

TRIGGERS: SKILLS FOR ANGER MANAGEMENT

OUTCOMES

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the words, actions, or body language that “trigger” anger in themselves and others.
- Compare and contrast others’ triggers with their own.
- Identify a range of choices they can make when their anger is triggered.
- Give assertive negative feedback.
- Receive negative feedback without getting upset.
- Use active listening skills.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Chalkboard or flip chart
- Chalk or markers

HANDOUTS

- 1 Triggers
- 2 How to Give Negative Feedback
- 3 How to Receive Negative Feedback

PREPARING TO TEACH THIS LESSON

- Write up and post the lesson objectives.
- Copy handouts and prepare all materials.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE PEOPLE

A Community Resource Person with some background in mediation or conflict resolution would add credibility and interest to this lesson. Send a copy of the lesson when confirming the date and location of the class. After he or she has received the lesson, discuss how you will work together to teach it.

SUMMARY

At the end of each lesson is a summary section. It is very important that the lesson is timed in order to allow sufficient time to complete the debrief with the students. During the debrief (summary), the students can discuss the information learned, clarify any concerns, and analyze the skills that they have practiced. This is a critical step in the learning process and must not be neglected.

PART ONE: TRIGGERS (45 minutes)

1

Write the word “trigger” on the flipchart or board.

Ask students to call out the first thing that come to mind. Record their first ten responses.

Ask: Are triggers dangerous?

After they respond, suggest that triggers are only dangerous when pulled.

Explain that to many people, the word has more than one meaning. In some circumstances, the term *triggers* refers to words or non-verbal behavior that produce anger or other negative emotional reactions. Write the definition of trigger on the board.

Triggers refers to words or non-verbal behaviors that produce anger or other negative emotional reactions.

Ask: “Can you see why this might have the name trigger?”

Ask: Can you think of any examples of triggers that fit this definition? (*If students do not mention these, suggest derogatory terms, name-calling, profanity, spitting, dangerous driving, etc.*)

2

Share the lesson outcomes with the students and introduce the Community Resource Person, if one is present to help teach this lesson.

3

Ask the students to think quietly about the last time they were very angry.

Then ask students to think quietly about these questions:

- What set you off?
- Did certain words trigger your anger?
- Did someone else use body language like gestures, facial expressions, postures, or other physical signals to make you angry?

After students have thought quietly about those questions, distribute “**Handout 1: Triggers**” which can be found at the end of this lesson plan.

Say: “Using your memory of the last time you were very angry, take a few minutes to write down your responses to the following questions after we read it aloud.” Ask a volunteer to read the handout.

NOTE: Define body language. Make sure students understand the term.

4

After they have jotted down a few responses on their handouts, organize the students into small groups. The groups should have between three and five students. Ask the students to sit close together so they can easily see and hear each other. Each group should choose a reporter and a recorder.

5

Each group should discuss their triggers and come up with a comprehensive list.

6

The recorder should put the group’s responses to the four questions on flip chart paper. Have each group display their answers to the class. The reporter for each group should give a brief summary of their responses.

7

Have students compare and contrast the answers posted. What are the most common triggers (verbal and non-verbal)? Are there any triggers that appear on all of the lists?

8

Get students to think about the responses by asking the following questions:

- How are the triggers alike?
- How are the triggers different?
- What does this tell you about each other?
- What does this tell you about triggers?
- Which triggers make the most people mad?
- What are the most common signs that a trigger is getting you angry?

The point here is to help students learn their own warning signs or anger cues, so that they can recognize their anger and to recognize that they have common “triggers” and reactions.

- What are the most common reactions to triggers?

Some examples of anger warning signs are raised voice, tense muscles, faster heartbeat, speaking faster, sweaty palms, foul language use, etc.

9

Use the groups’ answers to Handout 1, question 4 (How do I react to my TRIGGERS?) and ask students:

- What are the consequences of these reactions? What you do when you are angry?

If students need help, give them this example: *The anger trigger might be “He called me a name.” The behavior might be “I pushed or punched him.” The consequence might be “We got into a fight and both of us got suspended.”*

10

Tell students that there may be consequences not only for themselves, but also for others that may have been affected.

- Who might be affected by angry reactions?

If students need help, give them this example: *There may have been an injury to someone who tried to break up a fight, or someone’s parent may have had to miss a day of work to go to a school conference or to juvenile court.*

Tell students: Students have a choice in how they respond when their anger is triggered. No one is “forced to fight.” Instead, one “chooses to fight.” No one is forced to scream at someone or to lose control. Instead, one chooses to act out in a rage.

11

Point out that there are productive and unproductive reactions. Ask:

- Is there ever a time when it is a good idea to ignore an anger-provoking act?

There may be times when students think that it is a good idea just to ignore a trigger. For example, one benefit is that the conflict will not escalate at that moment. To determine if the trigger should be ignored, the following questions should be asked: Is this problem worth continued attention? Is it really important? Is my anger justified? Is there a practical or productive response to my anger?

- What could be the dangers of ignoring an anger-provoking act?

You may bury your emotions and then explode later in a bigger way than you might have if you had simply addressed the problem when it occurred.

12

Ask students:

- Why is it important to learn how to stay calm when dealing with someone who triggers your anger?

13

Remember back to the last time you were angry. Picture the scene.

- What words were spoken? What actions were taken?
- What was it like? Did you or someone else yell? Were you or someone else agitated? Did you or someone else use a profane gesture or push someone? What else happened?

14

Ask students:

- How did you feel when seeing these angry reactions in yourself? In the other person who was involved in the dispute?
- What would have happened differently if your trigger had not been pulled and you had remained calm?
- What is likely to happen if you approach someone in anger to give him or her a negative message?

15

Tell students that, while anger is a strong emotion, they probably already have strategies they use to get their anger under control.

Ask students what techniques they use. Write their responses on the board or flip chart.

Supplement students' suggestions with the following strategies, clarifying where necessary:

- *Deep breathing: Remind students of some of the signs of anger (tense muscles, faster heartbeat, etc.). In basketball, taking deep breaths is often part of a successful player's foul shot routine.*
- *Backward counting: Slowly and silently counting backwards from 20 to 1 helps you remove yourself mentally. It also gives you a chance to calm down.*
- *Thinking of a pleasant image: Imagine a scene you find relaxing and practice focusing on that scene when you feel yourself getting angry.*
- *Talking to yourself: Select a specific phrase, such as "Stay cool" or "Get over it" or "I have a choice here" to repeat over and over while you get yourself under control.*

16

Point out that, even though we think of ourselves as "out of control," we often pick some times to blow up and stay calm at other times. For example, there's a difference between how we handle our anger with strangers, our friends, and with our grandmother. In other words, we are able to control our anger when we really want to.

17

Ask students:

- When someone uses one of the triggers that make you the angriest, do you think you could calm down? If not, why not?
- Is there any way to make triggers less infuriating and provocative to you? To other people?

18

Tell students that, while anger may be a normal and natural human feeling, it is not always easy to give or receive. Nor is it easy to give or receive disappointment,

displeasure, or criticism. We consider this negative feedback. But it is important for us to learn “to take it” and then deal with it correctly. If we can do this, conflict will become a problem-solving situation.

PART TWO: GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK (25 minutes)

1

It is essential for us to be able to give negative feedback so that we stand up for our rights while respecting the rights of the person with whom we are in conflict. When we can do this, it will be far more likely that we can resolve the problem without conflict or harm.

2

Explain that the skill of “giving negative feedback” means expressing criticism, disappointment, anger, or displeasure calmly, without losing your temper or fighting.

3

Ask: “Have you ever seen someone give negative feedback in a very effective way? If so, what did he or she do?” (Encourage students to be as specific as possible in their descriptions of what someone did to give feedback in a positive way.)

Distribute “**Handout 2: How to Give Negative Feedback**” which can be found at the end of this lesson plan.

4

Discuss and brainstorm the reasons for each step with the students and give some tips on how to do each.

1. Stay calm and ask if you can talk to the person.

- Ask: Why would this help?

It is better than demanding or confronting another person in an angry way. It makes it more likely that the other person will listen without losing his or her temper. It is probably best to have this discussion without other people present.

2. Say something positive. For example, “Your friendship is important to me.”

- Ask: Why say something positive to someone who has made you mad?
This works best if you have some relationship with the other person (such as ongoing acquaintance, friend, girl/boyfriend, teacher, boss, co-worker or peer, or family member). Taking this step might make the other person more receptive to hearing a negative message.
- Ask: What else could you do if being positive is unreasonable? Can you just talk to the person and ask him to listen to you for a minute?
If you are polite and calm, you may be able to keep control of the situation this way.

3. Tell the person what is on your mind or what your point of view is. For example, “I think...” “I feel...”

Ask: Does the other person know you are mad and why? Did you trigger him?

This is the KEY step. The point here is to relate your feelings and thoughts rather than placing blame on the listener. The best way to do this by starting with “I think” or “I feel,” instead of “you are” or “you did.” It is important to be specific about what you think or feel, and to avoid labeling the other person (as “crazy” or “mean”). Remember that the other person may not be aware that he or she has upset you and will certainly be more likely to change his or her behavior once he or she knows that it is creating a problem.

4. Give a reason or example of your situation.

- Ask: Why is it important to give an example?

This will help make sure the other person understands what you have said. It also gives the other person a clear picture of why you became so angry. Doing this will make it easier for you to state what you want to see happen and/or for the other to say how he or she feels.

5.a Ask how the other person feels.

5 b. Ask the other person to do something different or differently.

- Ask: Why ask this person to change? Will he do it? Will it just make him more angry?

Be as specific as possible about what you want the other person to DO, not what you want him or her to think or feel. You may need to stop and think about exactly what it is that you want the other person to do. For example, instead of saying “stop being a thief,” you might say, “Please give me back my money.”

It is important to keep the other person's feelings in mind, even if you choose not to act upon them. This is also a way of showing that you respect the other person and can listen to his or her needs.

6. Thank the person for listening.

- Ask: How can you show the person that you are not still mad?

If you thank him or her for his or her attention, this shows respect for the other person who has heard you out. This makes it less likely that he or she will repeat the act that's made you angry.

5

Ask for student volunteers to role-play Scenario A on the handout. Remind students that they should follow the steps that have just been discussed, even if they do not think they would do it in conflicts in their own lives.

As the students do the role-play, coach them in the skills of giving negative feedback as needed by whispering reminders, pointing out a skill, encouraging, and praising.

6

When the volunteers complete the role-play, ask:

- (to the volunteer who gave negative feedback:) How did it feel?
- (to the volunteer who was on the receiving end what it felt like:) Was it easier to deal with than a situation where the other person could be yelling and angry?
- (to the other students:) What did you think or feel as observers? Do you have any advice for either of the participants?

7

Go back to the five steps and discuss with all the students the rationale for giving negative feedback. This skill has the potential for bringing about a change in someone else's behavior as well as helping you feel better by getting anger off your chest.

8

Divide students into pairs and have them role-play scenarios B and C on the handout. Then have them reverse roles (giver and receiver) and do the remaining scenario.

Have the person giving negative feedback use the steps in Handout 2 to remind him

or her of the skills that he or she is supposed to be practicing. Students should follow the steps even if they do not think they would use them in their own lives.

9

When everyone is done, bring the students back together for discussion of their roles.

Ask:

- How did it feel to give negative feedback? What was most difficult about giving negative feedback? What was easiest? Did you follow all of the steps? If you did not, why not? Could you have done anything better?
- How did it feel to be on the receiving end of negative feedback? Did your partner do a good job of giving negative feedback? Did he or she follow all of the steps? Which steps does he or she need to work on? Is there anything that you would have done differently?

10

Ask:

- What skills did you use in these role-plays?
- Did anyone do an excellent job?
- Did your partner use good skills?
- Which skills were demonstrated well?
- Which skills need to be practiced more?

11

Give all students credit for good work in learning an important and hard skill.

PART THREE: RECEIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK (25 minutes)

1

Tell students that sometimes using the skill of giving negative feedback does not end the conflict but instead may set up a situation in which they will need to receive negative feedback. This is another skill of standing up for our rights while respecting the rights of the person with whom we are in conflict. It is really the opposite of giving negative feedback, which is the skill that we have just learned.

2

Tell student that “receiving negative feedback” means listening and responding without getting upset when someone criticizes you.

3

Distribute “**Handout 3: How to Receive Negative Feedback**” which can be found at the end of this lesson plan.

4

Discuss and brainstorm the reasons for each step and give some tips on how to do each.

1. Stay calm and listen to what the other person has to say.

- Ask: Why should you listen to someone who has made you mad?

Listening calmly shows respect for another person’s feelings and may help calm the person down.

2. Ask the person to explain or give an example if you do not understand.

- Ask: Why?

If you do not understand exactly what has angered the other person, it will be hard for you to agree to change what you are doing or explain your side.

3. Listen to the other point of view and ask what the person wants you to do.

Ask: Why should you do anything?

This shows that you are willing to consider the other’s complaint or criticism and his or her ideas for changing the situation. It also soothes the person’s anger and shows that you have listened.

4. Agree, if you can, and apologize, if you should.

- Ask: Would you “lose face” if you apologized? What alternatives do you have?

If you can understand and accept the other’s viewpoint, simply apologizing and agreeing to try the other’s solution can help restore a friendship or keep more trouble from breaking out.

5. Ask to tell your side of the situation.

- Ask: Why is this step important?

This will give you a chance to correct any wrong information the other person may have about what you have said or done. It will also give you the opportunity to tell your side.

5

Ask for student volunteers to role-play scenario A on the handout. Remind students that they should follow the steps that have just been discussed, even if they do not think they would do it in conflicts in their own lives.

As the students do the role-play, coach them in the skill of receiving negative feedback by whispering reminders, pointing out a skill, encouraging, and praising.

6

When the volunteers have finished, ask:

- (to the volunteer who received negative feedback:) How did it feel? Was it hard? Which steps were the hardest?
- (to the volunteer who was on the giving end:) What did it feel like? Did they use all of the steps?

7

Go back to the steps and discuss with all the students the rationale for receiving negative feedback. Some key discussion points are:

- *If you do not understand exactly what has angered the other person, it will be hard for you to agree to change what you are doing or explain your side.*
- *At times it makes sense to accept negative feedback from someone else instead of getting into an unproductive argument.*
- *Picking your battles is a smart way to survive.*
- *If you allow another person to make you lose control, then that person wins, not you.*
- *There may be negative consequences for challenging negative feedback, such as defying a person in an authority position.*

8

Divide students into pairs and have them role-play one of the remaining scenarios on the handout. Then have them reverse roles (giver and receiver) and do the final scenario.

Have the person receiving negative feedback use the steps in Handout 3 to remind him

or her of the skills that he or she is supposed to be practicing. Students should follow the steps even if they do not think they would use them in their own lives.

9

When everyone is done, bring students back together for feedback. Ask:

- How did it feel to receive negative feedback? What was most difficult about receiving negative feedback? Did you follow all of the steps? If you did not, why not? Could you have done anything better?
- How did it feel to be on the giving end? Did the student do a good job of receiving negative feedback? Did he or she follow all of the steps? Which steps does he or she need to work on? Is there anything that you would have done differently?

10

Ask:

- What skills did you use in these role-plays? Were they different than the skills used in the first set of role-plays?
- Did your partner use good skills?
- Which skills were demonstrated well?
- Which skills need to be practiced more?

11

Give all students credit for good work in learning another important and hard skill.

PART FOUR: SUMMARY (5 minutes)**1**

Ask students:

- Do you think you will use these steps outside of class? Why or why not?
- Would the skills work in helping to defuse conflict situations?
- Is it a problem that the other person involved in the conflict may not be in the class and may not have learned these steps? Is there any way to solve this problem? Can you defuse the situation by yourself?

2

Have each student think about one thing he or she learned during the session. Ask students to write them down or tell a partner. After a few minutes of reflection, invite a few volunteers to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

3

If a Community Resource Person has assisted you, thank him or her. Thank the students for their participation.

HANDOUT 2

HOW TO GIVE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

The skill of “giving negative feedback” means expressing criticism, disappointment, anger, or displeasure calmly, without losing your temper or fighting.

1. Stay CALM and ask if you can talk to the person.
2. Say something positive. For example, “Your friendship is important to me.”
3. TELL the person what’s on your mind or what your point of view is. For example, “I think...” “I feel...”
4. GIVE a reason or example of your situation.
5. a. Ask how the other person feels.
b. Ask the other person to do something different or differently.
6. THANK the person for listening.

Scenarios

- A. You and your brother (or sister) share a room. Your brother (or sister) leaves clothes and sports equipment on the floor and the desk chair. You like things to be neater, and get angry when you see the “messy” room. You want the situation to improve.
- B. You and your father are arguing because your father calls you by a nickname in front of your friends, and this embarrasses you. You feel that you long ago outgrew that nickname. You speak to your father about this situation.
- C. Just as you are getting ready to pay for your movie ticket, someone you know cuts in line in front of you. She doesn’t even say, “Excuse me.” You have been waiting in line for a long time. You are angry and want to tell her about it.

HANDOUT 3

HOW TO RECEIVE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Receiving negative feedback means listening and responding without getting upset when someone criticizes you.

1. Stay calm and LISTEN to what the other person has to say.
2. ASK the person to explain or give an example if you do not understand.
3. LISTEN to the other point of view and ASK what the person wants you to do.
4. AGREE, if you can, and APOLOGIZE, if you should.
5. ASK to tell your side of the situation.

Scenarios

- A. You missed curfew for the second time this week. Now your dad says you can not go out for the next week.
- B. Your mom is angry because your room is a mess. She says that there are dirty clothes all over and that she is sick and tired of cleaning up after you.
- C. You are a half-hour late to meet your friend at the movies. This is the third time this has happened. She is upset.

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