TIP SHEET FOR
MANAGING ANGER

What do we know about ‘Anger’?

Anger is a normal human emotion which varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense rage. Everyone feels angry from time to time. It is a state of heightened arousal which usually is associated with other emotions like feeling threatened, unfairly treated, undermined, frightened, unappreciated, disappointed, worried, embarrassed, or frustrated. Sometimes it is linked with drug and alcohol problems. Anger can impact on concentration, relationships, mood, work and social life.

What triggers anger for one person may not be a trigger for another person; and what is irritating one day may not be irritating the next day to the same person. You may be angry about a specific person’s treatment towards you, or a particular event, or something to do with your past. Your response is likely to be a combination of how you feel on the day, the context of the event, and your own history of factors related to the event. The way you deal with anger is also strongly influenced by family and culture. Frequently your response affects others. Remember that physical outbursts are always inexcusable. At all times, your response affects you because there are physiological reactions in your body which accompany anger. When you get angry, your heart rate and blood pressure rise and stress hormones are released. This does not cause problems in the short-term but, in the long term, there can be significant consequences for your physical health (increased susceptibility to infection, hypertension, damaged arteries, headaches, circulatory disorders, stomach ache) and your mental health (depression, anxiety).

Sometimes it is events in the environment which trigger an angry response. For example, believing that your opinions are not being listened to; not receiving what you consider to be a fair mark for an assignment; having to cope with friends or family who do not understand the demands of study; or interpreting a comment as threatening, disrespectful or unfair. It is your response to the situation which determines whether your anger is problematic. When you are angry, you will express, suppress or calm those feelings, and there are consequences for whatever choice you make. The better choices result in validation of your feelings while not violating the feelings of others.

What can you do to help yourself?

These tips may help you to construct strategies for yourself which could improve the way in which you manage your anger. Physical violence is always off limits.

- **Determine the role of Anger**
  Think about the role of Anger in your life. What purpose does it serve? Sometimes anger serves a positive purpose and challenges you to make the necessary changes in your life. It may be a useful spur to seeking clarification from a lecturer or becoming clearer about your expectations from a partner. However, anger becomes a problem when it creates trouble for you and those around you or when others are frightened by you.

- **Discover your triggers**
  Become more aware of your own triggers. Which people, events, circumstance, times of the day seem to make you feel angry? Is there a pattern? Watch yourself for a week and keep some notes about your observations.

- **Track your thoughts**
  Observe and note down your thoughts. Notice the language you are using in your head. Are there words like ‘never’, ‘always’, ‘must’, ‘should’ or ‘should not’? Acknowledge that your thoughts are valid and that others are also entitled to their thoughts. How could this situation be viewed differently? Do you have all facts? Does what has made you angry really matter? Will this be important in six months? Do these thoughts take you in the direction of greater fulfillment as a person or do they take you towards further suffering? If the thoughts are making you suffer more, what can be done to change this? Do you need to say or do something differently?

- **Know your body**
  Note what happens in your body. Where precisely do you feel the tension? Does it spread or is it localized? Do you get a tense jaw, flushed face, pounding heart or tightness in your chest? Can you put a colour, form or texture to the bodily tension? What happens when the feeling eases?
**Balance in Life**
Getting sufficient sleep is very important. Even toddlers get irritable when they are sleep-deprived – and they don’t have any responsibilities! Physical exercise and good nutrition help you to sleep well at night.

**Vent safely**
At times you may want to express the anger without, of course, hurting anyone. Thumping a pillow repeatedly; yelling out loud in a field or in your parked car; ripping paper into smaller and smaller pieces may be ways to vent safely in the short term before you decide what action to take.

**Take time-out**
There’s no point continuing an argument if either person is angry. Anger filters out rationality. The focus becomes conveying your opinion, not listening to theirs. Sometimes time-out may involve a very simple technique like counting backwards while breathing slowly and deeply. At other times, time-out may be a pre-agreed time (say 15-20 minutes) when you and your partner go to different areas of the house or take a brisk walk by yourself, and agree to resume the discussion later. They say that successful couples argue well, not that they don’t argue at all! When you find that you are reacting quickly over a prolonged period to events which would normally not concern you unduly, it may be time to look at the demands in your life and see which ones can be reduced or dropped altogether!

**Practise detachment**
Your thoughts and feelings and behaviours are all interlinked. You may choose to calm yourself through relaxation or breathing exercises. Try breathing from the diaphragm, allowing your tummy to gently rise and fall as you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, slowly and deeply. Repeat calming words like “relax”, “let go”, “calm”, “harmony”, as you practise your breathing.

**Stay away from substances that increase your anger**
If you know that you get more irritable after consuming alcohol, make the decision to stay in control by limiting the amount you drink. Stimulant substances are also likely to lead to angry responses. Try to be honest with yourself about drug and alcohol use, and choose to make responsible decisions.

**Where can you get help from others?**
- Talk to a counsellor at the Callaghan campus (4921 5801) or at the Ourimbah campus (4348 4060).
- Make an appointment to see your doctor.
- Lifeline 131 114 offers a 24-hour service, as do the Psychiatric Emergency Centre (1 800 655 085) for the Hunter region or the Central Intake (4320 3500) for the Central Coast area.

**What other resources are available?**

**Websites:**
from Clare Albright: Ten Tips for Managing Conflict, Tension and Anger
http://mentalhealth.about.com/cs/selfhelp/a/tentips.htm
from Australian Psychological Society website

**Books:**

**CDs/ DVDs:**
Petrea King ‘Golden Light Meditation’ or ‘Learning to Meditate’, or ‘Soar like an Eagle’