

SESSION 4

Identifying Triggers

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to . . .

1. Understand the relationship between triggers and anger arousal.
2. Identify specific triggers for their own anger.
3. Recognize that their emotional reaction to a trigger is a learned response that has become a habit or the result of what they think or say to themselves about the trigger.
4. Recognize that the first (automatic) reaction to a trigger may not be the best way to respond.
5. Understand that it is possible to learn new and better ways to react to triggers.
6. Use the STOP! Calm Body, Relax and Let Go Technique when a trigger makes them feel angry or upset.

MATERIALS

Scanning Relaxation CD and CD player (*optional, if time permits*)

Preliminary Activities

How many of you practiced the complete Calm Body Technique?

Ask for a show of hands.

Do you have any questions or comments about using this relaxation technique?

Understanding Triggers

So far, we've talked about what it FEELS like to be angry or upset, and we've looked at the PHYSICAL SIDE EFFECTS that



5 minutes



Homework Review



Discussion



20 minutes

can wear down our health and overall sense of comfort and well-being. Now we're going to look at what "makes" us get angry or upset. We call these TRIGGERS.



Write: *Triggers*



Read the two *Garfield* cartoons on page 15 in your workbook. What are the triggers for Garfield in each cartoon? How does he respond? Please write your answers in your workbook.

Allow some time for students to read the cartoons and respond to the questions.

Small-Group Activity

Now I want you to divide into small groups, with no more than five or six of you in a group.

Allow time for students to assemble in small groups.



As a group, I want you to discuss the topic of triggers. What are the situations or events that really set you off?



Fill out the Personal Triggers Worksheet on page 16 of your workbook when you think of things that apply to you.

Allow a few minutes for small-group discussion.



Ask for volunteers to give examples of triggers and write them on the chalkboard. Use them as a springboard for discussion as you help the group identify the 5 to 10 most common triggers.



How Triggers Work

If I took a live ELECTRIC WIRE and touched you with it so that it gave you a good jolt, you would feel a rush of adrenaline, your muscles would tense, and you'd immediately feel very upset and angry. The reaction is direct and understandable. But how many of the triggers on the board cause bodily reactions the way a shock does?

Few, if any, should qualify.

If our personal triggers don't directly produce a reaction like a shock, then why do they make us get angry or upset?



The two main reasons are given in your workbook on page 17. Sometimes the way we respond to a trigger has become AUTOMATIC, like a habit, because we've learned to react that

way over and over again. Other times, the trigger makes us angry or upset because of what we THINK or SAY to ourselves about the trigger.

Automatic Reactions

Let's look at how we LEARN automatic reactions to triggers. If a reaction has become automatic, it tends to be our FIRST RESPONSE. But our first response often is not the best one. For example, if you just lost a dollar in a soft drink machine, your automatic first reaction might be to hit the machine. But because the machine is made of metal, and your hand isn't, you would probably hurt your hand and not get your money back anyway. Obviously, this isn't the best response.

Can you think of some past situations when your first response wasn't the best response and you wished you could change what you said or did?



Discussion

Solicit examples from the students. Help them identify the trigger.

Here's another way to think about this. If you react automatically to the trigger, who is in control, you or the trigger?

Answer: *The trigger*

In fact, your triggers can turn you into a puppet like the ones on page 18 in your workbook. People who know you well also know how to push your buttons. When they say or do something that acts as a trigger, you get angry or upset every time, just like a puppet being pulled by strings.



Workbook

So who's in control here?

Allow students to answer.

Let's say that someone disses you in front of a group of students, and everyone starts yelling that you should get angry and go after that person, and you do.

Who's in control here?

Allow students to answer.

If we want to stop being jerked around, we need to STOP REACTING to triggers by getting angry or upset. What we have to do is to UNLEARN this reaction.



Workbook

How do we unlearn something?

The answer is in your workbook on page 19: by practicing a different reaction over and over again until it becomes automatic.

STOP! Calm Body, Relax and Let Go

Let's choose a word that we can use to block or stop that automatic, angry reaction



Chalkboard

Write: *STOP!* in large letters.

Let's practice facing the trigger, yelling, "STOP!" and then saying, "Calm Body," and relaxing by softly saying, "Relax and let go."



Chalkboard

Under the word "STOP!" write: *Calm Body, relax and let go.*



Demonstration

Use the following example to demonstrate how to use the technique.

Let's say that you walk into a bathroom at school and find your favorite sweatshirt dumped on the floor. Yell, "STOP!" Then softly say, "Calm Body, relax and let go."

Have each student visualize one of his or her own triggers. Then, on cue, have everyone in class yell, "STOP!" then softly say, "Calm Body, relax and let go."

We can't go around yelling, "STOP! Calm Body, relax and let go," so we need to practice doing it inside our head.

Practice with three triggers.



Discussion

What do you think about this technique? Is it difficult to do in your head?

If you are having trouble making it work in your head, or as a whisper, then practice it out loud at home a few more times first, and then try it in your head again.



Demonstration

Role-play an automatic reaction to someone's trigger followed by yelling, "Stop! Calm Body, relax and let go," in your head.

If there is sufficient time, play part of the Scanning Relaxation CD again to reinforce what it feels like to have a calm body and to use the Relax and Let Go Technique.

SESSION 4 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Your homework assignment for this session is to practice the STOP! Calm Body, Relax and Let Go Technique, just as we did

here in class. Use the technique at least three times when you feel angry or upset. Write the triggers on the lines provided in your workbook on page 20. You can work on the same trigger more than once, as long as it is a different incident.

If you have time, it would also be a good idea to practice the Calm Body Technique, which you learned during the last class.

Tell students to listen to the Scanning Relaxation CD if they have been given copies to take home. Otherwise, encourage students to practice the technique on their own.

Note that they may want to track their effectiveness in using the technique by filling out additional Relaxation Rating Scales. Let them know that blank copies of these scales (one for before and one for after relaxation practice) appear on pages 43 and 44 in their workbooks. They may make as many copies of these scales as they wish.