

ASSESSING THE COSTS OF ANGER

The struggle with anger has cost you—in the coin of energy, of deep and painful regret, of damage to your closest bonds. You sense that your efforts at anger control—and all the ways those efforts have failed—have left a deep mark on you.

You probably already have a pretty good idea how much responding with anger has cost you in the various areas of your life. Have you experienced broken and strained relationships? Sickness and poor health? Excessive stress? Difficulties at school or work? Problems with alcohol or other substances? There may also be other costs that are less obvious, or that you choose not to think about.

The following exercise on assessing the costs of anger can help you examine exactly what anger has cost you in your life. This will also give you a better idea of what you have missed out on by responding to anger feelings with anger behavior.

You may already have an idea that something is wrong. This is a good starting point. The difficult work is facing exactly what is wrong and coming to terms with what anger has cost you. You will see that we are asking you to look at your personal experience with anger. Nobody is more of an expert about your experience than you. Are you willing to get started? If so, then get a pen and a separate piece of paper. Let's begin.

ASSESSING THE COST OF YOUR ANGER

1. Interpersonal Costs

Summarize the effects of anger on your relationships. Have friendships changed or been lost? Have family members been alienated? Do they avoid you, or do you avoid them? Have you lost a marriage or romantic relationship due to anger?

2. Career Costs

Summarize the effects of anger on your career. Have you ever quit or been fired from a job because of anger? This includes overt

productive, bad-mouthing people, gossip, and so on. Have coworkers ever been alienated by your anger? Has your anger affected your school career (relationships with teachers, administrators)?

3. Health Costs

Describe the effects of anger on your health. There is a lot of research showing that anger stresses your body. Do you have any physical problems that could be stress related? Do you tend to get sick often? Do you experience physical symptoms during or after anger episodes (such as chest pain, muscle tension, upset stomach, headache)? Do you sometimes ruminate and stew over anger to the point of feeling sick or keyed up or having insomnia?

4. Energy Costs

Outline how anger has affected your energy. Does your anger sometimes exhaust you? Have you put time and energy into disappointing efforts at control? Have your attempts to manage anger left you feeling discouraged, fatigued, or worn out?

5. Emotional Costs

What has anger cost you emotionally? How much guilt do you carry for damage done by your anger? How do regrets about your anger episodes affect you emotionally? Are you affected by relationship losses due to anger? Do you suffer depression or hopelessness in the wake of your anger?

EXAMPLE ASSESSMENT

Here's how Rachel, an insurance claims adjuster, completed her assessment of the costs of her anger:

1. Interpersonal Costs

Mom and I fight, and then we don't talk for months. Two relationships with boyfriends got screwed up because of fighting. Rod and Jeanine—both