In this article, you will learn how to analyze an episode of anger. This involves learning how to identify internal and external events and cues that indicate an escalation of anger, and then developing a plan to defuse that anger.

**Events that Trigger Anger**
The first important way to recognize and manage anger is to know what events trigger your anger. When you get angry, it is because you have encountered an internal or external experience or event that has provoked a sensitive emotional area or a ‘hot-spot’. For many people, specific and recurring events touch on these hot spots which have often been with you most of your life. In addition to events that you experience in the here and now, you may also recall an event from your past that made you angry. Just thinking about these past events may make you angry now. Here are examples of events or issues that can trigger anger:

- Long waits to see your doctor
- Traffic congestion
- Crowded buses or trains
- A friend joking about a sensitive topic
- A friend not paying back money owed to you
- Being wrongly accused
- Having to clean up someone else’s mess
- Having an untidy roommate (including significant others)
- Having a neighbor who plays music too loud
- Being placed on hold for long periods of time while on the telephone
- Being given wrong directions
- Rumors being spread about you that are not true
- Having money or property stolen from you

**Cues to Anger: Four Cue Categories**
A second important way to monitor anger is to identify the cues that occur in response to the anger-provoking event. These cues serve as an early warning system that you have become angry and that your anger is escalating. The cues then become ‘red flags’ letting us know something is out of balance. When we become aware that our ‘red flag’ has been triggered, it lets us know that one of our emotional hot-spots has been touched. Cues can be broken down into four cue categories: physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive cues.

- **Physical cues**—how your body responds; such as with an increased heart rate, tightness in the chest, or feeling hot or flushed
- **Behavioral cues**—what you do; such as clench your fists, raise your voice, or stare at others
- **Emotional cues**—other feelings that may occur along with anger, such as fear, hurt, jealousy, or disrespect
- **Cognitive cues**—what you think about in response to the event, such as hostile self-talk or images of aggression and revenge

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Anger Control Plans
An anger control plan refers to the list of strategies you will identify to manage and control your anger. Up to now, you have been focusing on how to become aware of, and monitor, your anger. Next, you can develop your own anger control plan and learn how you can use specific strategies to control anger.

An effective set of strategies for controlling anger should include both immediate and preventive strategies. Examples of immediate strategies include time-outs, deep-breathing exercises, and thought stopping. Examples of preventive strategies include developing an exercise program and changing irrational beliefs.

Time-Outs
The time-out is a basic anger management strategy that should be in everyone's anger control plan. A time-out can be used formally or informally. In its simplest form, it means taking a few deep breaths and thinking instead of reacting. It may also mean leaving the situation that is causing the escalation or simply stopping the discussion that is provoking your anger.

The formal use of a time-out involves your relationships with family members, friends, and coworkers. The formal use of a time-out involves having an agreement, or a prearranged plan, by which any of the parties involved can call a time-out, and to which all parties have agreed in advance. The person calling the time-out can leave the situation if necessary. It is agreed, however, that he or she will return to either finish the discussion or to postpone it, depending on whether the parties involved feel they can successfully resolve the issue. The next part of the discussion does not have to happen right away and can be rescheduled for a calmer time.

A time-out is important because it can be used effectively in the heat of the moment, even if a person's anger is escalating quickly. A time-out is also effective when used with other strategies. For example, you can take a time-out and go for a walk. You can also take a time-out and call a trusted friend or family member or write in your journal. These other strategies help you calm down during your time-out period.

Sample Anger Control Plan
- Take a time-out, whether formal or informal.
- Talk to a friend, someone you trust.
- Exercise. Take a walk, stretch, go to the gym, do yoga.
- Explore your other feelings beneath the anger.
- Attend 12-step meetings.

It is important to understand what your own hot-spots are. If you don’t know, ask people who are close to you. It is highly likely that they have observed some events that have caused your anger to escalate. Know your ‘red flags’ and pay attention when they get triggered. Finally, get your anger control plan (tool box) and anger management strategies (tools) in order so that they are there when you need them.