punish her. I don’t want to lose my rewards or look foolish.

P-thought: “I need to teach him a lesson.”

Self-directive: “Stop wanting to punish him. If I’m hurtful in the long run I will be worse off. Remember my rewards.

Self-Directives Summary

These all begin with the word *Stop*. You are telling yourself to stop thinking MAD+P thoughts:

1. **Stop** musturbating... stop insisting... think I prefer, but I don't insist.
2. **Stop** awfulizing... stop making it out to be so bad. It's not pleasant, but I'm not going to think it's so awful that I can't stand it.
3. **Stop** thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too. Stop taking myself too seriously.
4. **Stop** wanting to punish or hurt. In the long run how will it help me if I am hurtful? Remember my rewards.

The 5 Types of Anger

1. **Relational Anger**—is anger *prompted* by what someone else says or thinks about you. The person may say that you are disliked or inadequate. It involves feeling criticized, judged, belittled, disrespected, devalued. A key characteristic of relational anger is having *devalued self-thoughts*.

Protection Purpose:

To protect yourself from being disrespected and devalued

The 5 Types of Anger

2. **Frustrative Anger**—is anger *prompted* by the blocking of a goal (or expectation) For example; you get angry because your car will not start.

Protection Purpose:

To protect yourself from obstacles and hindrances

The 5 Types of Anger

3. **Boundary Anger**—is anger *prompted* by people who have violated your personal boundaries or you perceive are responsible for causing you to suffer an injury or loss, or you perceive as a threat to cause such suffering.

Protection Purpose:

To protect yourself from a sense of invasion, loss, or threat

The 5 Types of Anger

4. **Self-critical Anger**—is anger *prompted* by your criticism of your own behavior. (It is a judgment against self.) It is characterized by negative self-thoughts, especially devalued self-thoughts. Like relational anger, a key characteristic of self-critical anger is *devalued self-thoughts*.

Protection Purpose:

To protect yourself from not measuring up to self-imposed expectations you have for yourself

The 5 Types of Anger

5. **Empathic Anger**—is anger *prompted* by people you perceive have hurt or disrespected another person or persons.

Protection Purpose:

To protect someone else

Identifying Anger Spikes and Triggers

A **spike** is an unwanted or bad behavior of another person, or a frustrating situation, such as losing your keys, or something about yourself that bothers you. Spikes are external—outside of you.

A **trigger** is what you think about what happened. It is your automatic thoughts that come to mind when you experience or become aware of a spike. Triggers are internal—inside of you.

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

Describe without evaluating—simply state what happened or restate what was said; give the facts only and try to be as accurate as possible. Keep your description free from evaluation or criticism. And do not ask questions. Asking questions makes the other person feel blamed and defensive. Remember, this is not an attack or judgmental process.

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

Own your feelings—once you have described the problem or restated what was said report your feelings and take *ownership* for them. Don't make statements that put the responsibility for your feeling on the other person. Don't say things like: "You made me feel ..." or "That makes me feel..." It puts the blame on the other person, causing that person to be defensive. Instead, take ownership of your feelings by using either "*I feel*" or "*I felt*." For example: "When that happened I felt hurt." And "When you speak to me like that I feel embarrassed." Use only "I feel" or "I felt."

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

No anger words—Expressing anger makes the other person feel defensive. Instead, talk about your primary emotions.

Anger words: annoyed, disappointed, displeased, frustrated, aggravated, disgusted, irritated, peeved, angry, mad, steamed, pissed, furious, enraged etc. **Primary feeling words:** sad, afraid, lonely, rejected, worthless, abandoned, shamed, humiliated, ignored, embarrassed, worried, uncared about, disrespected, devalued, unloved, unappreciated, hurt, etc. Avoid using “upset,” because it is vague and often communicates anger.

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

'—*don't look for an immediate solution*

Let the apostrophe remind you to not think that the other person must solve the problem or change his or her behavior. Allow the other person time to live with your message and internalize it. This can take several days or longer. Make it your goal to simply report the problem using the DON'TS skills. Let your satisfaction come from the fact that you reported the problem.

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

T—*tell what you need for things to be fixed.* “I need an apology.” “I need you not to do that next time.” Make your request reasonable and do this without being critical or disrespectful.

S—*speak in a normal tone of voice.* Keep your voice tone normal and polite. Use your voice to communicate respect.

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

How should you handle it when your feelings are dismissed?

Suppose you report the problem and the other person responds to you by saying, “I’m sorry you feel that way.” What the person is implying is that the way you feel is your fault and is avoiding any responsibility for how you were affected by his or her behavior. So, what do you do if this happens? You communicate that you “understood” what was said, and then assertively say, “...but the fact is that’s how I feel.”

Other person: “Well I’m sorry you feel that way.”

Your response: “I understand that, but the fact is that’s how I feel.”

Reporting the Problem - **DON'TS** Skills

Mental Rehearsal # 2 – Begin by choosing an anger episode in which you feel a need to confront another person about your anger. Get paper and pencil and write out exactly what and how you would say it if you were reporting the problem in real life. Writing intensifies the restructuring of your automatic thought process.

Next check to make sure what you wrote follows the DON'TS skills. Then rehearse either aloud or silently to yourself *reporting the problem* using the ideas you wrote out. *Do not* read what you wrote; do it from memory as best you can. Repeat the rehearsal aloud once more so that you complete 2 sets using the same anger episode. Do this two or three times a day for seven days or more and use a variety of anger episodes over the course of seven days.

Checklist for using **DON'TS** Skills

- Did I first state my observations by describing what I saw or heard?
- Were my statements free from judgmental or accusatory remarks?
- Did I refrain from asking any questions?
- Did I avoid saying things like, “You make me feel.” or “You hurt me?”
- Did I report my primary feelings using only “I feel.” or “I felt?”
- Did I keep any disclosure of anger out of my remarks?
- Did I state respectfully what I needed in order for things to be fixed?
- Am I accepting of the idea that I am not looking for an immediate solution from this person?

Analyzing Anger Episodes

Anger Spike:

What type of anger was it?

Was it necessary?

<i>M-thoughts:</i>	<i>Expanded Self-directive:</i>
<i>A-thoughts:</i>	<i>Expanded Self-directive:</i>
<i>D-thoughts:</i>	<i>Expanded Self-directive:</i>
<i>P-thoughts:</i>	<i>Expanded Self-directive:</i>

Analyzing Anger Episodes

Mental Rehearsal # 3 – Follow the outline on card 37. Analyze an anger episode by (1) answering the questions and identifying your MAD+P thoughts, and write them down. (2) Write out the expanded self-directives for your MAD+P thoughts. Next visualize in your mind the anger episode from start to end. When you get to the *anger point*, the point where you feel angry, or the point where you would have felt angry, begin speaking to yourself your expanded self-directives; say them to yourself two or three times, and as you do make every effort to obey your directives to stop your MAD+P thoughts. Repeat the exercise two more times so that you complete three sets using the same anger episode. Do this two or three times a day for seven days or more and use a variety of anger episodes over the course of seven days.

Desensitizing Emotional Triggers

1. ***Recognize how you devalue yourself*** during anger episodes. Learn to identify your D-thoughts as explained in module # 2.
2. ***Separate your personality from your behavior or the other person's attitude.*** Protect your personality, do not attack it. Instead of thinking: "I'm a failure," focus on your behavior, for example, "Today I didn't do as well as I hoped." When the problem involves another person's attitude, focus on his attitude, instead of labeling yourself, for example, "This person is annoyed with me today." Instead of, "I'm a reject."

Desensitizing Emotional Triggers

3. *Stop putting irrational expectations on yourself.* Thinking that you must be perfect and without faults and that your purpose is to impress others is irrational. Learn to apply the healing self-directive introduced on card 7. Tell yourself to “*Stop thinking I have to be perfect, and without faults, and that my purpose in life is to impress others. I accept myself the way I am. Everyone has faults, me too.*” Also remember that the phrase “Stop thinking...that my purpose in life is to impress others also means “Stop thinking that people should never be unimpressed with me.”

Desensitizing Emotional Triggers

4. *Develop the habit of being emotionally self-reliant.* Tell yourself to stop looking for external validation; and make the decision to accept yourself unconditionally.

The emotionally dependent person feels worthwhile only if he is accepted and validated by others. He looks for validation outside of himself. He will always be chasing after the validation that comes from others—and that can be parents, siblings, spouse, friends, co-workers, his employer, and even his children.

Desensitizing Emotional Triggers

Mental Rehearsal # 4 – Think about a “relational” or “self-critical” type of anger episode and identify your *devalued self-thought*. Think about your D-thought and do the following:

- Ask yourself: Am I attacking my personality instead of focusing on my behavior or the other person’s attitude?
- Ask yourself: Am I putting irrational expectations on myself by insisting on having to be perfect? Then tell yourself to stop it and then recite the healing self-directive to yourself.
- Ask yourself: Am I looking for external validation? Do I really need it?

Repeat the rehearsal a second time. Do this two or three times a day for seven days or more and use a variety of anger episodes over the course of seven days.

Focus on Frustrative Anger

Going into a fit of anger due to frustration does not come from mere frustration but from *low frustration tolerance*. Such anger is driven by intense musturbating and awfulizing thinking. You insist that whatever frustrates you should and ought not to exist and that you absolutely cannot stand it.

You can teach yourself to develop frustration tolerance by *accepting the reality that frustration should exist simply because it does exist*. This one principle of accepting frustration simply because it exists is the top self-correcting skill for managing frustrative anger.

Relapse Prevention and Maintenance Plan

Daily for the next two years have a daily anger management time, in which you read and reflect on the daily reflection questions and read four cards a day. Think about any anger episodes you may have had in the past 24 hours and think about your MAD+P thoughts connected to your anger and think about the self-directives that would have helped you self-regulate your anger.

At least once a week do any one of the four mental anger mental rehearsals.

Daily Reflection Questions

How angry did I get in the past 24 hours? How did it help me?

Did I experience a devalued self-thought in the past 24 hours?

Did I show aggression verbally or otherwise in the past 24 hours?

Did I think about my rewards in the past 24 hours?

Did I neutralize my MAD+P thoughts using expanded self-directives?

With what problems could I have used the DON'TS skills?

Did I read 4 anger management cards today?