

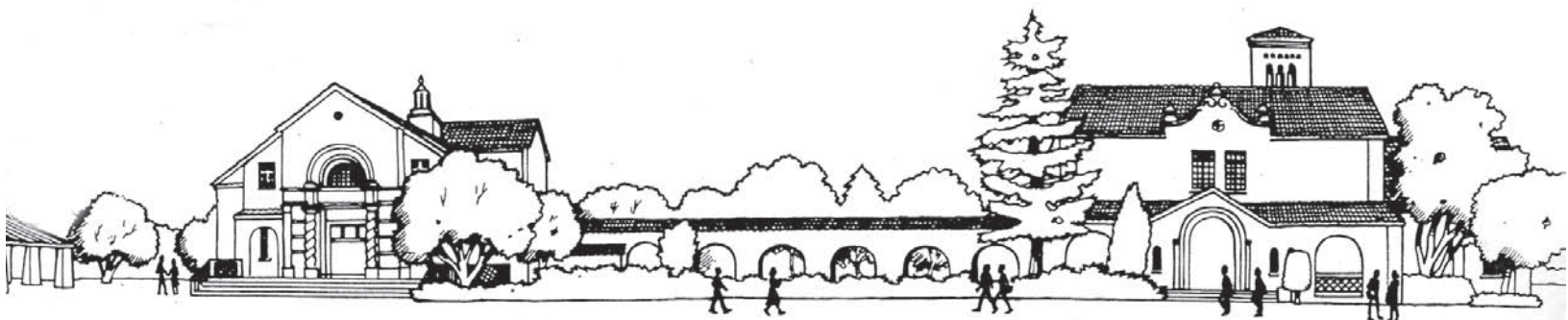
1. Being an Anger Tamer

You don't "lose" your temper — you "turn it loose." Research has shown that the "anger reflex" lasts about one second. Beyond that, the "angry" person is doing something else: choosing to punish another person or vent personal frustrations — or perhaps that's how he or she was taught to express anger. It takes a commitment to stay angry.

Taming anger means (1) being able to avoid or re-channel it within yourself, and (2) knowing how to avoid or cool off anger in another person. Anger is a natural reaction that often needs to be expressed — but there are different ways to express it. An angry rage often results from a person's inability to express anger coolly and calmly.

The goal is to communicate well, to express concerns and feelings at a level where they can be considered calmly, and to address problems so they lead to solutions or compromises in an atmosphere of good will.

- Practice assertiveness on your own behalf.** Standing up for yourself avoids a build-up of resentful, hurt or angry feelings.
- Avoid angering others by listening respectfully to what they are saying — **understand before disagreeing.**
- Never say "always" again.** Statements such as, "You always..." or "You never..." are always accusatory and never true, and **they trigger angry, defensive responses.**
- Express your basic good will** toward those close to you as often as possible—even when you are angry with them. **Separate your love of that person from your anger** at what he or she has done.
- If you do get angry, **don't commit to staying angry and punishing someone.** The anger will dissipate and the issue that generated it can then be addressed constructively.



“...I Just Said to Myself, ‘I Will Control My Temper.’ ”

The 11-year-old boy repeatedly had “outbursts of uncontrollable and unreasoning anger” and fell into “mean moods.” His parents sought help, and after a period of counseling the therapist had dinner with the family to observe his behavior.

The boy protested having to wash his hands for dinner, and threatened not to return to the table. But he did return, and later told the counselor: “I nearly got mad, but I just said to myself, ‘I will control my temper.’”

This occurred in 1908!* The boy would now be nearly 100 years old. *If* he kept up his new-found self-control through “self-statements,” his life turned out vastly different than it would have if he had not learned that essential skill.

Following that early case-study report, there have been many volumes of studies about anger and ways to control it. More recently, terms such as “self-statements,” “self-regulated private speech,” and — a trendier term — “self-talk” have emerged.

Such concepts recognize — but bypass — most of the studies done on the complexities of anger: the deeper psychological and physical aspects of this powerful emotion. They bypass it so they can get to the important part, on the same theory that you don’t have to know how a telephone works in order to make a call.



Similarly, one needn’t understand all about anger in order to learn how to avoid arousing it, either in yourself or others.

There are a number of excellent approaches to avoiding or controlling anger within families, or in any setting. Most cover a combination of:

- Using improved listening skills.
- Avoiding “trigger” words or phrases (such as “Why?” questions and “You always do that to me!”).
- Keeping the discussion on the issue instead of generalizing or accusing the other person of “being unreasonable.”
- Keeping the discussion future-oriented, specific and positive. Going back into the past just triggers anger all over again.

In addition, studies have shown that **you have twice as great a chance of resolving an issue if you keep from getting angry or provoking anger.**



A great fallacy is that the expression of anger is good because it releases emotions. There is an immense difference between the healthy expression of real feelings and the habitual venting of anger in a loud (or silent), destructive way.

If people treat each other with respect and listen — really listen — to each other before disagreeing, odds of an angry confrontation are dramatically reduced.

Early research on anger explored the broader issue of aggressive behavior — actions based on an angry response. In the mid and late 1970s, a new line of exploration was followed by some professionals, including Prof. Raymond W. Novaco of the Program of Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine.**

He and others developed and tried a concept called “stress inoculation” — building up an inner resistance to stressful situations that might arouse anger.

Today, we realize that this concept contributes to emotional “resilience.”

* Witner, L. *The treatment and care of a case of mental and moral deficiency.* The Psychological Clinic, 1908, 3, 153-179.

** Novaco, Raymond W. *Anger and Coping With Stress.* In *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Research and Application.* Plenum Press, New York, 1978.

Using ‘Self-Talk’ To Avoid Anger

“Men are disturbed not by things, but by the view which they take of them.” Thus Epictetus, the Greek Stoic philosopher, defined “self-talk” nearly 2,200 years ago.

Today, this idea of inoculation against stress and anger consists of four easy-to-follow patterns of self-statements — patterns that work!*

• Preparing for a Provocation.

“This could be a rough situation, but I know how to deal with it. I can work out a plan to handle this. Easy does it. Remember, stick to the issues and don’t take it personally. There won’t be any need for an argument. I know what to do.”

• **Reacting to Confrontation.** “As long as I keep my cool, I’m in control of the situation. I don’t need to prove myself. I won’t make more out of this than I have to. There is no point in getting mad. Think of what I have to do. Look for the positives and don’t jump to conclusions.”

• **Managing Anger.** “Muscles are getting tight. Relax. Slow things down. Take the issue point-by-point. My anger’s a signal of what I need to do. Time for problem-solving. He probably wants me to get angry, but I’m going to deal with it constructively.”

• Reflecting Back on Conflict.

a. *If unresolved:* “Forget about the aggravation. Thinking about it only makes me upset. Try to shake it off. Don’t let it interfere with my job. Remember to relax. It’s a lot better than anger. Don’t take it personally. It’s probably not so serious.”

b. *If resolved:* “I handled that one pretty well. That’s doing a good job. I could have gotten more upset than it was worth. My pride can get me into trouble, but I’m doing better at this all the time. I actually got through that without getting angry.”

Relaxation training (which really is training in self-control) also helps avoid anger. “Self-talk” helps with mental relaxation. Slow, shallow breathing and relaxing your muscles helps the body let go of tension.

* Novaco

The Strength of ‘Assertiveness’

Getting angry can do some good things: It can fill you full of energy, give you a sense of controlling a situation, spur you to action to deal with something, and bring out negative feelings that should be aired.

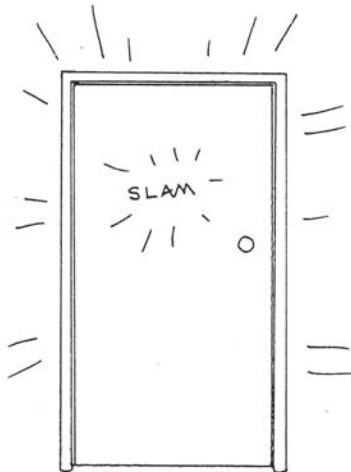
These can all be valuable to how you relate to others in your life. They can be essential, in fact — but only to the extent that they help you with your interactions.

To the extent that your anger disrupts how you perform, is an unnecessary defensive reaction that gets in the way of resolving issues, triggers aggressive behavior, or is just a general

reaction to the world, then it needs to be managed. And only you can manage it.

One alternative to uncontrolled anger is simple assertiveness — a gentle but highly effective alternative to angry aggression. This “gentle assertiveness” consists of **avoiding rage and speaking softly, perhaps even in a friendly manner, while expressing your specific wishes.**

This non-hostile way of voicing your true feelings often results in excellent outcomes for you and the other person, and it eliminates the “bottled up” reasons to blow your cork.



Just Cooling Off

The two major schools of anger-response theory are the “ventilationists”* who favor letting it blow off any which way and those who believe that ventilating is no air-conditioner and only heats things up.

Some studies have shown that ventilating can have a releasing effect — but not in all situations (as with your boss or teacher). It has come to be regarded as a “learned behavior,” and not such a positive one at that.

Most such theories today stress “bringing down” anger.

Virtually all emotions cool down on their own, anyway. The classic advice for anger control — count to ten — has been around for centuries.

* Tavris, Carol. *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, 1982.

When You Get Hot

Most families heat up once in awhile. If yours is hot more than you like, there are community and school resources available for help and advice that can often resolve the situation that is troubling you.

Such assistance is confidential.

Check with your school guidance office for local resources.

Using LifeSkills

Information in this publication can make a real difference in your life — but only if you read and share it. Here are two ways you can make most effective use of the concepts.

1. **Pass it on** — Share it with friends and family members. (It probably works best if you don’t force it on anyone — just leave it around or make a comment without being “holier than thou.”)

2. **Leave it around** — Once you’ve read it, just lay it around the house. Others will check it out, maybe without your even knowing. Just leave it on the kitchen or dining-room table, or a coffee table, in the bathroom or pinned to a bulletin board.

'ROM' — A Quick'n'Easy Relaxation Plan

We hear a lot about “relaxation training,” meditation, even bio-feedback. It all sounds kind of mysterious.

But if you strip away the jargon, relaxation is really just a matter of slowing down and getting in touch with yourself — developing a sense of self-control and calmness that comes with that. ROM is one of the easiest, most-effective relaxation methods. Here's how it works:



A Quick Way to Relax — Get comfortable and simply think the word “one” every time you breathe out. Try this “**Respiration One Meditation**” (ROM) for a few minutes daily or several times a week, or whenever you feel like it. That's it! The “one” just crowds out competing “busy” or “worry” thoughts, and you soon slip into the natural state for humans — relaxed.

Too simple? A careful study in a major telephone company found that the ROM and CSM (Clinically Standard Meditation), another popular relaxation/meditation technique, to be highly effective in reducing overall stress, moderate depression, anxiety and even hostility in employees who tried either method. Some participants reported improved priority-setting and thinking.

Family

LifeSkills

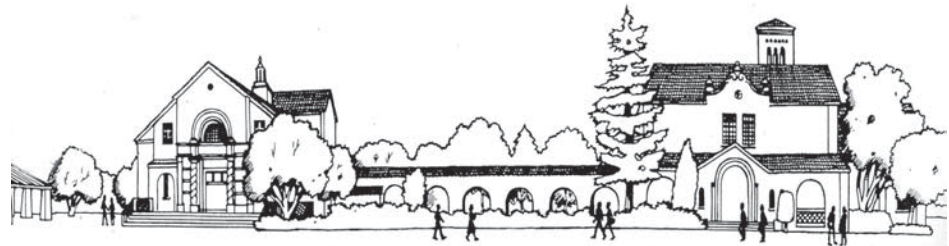
is a program to strengthen and enrich how family members interact — with the purpose of making each person and the family as a whole as psychologically strong as possible.

It was developed originally by **Palo Alto High School** and the **Palo Alto Medical Foundation** for Health Care, Research and Education, and expanded to Gunn High School.

It is now being co-sponsored by the **Palo Alto Weekly**, **Palo Alto Unified School District** and other community organizations, with major support from the **California Family Foundation**.

Being an Anger Tamer is the first publication in a program designed to help students and family members interact more positively and develop stronger abilities to negotiate and communicate. Other publications and newsletters will be mailed during the school year.

—LifeSkills Planning Committee



Family

LifeSkills Program

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For information: (650) 329-3717

For help or Advice: (650) 327-TEEN; 327-3333

1. Being An Anger Tamer: Staying in Charge Of Yourself