Perception and Anger Management
A Series of Lessons Developed by Sandy Magnuson

AGE GROUP: With appropriate modification, these lessons can be used with students in elementary and high school.

ASCA Standards Area: Personal/Social Development

National Standard Personal/Social Development A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Student Competencies:
Students will identify and express feelings.
Students will distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
Students will understand the need for self control and how to practice it.
Students will acquire strategies for managing anger.

Lesson #1

Suggested Introductory Activities

Read and discuss meaning of “People are disturbed not by events, but by the views which they take of the events” (Epictetus -- around 2,000 years ago).

Show images featuring multiple images (old woman/young woman, duck/vase).

Lecturette

We have talked about our perceptions being different. That is why I view or experience some things as mean or aggressive, while another person might ignore them or brush them off. We'll talk more about perception during the next few weeks.

Our brains are amazing organs. Sometimes we can create an experience with them. If you're comfortable doing so, I'd like you to try an experiment.

    Close eyes.
    Imagine that you climb up 25 sets of stairs to a flat roof.
    The steps come up in the middle of the flat roof.
    There is a fence around the edge of the flat roof.
    Stand in the middle.
    Walk to the fence.
    Look over the edge.
    Walk back.
    Watch as the fence around the edge vanishes.
    Now walk over to the edge and look over.
    And now return to the center.
    Catch your breath.
    Walk down the stairs . . . all the way to the ground.

    What experiences did you have?
    You didn't even leave this room . . .
Let's imagine that you come to school and you have a big test to take - - maybe CSAP, maybe a spelling test, maybe a reading test. And you say to yourself:

This is awful.
This is terrible.
This is horrible.
I can't stand this.
I will be miserable.
I will fail.
This is not fair.
I hate school anyway.

What's going to happen?

Transition with reference to Epictetus quote

**Illustration and Application**

Tell or read “It Could be Worse” (Yiddish tale)
Discuss what changed in the story.

Return to the big test situation: Let's imagine that you come to school and you have a big test to take - - maybe CSAP, maybe a spelling test, maybe a reading test, and you say negative things to yourself such as “This is awful” or “I know I’ll fail.”

How can you alter that outcome of feeling discouraged, mad, or fearful? (Challenge your thoughts.)

What can you say to yourself instead of "This is awful"?
What can you say to yourself instead of "This is terrible"?

This is horrible.
I can't stand this.
I will be miserable.
I will fail.
This is not fair.
I hate school anyway.

Demonstrate by “thinking out loud” with language such as “Stop that, Sandy! You are scaring yourself. You studied. You know the material. The test may be hard, and you know how to think. Just calm down and do your best!”

**Personalization and Conclusion**

I'd like you to think of a time at school when you upset yourself. How could you change your reactions?

(Consider asking class members to record “I learned” statements.)
Lesson #2

Suggested Introductory Activities

Review “People are disturbed not by events, but by the views which they take of the events” (Epictetus -- around 2,000 years ago).

Last week I talked about our powerful brains, and we conducted an experiment. I’d like you to do a similar experiment this week, if you are comfortable doing so.

Lemon illustration

Please close your eyes.
Create a picture in your head of a large, bright yellow lemon.
Now, imagine that you have a cutting board and knife, and that you cut the lemon in half.
Notice the juice coming out of the lemon.
Hold the lemon to your nose. Take a deep breath through your nose and notice the fragrance.
Now put the lemon in your mouth.

What happened?
Was there a lemon in the room?
But you made funny faces when I asked you to smell your lemon.
What did you smell?
What did you taste?
What does that tell you about your thoughts?

Lecturette

Thoughts can create experiences much like we actually have when we smell, taste, or see something. Thoughts also influence our emotions.

Thoughts are things we say to ourselves.
As we think positively, we usually are more content or less upset.
When we think negatively, we often become fearful, sad, or angry.
When we think about something scary, we can actually create butterflies in our stomachs.

We can also make ourselves angry.

Illustration

Read or tell “The Cookie Thief” (a story that can be accessed with an electronic search).

Facilitate a discussion with questions such as:

At one point the woman was furious. And then she was embarrassed. What changed?

Why was she angry?
Emphasize that the woman was not angered by the situation. She was angered by her beliefs about the situation, and her beliefs were inaccurate.

Assist the class in re-writing the story, e.g., “When she first realized that the man was eating cookies out of the bag that she thought was hers. She got mad. How could she have changed the ending of the story at that point?”

**Concluding Activities**

What lessons do you think the woman learned?
What lessons can we learn from her story?
When have you absolutely believed you were right about something, and then realized you did not have all of the facts?

(Consider asking class members to record “I learned” statements.)
Lesson #3

Suggested Introductory Activities

Review previous lessons.

Facilitate spontaneous word association: Anger
Power
Control
Influence

Introduce notion of power over ourselves and power over someone else.

Tell fable of The Sun and the Wind

Oral PreQuiz

True or False: People are disturbed by events.

True or False: Our minds are quite powerful.

True or False: Sometimes our minds trick us.

True or False: We can convince ourselves that something is horrible even though it's not all that bad.

True or False: We can change our thinking about events.

Introduce diagram

Event ———> Perceptions ———> Feelings ———> Behavior/Reactions

Imagine: I really want to do something so you will be mad. I may even want to hurt you.

Why might I want to do that?

How might I do that?

Name calling

Harsh teasing

Excluding

And what will happen if I succeed?

I have more power than you.

When we are angry we don't think clearly.

Each of us is faced with choices about anger many times a day.

We encounter events every day, and we have choices about how to respond.
Advantages to showing anger or not learning to manage anger:
- Power
- Ability to intimidate
- Avoidance
- Denial of responsibility

Disadvantages to showing anger or not learning to manage anger:
- Embarrassment or shame
- Guilt
- Damage to relationships
- Damage to reputation

Sometimes people stay in angry mode to avoid what is really going on with them.
Would you rather feel angry or would you rather feel sad?
Why?
Would you rather feel angry or would you rather feel jealous?
Why? (It may be hard to admit we’re jealous.)
Would you rather feel angry or would you rather feel hurt?
Why?

It’s hard to feel sad, jealousy, or hurt. These feelings are painful or uncomfortable.
To avoid that pain or discomfort, sometimes people just stay angry.

Illustration and application of diagram

I can’t find my pencil.
What could I say to myself about that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>High Road</th>
<th>Low Road</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone took it.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is terrible.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is horrible.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to get even.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t stand this!</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder what I did with it.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I find another?</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not a big deal. It’s just a pencil.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t need to be upset by this.</td>
<td>How will I feel?</td>
<td>How might I act or react?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concluding Activity

Getting our Angries Out review sheet
This is terrible.

This is horrible.

I can't stand this.

I will be miserable.

I will fail.

This is not fair.

I hate school anyway.
Event

↓

Thoughts

↓

Feelings

↓

Reactions/Behavior
People are disturbed not by events, but by the views which they take of the events.

Epictetus
around 2,000 years ago
Getting Our Angries Out

True or False: People are not disturbed by things that happen. We are disturbed by our perception or beliefs about events.

True or False: Our minds are quite powerful.

True or False: Sometimes our minds trick us.

True or False: We can convince ourselves that something is horrible even though it's not all that bad.

True or False: We can change our thinking about events.

In other words:

Event ———> Perceptions ———> Feelings ———> Behavior/Reactions

This is the event: ____________________________

These are my beliefs about the event: ____________________________

Because of those beliefs, I feel: ____________________________

Given any situation, we choose which road to take:

Event ———> High Road

———> Low Road

Reasons boys and girls may enjoy being angry:
_________________________  ____________________________

Reasons boys and girls may want to manage their anger:
_________________________  ____________________________