

Managing Anger & Other Feelings Cases Poorly 25

[Self-Management Skills Module](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the Introduction to Teaching Self-Management section for suggestions on teaching SES Skills, processing learning experiences, and applying skills in real-life situations.

Managing anger and other unpleasant feelings requires first being aware of what we feel and why we feel that way. It also requires that we accept the way we are feeling. Anger and other unpleasant feelings can be a catalyst to change ourselves, our situation, our environments, and our relationships. Our feelings can be vague, and a feeling like anger may only be a secondary feeling that masks deeper feelings. Feelings such as anger may only be the tip of an iceberg and not reveal deeper feelings that exist below the water line. We may have other feelings first before we experience anger, and these feelings may then trigger anger. What is important is that we identify all of our feelings in a given situation and determine why we feel that way. Only then can we consider how we want to manage those feelings. When we are angry, it is especially important to stop and identify the primary feelings that triggered the anger before we react and say or do something that makes the situation or a relationship worse. In addition, if we want to communicate our feelings to others, we have a choice of whether to share the secondary feeling of anger or the primary feelings (e.g., disappointment, hurt, frustration, etc.).

Procedures/Directions:

1. Depending on your student's developmental level, you may start this learning experience with the Ms. Fernandez Example outlined below. This example illustrates how anger is often a secondary feeling that may mask other initial feelings and how important it is to identify the primary feelings that trigger anger before we react and say or do something that makes a situation or relationship worse.
2. If you don't want to use the Ms. Fernandez example or an edited version, you may review the concepts in Managing Anger and Other Unpleasant Feelings: Background Information for Students below and then proceed to the Feelings Can Cause Us to Behave in Ineffective and Hurtful Ways below.

The Ms. Fernandez Learning Experience: Managing and Coping With Anger

Procedure/Directions for the Ms. Fernandez Learning Experience:

1. Before having students participate in this learning experience, it is helpful if they are skillful at identifying their feelings and why they feel that way. See the [Self-Awareness Module](#).

Although not essential, it may be helpful if students are familiar with the Focusing process [Self-Awareness Module](#). If you have not taught the Focusing process, it may be beneficial to review the “Trivial Problem” story and discuss the significant points it illustrates [Self-Awareness Module](#). To manage our feelings, especially anger, and to avoid taking our feelings out on others, we need to understand the depth of our feelings fully. The skill of Focusing, once mastered, allows one to fully understand the depth of their feeling and why they are feeling that way.

2. Review the concepts in Managing Anger and Other Unpleasant Feelings: Background Information for Students below.
3. Even if you have not taught the Focusing process, explain the importance of understanding the depth of our feelings, especially when we are angry, and review the steps in the Process (see the Focusing Short Form below).
4. Draw an equilateral triangle on the board to represent an iceberg. Read Ms. Fernandez’s story below so that students can see how her feeling of anger at her students were only the tip of the iceberg. By using the Focusing process, she became aware of the deeper feelings that existed below the water line (feeling scared she would not get another job and thus not meet her financial obligations). As Ms. Fernandez goes through each of the Focusing steps, write on the triangle/iceberg, starting at the tip of the iceberg, her feelings/identification of the crux of the problem as she goes through the steps. She begins with feeling angry at her students for fooling around and not paying attention (placed above the waterline) to:
 - A. Worried about the costly repairs for her car
 - B. Frustrated with her daughter for missing the school bus again and making her late for work.
 - C. Angry about losing her job
 - D. Frustrated that her job was eliminated
 - E. Disappointed and sad because she likes her job, her students, the school, and her fellow teachers
 - F. Overwhelmed because she needs to go through the whole process of updating her resume and trying to find another job
 - G. Worried and scared that she wouldn’t get another job or one that she likes as much
 - H. Worried and anxious about meeting her financial obligations.

Managing Anger and Other Strong Emotions: **Background Information for Students**

Managing anger and other unpleasant feelings requires first being aware of what we feel and why we feel that way. It also requires that we accept the way we are feeling. Anger and other unpleasant feeling can be a catalyst to change ourselves, our situation, our environments, or our relationships. Our feelings can be vague, and a feeling like anger may only be a secondary feeling that masks deeper feelings. Feelings such as anger may only be the tip of an iceberg and not reveal deeper feelings that exist below the water line. We may have other feelings first before we experience anger, and these feelings may then trigger anger. What is important is that we identify all of our feelings in a given situation and determine why we feel that way. Only then can we consider how we want to manage those feelings. When we are angry, it is especially important to stop and identify the primary feelings that triggered the anger before we react and say or do something that makes the situation or a relationship worse. In addition, if we want to communicate our feelings to others, we have a choice of whether to share the secondary feeling of anger or the primary feelings (e.g., disappointment, hurt, frustration, etc.).

Ms. Fernandez: The Focusing Short Form

The following example illustrates how anger may only be the tip of an iceberg, and by using the Focusing Process, one can become aware of deeper feelings that exist below the water line. Focusing is a skill that can help us discover what keeps us from feeling wonderful at any given time. It can also help us understand feelings, problems, and dilemmas in greater depth than we may initially understand them. Once we become clearer and more aware of what keeps us from feeling wonderful, we usually feel better. Knowing and accepting what is bothering us in and of itself can make us feel better. However, it is only when we fully understand our feelings, a problem, or a dilemma that we can do something about it.

The situation:

Ms. Fernandez is a high school English teacher. She is having a bad day. Her car needs costly repairs, and she was late for work because she had to take her oldest daughter to school because she missed the school bus (again). During her prep period before her last class, Ms. Fernandez, who is in her first year of teaching, was called into the principal's office. She learned that an English position is being eliminated next year because of a lack of funds, and she will be losing her job because she was the last hired. During her last class, several of her students started fooling around and not paying attention just before the end of the period. She yelled at them, telling them they all had a zero for the day and would have to come in and serve a lunch detention the following day.

That evening, she realized that it was out of character for her to yell at her students and give them a detention for fooling around. She needed to figure out why she did it. She decided to try Focusing. She had practiced it for several years and was very good at it—was, in a sense, fluent in it as one might be fluent in a familiar language. She began by getting as comfortable as possible, removing all necessary distractions. She went through the steps.

The Steps in the Focusing Process (the short form) Applied to the Ms. Fernandez Situation

Find a time and a place to sit quietly for a while without any distractions. Stop after each question (when you see...) Don't try to answer the questions with your thoughts or thinking brain. Allow your answers to come from the place where you feel. At some point, you will feel the problem changing, like you are getting closer to figuring it out, like you are getting warmer, like remembering something you forgot. There will be a shift, a feeling like "this is right." Continue until you have an "ah ha" experience, that "yes, this is why I feel this way." A problem is like an iceberg. You initially see the tip, but you must go very deep to discover the base, the part that is making you feel less than wonderful.

1. Ask yourself: "How do I feel? Why don't *I* feel wonderful right now? What is bugging me on this particular day? Stay quiet. Listen. Let what comes come. Let all the problems come up and out, making a list of them. Don't get snagged on any one problem. Keep listing the problems until you hear something within you say, *"Yes, except for those, I'm fine."* Make a list of all the things keeping you from feeling wonderful right now...
 - **Angry at students for fooling around at the end of class and not paying attention**
 - **Worried about the costly repairs to my car**
 - **Frustrated with my daughter for missing the school bus again and making me late for work.**
 - **Angry about losing my job**

2. Ask: "Which problem feels the worst right now? Don't try to make an intellectual choice. Let your body decide which problem feels the worst on this day. Let the answer come from the place where you feel. Ask: "Which problem feels the worst right now...?"
 - **Anger about losing her job**

3. Now ask yourself: What is the crux (main part) of this problem?" What is the worst of it? What is the main thing in it that makes me feel bad? Ask the question, then wait. Let the main crux of the problem come to you—not from your thinking brain—but from the felt sense itself. Ask: what is the main part of this problem (what is the worst of it)? Wait for an answer to come from the place where you feel.
 - **I'm angry and frustrated that my job was eliminated.**

 - She asked, what is the crux or main part of this problem? **I'm disappointed since I really like my job, my students, the school, and my fellow teachers, and now I won't be here any longer. I'm disappointed and sad.**

 - **So is this it? I'm disappointed and sad about losing my job. I feel overwhelmed because I need to go through the whole process of updating my resume and trying to find another job. Yes, but there seems to be more to it.**

 - So what's the worst of this? She sits with it, and then what comes to her is the following: **I'm worried and even scared. What happens if I cannot get another teaching job? Other people are losing their jobs, and there aren't a lot of English positions available. How will I pay my bills if I don't get another job? A ha, that's it. The crux, the main part of all of this, is that I may not get another teaching job or one I like as much, and I am worried about meeting all my financial obligations.**

4. Now, take what you consider the worst of it, and check them to ensure they fit your felt sense of the problem. Ask yourself: "Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly? Ask: Do these words and the felt sense match the problem exactly...?"
 - **Yes, I am worried and scared that I won't get another teaching job or one that I like as much, and I am worried about meeting my financial obligations.**

See how the feelings and the scope of the problem changed from anger at students to feeling sad and scared. This didn't solve her problem, but knowing exactly what she was feeling made her feel better and helped her realize what she needed to do to get another job. She also realized that she took her feelings out on her students and realized that she needed to apologize.

5. If you are still stuck, if you haven't had the "ah ha" this is what I am feeling (like remembering something you forgot), ask yourself the following questions and let the answers come from within:
 - What is the worst of this feeling?
 - What's really so bad about this?
 - What does it need?
 - What should happen?
 - What would it feel like if it were all O.K.?
 - If you still feel stuck, if you have not had that "ah ha" this is what I am feeling (like remembering something you forgot) you can stop and come back to it at a later point.

The next day, Ms. Fernandez apologized to her students. She shared with them her feelings of being sad and disappointed about losing her job because she likes them, the school, and her colleagues. She also shared her worry about not getting another teaching job and meeting her financial obligations. By apologizing and sharing her feelings and why she felt that way, Ms. Fernandez was a good role model for her students.

Processing /Main Points/Summary of the Ms. Fernandez Learning Experience:

Use the Ms. Fernandez story to make the following points:

1. Ms. Fernandez had a lot of things keeping her from feeling wonderful (expensive car repair, needing to take her daughter to school again because she missed the bus, being late for work, students not paying attention and fooling around, and being told she was losing her job). It all came to a head when the students were fooling around and not paying attention. She felt angry with her students and reacted out of anger.
2. This example demonstrates how the anger she felt (at her students) was only the tip of the iceberg. The focusing process helped her understand specifically what is bothering her the most (e.g., losing her job) and then getting to the crux/worst part of it (having to go through the job search process, fear of not being able to get another teaching job, and thus not being able to meet her financial obligations).
3. Being aware of her problem didn't solve it, but knowing what it was made her feel better and helped her decide what to do about it.

4. Our behavior is affected by our feelings, and if we aren't aware of the depth of our feelings and why we feel that way, we may behave in ineffective and hurtful ways that make a situation or a relationship worse for us. Ms. Fernandez's situation is an excellent example of how we sometimes take our feelings out on people who aren't the primary reason we feel bad. If she had not gone through this process, she probably would have remained angry at her students, unfairly given them a detention, and would not have apologized.
5. Ask students if a parent (or anyone else) has ever taken their anger out on them (gotten angry at them for something that didn't seem like that big of a deal: the anger didn't appear in proportion to the behavior). Ask them what happened, how they felt and reacted, and how it affected the relationship. Summarize or have them summarize any similarities in the situations.
6. Ask students if they have ever taken their feelings out on others. Ask them what happened, what they did and said, how the other person reacted, how they felt afterward, and how it affected the relationship.

Feelings Can Cause Us to Behave in Ineffective and Hurtful Ways

Procedure/Directions

Below are five situations where people acted without stopping to consider what they were feeling, why they felt that way, and how they wanted to respond. Each of these people initially felt angry and acted on their anger. For each, read the situation aloud, and have students (working alone or in groups) complete the Managing Anger Poorly Cases Chart ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) for each person.

The Situations

Jimmy: Jimmy tried out for the varsity basketball team. His coach told him that he didn't make varsity, but he did get on the junior varsity. Jimmy told the coach that the junior varsity team was lousy and that he didn't want to waste time with basketball, so he walked away from the coach without saying anything else.

Lois: Lois has a friend named Marsha. They aren't best friends, but they are friends. Marsha had a weekend party, and Lois wasn't invited. When Lois saw Marcia at lunch on Monday, she said, "Those pants make your hips look huge. Why did you buy them?"

Willy: Willy agreed with his mom that he would be home by 10 PM. When Willy walked in the front door at midnight, two hours after he agreed to be home, his mother shouted, "Where in the world have you been? You are grounded. Now get up to your room."

Sue: This afternoon, Sue found out she had flunked biology, and her grades went down in two other subjects. She tore up her report card and said nothing to her parents even though they were supposed to sign the card and return it to the school.

Ms. Fernandez (if you didn't use the Ms. Fernandez learning experience above): During her prep period before her last class, Ms. Fernandez, who is in her first year of teaching, was called into the principal's office. She learned that an English position is being eliminated next year because of a lack of funds, and she will be losing her job because she was the last hired. When some kids in her class started fooling around just before the end of the period, she told them they had a zero for the day and would have a lunch detention the following day."

Processing /Main Points/Summary of the Feelings Can Cause Us to Behave in Inappropriate and Hurtful Way Learning Experience:

Have students share the range of feelings each person felt, why they felt this way, how they reacted, and what they could have done to be more effective.

How did Jimmy feel? (Disappointed, frustrated, and angry).

- Was he honest when he said he didn't want to waste his time with basketball?
- How did he act? (he quit). Instead of realizing that he felt disappointed, frustrated, and angry and then stopping to consider how he wanted to act, he reacted out of anger. He rationalized that he didn't want to play basketball anyhow.
- What are the consequences of his behavior?
- What could he have done that would have been more effective?

How did Lois feel? (hurt, disappointed, angry)

- How did she act? Instead of realizing how she felt and stopping to consider how she wanted to act, she reacted out of anger.
- What are the consequences of her acting this way?
- What could she have done that would have been more effective?

How did Willy's mom feel (worried, anxious, frustrated, angry).

- How did she act? Instead of realizing how she felt and stopping to consider how she wanted to act, she reacted out of anger.
- What are the consequences of her behavior?
- If your parent reacted like Willy's mom, would you be more or less motivated to be on time in the future (why or why not)?
- What would you recommend she have done, if anything, to be more effective?
- How would you like your parent to react?
- Would you be more or less motivated to be on time if your parent said they were anxious and worried that you had been in an accident or something else had happened to you (why or why not)?

How did Sue feel? (frustrated, angry at self, worried about the consequences in school and with parents).

- How did she act? Instead of realizing how she felt and considering how she wanted to act, she reacted out of anger, tore up the report card, and avoided telling her parents.
- What do you think the consequences will be (more trouble with parents for tearing it up, trouble at school)? Sue has now created additional problems.
- What could she have done that would have been more effective?

How did Ms. Fernandez feel (angry and frustrated with students because they were not paying attention and shocked, disappointed, frustrated, angry, worried, etc., that she was losing her job)

- How did she react? Instead of realizing how she felt and considering how she wanted to act, she took her anger out on her students when they were not the primary reason for feeling frustrated and angry.
- What were the consequences of her behavior?
- What could she have done that would have been more effective?

When processing these situations, point out that all of these people felt angry and acted on their anger. The result of acting out of anger only made the situation worse for them and their relationships. Anger was only the tip of the iceberg; and there were other deeper feelings below the water line. Those feelings included:

- Disappointment for Jimmy,
- Disappointment and hurt for Lois
- Anxious and worried for Willy's mom
- Frustrated with herself for Sue
- Worried for Ms. Fernandez

If these people were going to communicate their feelings to the people involved, they could choose to share their anger, or they could decide to share the deeper feelings below the water line. In most cases, it is usually more honest to share the deeper feelings that the anger masked and easier for others to hear. When we share feelings like disappointment, worry, hurt, etc., because of what someone did or said, it is more likely to have a positive impact than if we share our anger. Others are more likely to listen, try to understand us, consider what we have to say, and possibly change their behavior when we share feelings other than anger.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences

Now that students understand how feelings affect our behavior in unhealthy and hurtful ways, have them complete the Acting on My Feelings In Healthier Ways LE ([Self-Management Skills Module](#)) to help them understand how their feelings can cause them to behave in unhealthy and hurtful ways.