

## The Anger Thermometer

**STEP 1 – LEVEL OF ANGER/EMOTION:** Begin by identifying the different levels of intensity of the emotions that you experience with your anger. Words to describe the levels could be “irritated,” “annoyed,” “frustrated,” “upset,” “mad,” “peeved,” “angry” or “rage.” Start at the bottom of the thermometer and work your way up the scale of intensity. This is personalized to your anger so it may be very different from others’ thermometers or our example. Some people have found it helpful to create different thermometers depending on the situation (i.e. my anger with my spouse versus my anger with work).

**STEP 2 – PHYSICAL SENSATIONS:** Now for each level of anger, we ask that you mindfully bring your attention to the physical sensations that you experience in your body. For example, at “irritated” I might notice muscle tension in my neck or jaw and at a higher level I might notice my heart rate is elevated and I am sweating. Try to think back to times when you were angry and the sensations you experienced at each level.

**STEP 3 – AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS:** As you are learning, our anger is very connected to our hot thoughts or possible thought distortions. At this step, list the type of thinking that might occur for you at each level. For example, at “annoyed,” the thought might be, “Here we go again” and at “frustrated,” one might think, “They are doing this to me to push my buttons.” At higher levels of the thermometer, this would also include the difficulty in concentrating or narrowed focus that some may experience.

**STEP 4 – ACTION URGES/BEHAVIORS:** With each emotion we have an action urge that may guide our behavior. This urge could be just that, an urge that we don’t have to act on. Other times, it may be so strong that we find ourselves engaging in aggressive behavior either towards others or ourselves. Let’s remember that “loss of control” is a behavior and we do have control over our behaviors – it just might not feel like we do at times. List at each level either your urge or the action that you might take as a result of the emotion, physical sensations, and thoughts.

**STEP 5 – BASELINE :** Our anger is very different in different relationships. For example with a friend the baseline of your anger might be at calm. When you see your friend there is no unresolved conflict and you are able to relax and enjoy one another’s company. However, at work, your baseline might be at frustrated due to ongoing stressors, conflict and lack of resources. It is helpful to place on the thermometer your baseline for different environments or people. Write in your baseline at different points on the thermometer for work, partner, family, friends, or other stressors. Identifying your baseline will help you understand why seemingly small triggers seem to elicit such strong emotional responses.

**STEP 6 – COPING SKILLS/NEW BEHAVIORS:** This is the last and most important step in the anger thermometer. Here you are going to list the skills to help you manage your anger in a successful way. Let’s remember that anger is a healthy emotion that can bring us important information that we need to act on and by doing so, can improve our situation. At each level of anger, think about what tools would work best. Some of these can be repeated at all levels such as deep breathing or distraction. Other tools will only work best at certain levels. For example, a DEESC script or thought records should only be used at lower levels of intensity when a person is able to focus and the anger is less likely to be displayed nonverbally. At the point of boiling, the only intervention to be considered is to get out and get safe. At this high point of anger, our thinking is not clear or rational. Attempting to talk through the conflict will not work when our anger is high. Get out of the situation and begin to use the skills to cool

down such as distraction, changing body temperature, and deep breathing. Once the intensity has decreased, begin to implement other skills to work with your anger.

**REMEMBER:** This will take practice. A large part of this exercise is developing the awareness of anger so that we might be able to use skills effectively. Be kind to yourself when you might revert to the action urge and reward yourself when you do use the new coping. Be sure to review your thermometer with the group to get further coaching, suggestions and support.