Introduction

The Need for 'Anger Management'

In order to be successful learners in today's busy and demanding learning contexts, children and young people need to be able to work co-operatively with others, showing genuine empathy and the ability to communicate their own needs and feelings effectively. They need to be good listeners and to be able to effectively resolve differences and cope with conflict without losing control of what can sometimes be described as uncomfortable and strong feelings. This is a real challenge and possibly a life-long challenge for many of us. For teachers and those in the caring professions who work with young people, there is also an ongoing challenge to provide appropriate opportunities for the development of these skills. However, effectively managing strong and difficult feelings is an essential life skill and, as such, clearly needs to remain a priority in the design and delivery of today's curriculum.

The Problem with Anger

Anger, as a feeling that frequently seems to affect our thinking, behaviours and responses, can be problematic – particularly when it appears to overwhelm the individual and lead to a lack of control and feelings of guilt. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines anger as 'extreme displeasure' and also as 'instinctive feeling as opposed to reason'. This is perhaps one of the key reasons why people can become frightened of anger and also why young people can be confused and bewildered by adult responses and reactions to their own anger. The latter usually prompts adults to punish young people for actually having such feelings in the first place.

However, anger is, in effect, an essential part of being human and, as Faupel et al. (1998 : 3) state, it is now 'accepted as having an evoluationary or adapted significance'. It can also be either positive and useful to us in that it can protect us from certain problem situations or it can be harmful and negative, particularly if these feelings are considered to represent a threat of some kind and, subsequently, significantly disrupt a child's daily living. Worst, strong feelings such as anger can impact negatively on the sustaining of positive relationships and can also lead to violence towards self and/or others. Daniel Goleman (1996) quotes Aristotle : 'Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy' (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, as quoted in Goleman 1996: 3). The challenge is quite obvious: what all human beings need to be able to do is to manage their anger effectively – not to simply attempt to repress such feelings, which are, in effect, entirely natural and have an evident evolutionary and adaptive significance and use.

Coping with Anger

How individuals cope with such anger will depend upon a range of aspects, including:

- ▶ Learned response from parents/carers
- ▶ Belief systems, i.e. our thoughts and understanding of situations and of ourselves
- ▶ Unconscious motivators such as fears and stressors, e.g. separation anxiety
- ▶ Individual differences, i.e. genetic or biological differences

Individuals may deal with their anger in one of the following ways:

- ▶ By displacement: placing on to another person and object our negative feelings/thoughts/ behaviours
- ▶ Repression: containing thoughts in the subconscious
- ▶ Suppression: hiding hurt for fear of disapproval of others
- ▶ Ineffective expression: irrational or hostile expressions of anger such as violence and aggression towards others/a specific context/object
- ▶ Effective expression: learning through experience and allowing others to have their point of view and effectively 'show' our displeasure/anger

The Importance of Emotional Literacy

It is this effective expression of anger and the ability to reflect upon behaviours, thoughts and feelings and to learn through experience that permeates programmes of intervention such as that described in this book.

In recent years there has been much research which highlights the importance of developing children's emotional literacy (Apter 1997; Baker 1998). This includes the development of the social and emotional skills which will enable them to participate, both confidently and appropriately, within a range of social contexts. What is identified as important in such research is the fact that children's mental and physical health is also very much tied to this development (Goleman 1996; Grant 1992; Rudd 1998). Consequently, a central aim of many of the interventions, programmes and approaches adopted by teachers in schools has been to develop pupils' ability to recognise, label and cope with the range of feelings that they may have to experience and deal with on a daily basis.

A central element of any approach to developing emotional literacy is the fostering of children's ability to cope effectively with their emotions. Gaining these kinds of skills has been seen to assist children both in the school context and in the home context. Researchers such as Goleman (1996) and Higgs and Dulewicz (1999), as quoted in Jean Gross (2000: 5), have also shown that 'emotional literacy, or emotional intelligence, is actually a better predictor of lifelong achievement than is conventional IQ. A person's IQ predicts only a small part of

lifelong success – ranging from 4–20%. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, predicts about 80% of a person's success in life.'

The Rationale

Jean Gross (2000) proceeds to highlight five good reasons for teaching emotional literacy, as follows:

- ▶ It will help children to achieve in their school work and support schools in achieving the targets that are set for them.
- ▶ It will enable children to succeed once they've left school and to make a contribution to their community, alongside being motivated to work, learn, develop and maintain positive relationships with others.
- ▶ It will promote mental health, which is particularly important given the statistics which seem to show that mental health problems are increasing at an alarming rate, particularly among children (Mental Health Foundation, 1999).
- ▶ It will make teaching easier in that schools should become more peaceful, nurturing, task-focused and less aggressive places.
- ▶ It will also promote understanding and tolerance within the school and consequently within society as a whole, i.e. developing and maintaining social inclusion.

McCarthy and Park (1998) also suggested a rationale as to why emotional learning is important for every individual. They stress the following points:

- ▶ Understanding emotions is directly connected to both cognitive achievement and motivation to learn.
- ▶ Dealing effectively with emotions helps individuals to develop more positive relationships and provides a sense of psychological well-being.
- ▶ Those adolescents who are 'emotionally developed' are deemed to be more able to live/cope with difference.
- ▶ Moral views and value systems are clearly shaped by both attitudes and feelings.
- ▶ The sense of purpose and meaning that individuals gain in their lives is derived, in equal part, from both feeling and understanding.

Sharp (2001) also provides four reasons for promoting the emotional literacy of children, parents, carers, teachers and those in the 'caring' professions. He suggests that human beings need to:

- ▶ recognise their emotions in order to be able to label/define them
- ▶ understand their emotions in order to become effective learners
- ▶ handle/manage their emotions in order to develop and sustain positive relationships
- ▶ appropriately express emotions in order to develop as 'rounded people' who are able to help themselves and, in turn, those around them.

The Focus on Mental Health and Achievement

The latter reason appears to suggest a close relationship between emotional literacy and mental health. For Park (1999) this becomes a significant factor in the drive to promote emotional literacy, both in schools and in the wider context of the workplace and our social institutions and organisations. Park highlighted the waves of initiatives and continuous changes being experienced by individuals (particularly in education) as a crucial reason for promoting emotional literacy. Other reasons Park highlighted were heightened expectations (again, particularly in education), increased social diversity, insecure and high-pressure workplaces, and the legacy of social exclusion in conjunction with the drive for greater social inclusion. It would seem that without the necessary support structures, which include emotional learning, coaching and work-based support systems, there may well be a greater risk of mental health problems and the failure of individuals to reach their full potential.

As Rae (1998: 8) suggests:

> Schools have a clear focus and a required commitment to teaching the curriculum and basic skills, i.e. the three 'Rs'. It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that without a further commitment to teaching the fourth 'R', that is life and social skills of problem solving, empathy, co-operation and emotional literacy, schools will be failing many pupils. Without these skills and the sense of personal identity, self-esteem and self-control that can result from focusing upon them, some pupils will also fail to develop the academic and basic literacy skills they require in order to reach their full potential.

It could be further argued that such children will also fail to develop the sense of emotional well-being and control essential for developing and maintaining good mental health. This would appear to be crucial in the light of the findings of a recent survey carried out by the Mental Health Foundation (1999). This work primarily focused upon the promotion of children's and young people's mental health, defining the 'mentally healthy' as those with the ability to:

▶ develop psychologically, emotionally, creatively, intellectually and spiritually

▶ initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships

▶ use and enjoy solitude

▶ become aware of others and empathise with them

▶ play and learn

▶ develop a sense of right and wrong

▶ face problems and setbacks, and learn from them in ways appropriate for that child's age (Mental Health Foundation 1999: 7).

It would not be difficult to match this definition of children's mental health to McCarthy and Park's (1998) rationale as to why the promotion of emotional literacy is so important. Susie Orbach, psychoanalyst and co-founder of Antidote (a national charity set up in 1995 to promote emotional literacy), argues that: 'Emotional development has been seen as unnecessary, as an extra that is just too hard to fit in given the constraints of the national curriculum, as already existing in Circle Time or Personal and Social development, or as something that relates exclusively

to children in difficulty' (Orbach 1998: 216). The fact that the number of British children experiencing mental ill health has increased since the 1940s to an estimated one in five (Mental Health Foundation 1999), would suggest that such a view needs to be reviewed as a priority. As the Mental Health Foundation's report, *The Mental Health of Young Children and Adolescents in Great Britain* (Meltzer et al. 2000: 15) stresses:

> Mental health problems in children and young people will continue to increase unless there is a coherent and holistic programme implemented to develop the emotional and mental health of our children. ... Emotionally literate children are less likely to experience mental health problems and, if they develop them, are less likely to suffer long term. Emotional Literacy is derived from a combination of parents, schools and wider social networks.

Clearly, in an ideal world we would want to see this 'combination' working co-operatively in order to enable children to develop these skills, but it needs to be recognised that, for some children, this ideal state of 'emotional literacy' may never be attained due to a range of external and internal factors and influences. However, what can be achieved within all of these contexts, in terms of promoting and fostering emotional literacy, is positive and of very real value to all involved. Such work consequently needs to be promoted and continually fostered within all contexts.

Issues of Attachment in the Early Years

It is also vital that those working with children and young people remain motivated to promote and foster such work – even when individual children appear to present with more complex and challenging needs. Children and young people with attachment disorder or other attachment problems may frequently present as more challenging than their peers in both the learning and social contexts. They will frequently display more pronounced difficulties in terms of connecting to others and managing their own emotions. They will be the children who also display a lack of trust and self-worth and present as fearful of close human contact, angry and needing to be in control. These are essentially the children who continually feel unsafe, isolated and frightened, and their controlling, attention needing, socially manipulative behaviours are a direct result of these extreme levels of anxiety.

So, why do some young children develop such attachment disorders while others do not? Essentially, attachment disorders are the result of negative experiences in early caregiver relationships. If young children feel repeatedly abandoned, isolated, powerless or uncared for, for whatever reason, they will learn that they can't depend on others and that the world is a dangerous and frightening place to be living in.

Reactive Attachment Disorder and other attachment problems occur when children have been unable to consistently connect with a parent or primary caregiver. This can happen for many reasons, including one or more of the following:

▶ A baby cries and no one responds or offers appropriate comfort.
▶ A baby is hungry or wet and they aren't attended for extended periods of time.

- No-one looks at, talks to or smiles at the baby, so the baby feels alone and isolated.

- A young child only gets adult attention by acting out or displaying other extreme behaviours (the implications for teachers in the early years begin to become evident).

- A young child or baby is mistreated or abused – physically, sexually or emotionally.

- Sometimes the child's needs are met and sometimes they aren't. The child never knows what to expect and has to exist in a state of flux and uncertainty.

- The infant or young child is hospitalised or separated from his or her parents for an extended period.

- A baby or young child is moved from one caregiver to another as a result of adoption, foster care or the loss of a parent.

- The parent is emotionally unavailable because of depression, a bereavement, an illness or a substance abuse problem/issue.

Unfortunately, the circumstances that cause the attachment problems are sometimes clearly unavoidable.

Early signs and symptoms of insecure attachment in young children and infants include the following:

- Avoids eye contact
- Doesn't smile/look happy
- Doesn't reach out to be picked up/cuddled/touched
- Rejects efforts to calm, soothe and connect
- Doesn't seem to notice or care when the parent leaves them alone for short/extended periods of time
- Cries inconsolably and on a frequent basis
- Doesn't coo or make sounds
- Doesn't follow the parent or caregiver with his or her eye
- Isn't interested in playing interactive games or playing with toys/others in their context
- Spends a significant amount of time rocking or comforting themselves

Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder have been so disrupted in early life that their future relationships are also impaired. They have difficulty relating to others and are often developmentally delayed. Reactive Attachment Disorder is common in children who have been abused, accessed a range of foster care, lived in orphanages/residential units or who have been taken away from their primary caregiver after establishing a genuine bond. These are the children who may display an aversion to touch or physical affection. They will frequently go to great lengths in order not to feel helpless and remain in control. They can present as argumentative, defiant and disobedient, and will frequently display anger problems. They may express their anger directly, in tantrums or acting out, or through manipulative, passive-aggressive behaviour.

Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder may hide their anger in socially acceptable actions, like giving a high five that hurts or hugging someone too hard. They may also display difficulty in showing genuine care and affection. For example, children with Reactive Attachment Disorder may act with excessive affection for strangers while displaying little or no affection towards their parents. These children also display an underdeveloped conscience. Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder may act like they don't have a conscience and fail to show guilt, regret or remorse after behaving badly.

It is this group of children who will clearly benefit from access to social and emotional skills training interventions such as the Anger Alphabet programme. However, unlike those who do not have attachment issues, such approaches will need to be delivered within a nurturing context and one in which nurturing principles permeate the whole process of teaching and learning.

The Need for Nurture

Given the fact that social and emotional skills are clearly vital for a child's future development, it seems logical to ensure that such skills are taught within our school curriculum. The early years are when young children begin to develop these skills – learning to co-operate, take turns and solve the social problems that they are likely to encounter on a daily basis. Children need to learn how to wait their turn, share, resolve conflicts, cope effectively with anger, respond assertively in some contexts and gain confidence in social situations. If these skills are not learnt in the early years, there will naturally be an impact upon overall development. Some children will clearly develop these skills more easily than others – particularly those raised in secure, emotionally literate contexts. However, those children who have not been raised in such a secure and nurturing context will inevitably display difficulties in terms of developing and using such skills. They will not have developed the secure attachments and been appropriately nurtured by significant caregivers.

Such insecure attachment may also have resulted in significant gaps in social, emotional and cognitive learning. Children need to progress through a series of developmental stages, one of which needs to involve exploratory play. Without this kind of natural progression they will fail to develop the social and emotional skills necessary to access an age-appropriate curriculum. Children who have not had access to such environments will require additional teaching to learn to interact socially, ask for help and support, assert themselves and manage anxiety and stress. They will also need to be provided with opportunities to learn these skills through play as many of them will clearly have missed out on this particular stage and consequently find it difficult to interact appropriately and engage in learning tasks. Those who are aggressive or impulsive will also require such additional support in order to learn how to wait their turn, share, resolve conflicts, empathise with others, cope with strong feelings such as anger and to develop assertive, as opposed to aggressive, behaviours and responses. Children with Asperger's Syndrome or Autism will also require additional support in order to develop basic social skills, such as making eye contact, recognising emotions and developing empathy. It is hoped that the Anger Alphabet programme and set of resources will go some way to providing practitioners with the practical resources to teach some of these skills in an engaging and interactive manner.

The Vicious Cycle

Children who present as aggressive – both physically and verbally – tend to be rejected by their peers and those who present as withdrawn may often be left out of activities and isolated and ignored. This can result in a vicious cycle in which these children consequently do not interact as much as others in their peer group. They subsequently have fewer opportunities to learn, practise and develop the basic social skills that they need in order to become socially integrated. Such children will tend to fall behind socially and the gap between them and others in their peer group may well increase to a significant level. This is particularly distressing given the fact that these early years are so crucial in terms of social and emotional development. There is evidence to suggest that the quality of children's peer adjustment in the primary phase and their peer status among new classmates is detrimentally affected by a lack of social and behavioural skills (Ladd 1981). Mize and Ladd (1990) also identified how interventions with pre-school children were successful in teaching pro-social skills, in reducing inappropriate/negative behaviours (Gresham and Nagle 1980) and in increasing the social interaction of children labelled as withdrawn or over anxious (Evers and Schwartz 1973).

Social and Emotional Skills Interventions

Much of the research literature to both evaluate and support the delivery of social and emotional skills interventions of this nature has outlined a general agreement that (a) the arrangement can produce important changes in identified social behaviours and that (b) training in specific social skills can be accomplished by means of such procedures as modelling, behavioural rehearsal, feedback and practice. Various reviews of the relevant literature support these conclusions (Cartledge & Milburn 1980; Hops & Greenwood 1981). Van Hasselt et al. (1979) made the point that when a child lacks the specific social skills that are needed to be effective in social situations, it is not appropriate to simply apply reinforcing contingencies. Rather, a combination of instruction in the missing skills and in such reinforcing contingencies is needed.

Developing Interventions Based on Nurturing Principles

It is also important to highlight the fact that interventions designed to support the social and emotional development of young children – and particularly those with attachment issues or disorders – are most successful within a genuinely 'nurturing' context. For the most vulnerable children who display such difficulties and have evident problems with managing anger and aggression, this kind of intervention is clearly appropriate. However, it is also perhaps best delivered as part of the package of support that such a child might receive within the context of a nurture group.

Nurture Groups

Nurture groups were developed in 1969 in inner London as a response to the large number of children presenting to psychological services with severe social, emotional and behavioural

needs on entering school. Marjory Boxall, an educational psychologist, recognised the difficulties presented by this group of children and the ways in which these were directly related to impoverished early nurturing. This resulted in many of the children being unable to form trusting relationships with adults or to respond appropriately to other children. In effect, they were simply not ready to meet the social and intellectual demands of school life. For Boxall, the main aim of the nurture group intervention was therefore to 'create the world of earliest childhood; building the basic and essential learning experiences normally gained in the first three years of life and enabling children to fully meet their potential in mainstream schools' (Boxall 2002: 5).

Theoretical Underpinning

The guiding theory of nurture groups was that children who exhibited emotional and behavioural difficulties were very often experiencing emotions and exhibiting behaviours that developmentally were appropriate for children of a younger chronological age.

For Boxall (2002), the focus of a nurture group should therefore be building early attachments and the recreation of early care-of-child interactions. Boxall outlines the main principles which underpin the nurture group approach, as follows:

- ▶ Children's learning is understood and responded to developmentally.
- ▶ The classroom offers a safe and predictable environment where adults are reliable and set firm boundaries.
- ▶ The importance of nurture for self-esteem is promoted.
- ▶ Language as a key tool for communication and not just a skill to be learned is addressed.
- ▶ There is a recognition and understanding that all behaviour is a means of communication.

What is a Nurture Group in a Mainstream Context?

In effect, a nurture group is an inclusive early intervention and prevention for the development of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties within a mainstream setting. It is also a provision in which the day is one of carefully structured routines providing a balance of learning, teaching, affection and structure within a homelike environment. It is also a group in which children are placed not because of their limitations with regards to ability, but simply because they have missed out on early experiences that promote good development, particularly in the areas of social, emotional and behavioural skills.

Nurture groups offer a context and a model of relationships to children who have been missing or who have insufficiently internalised essential early learning experiences. They are generally a within-school resource staffed by two adults for up to 10 children and offer short or medium placements where the children attend regularly, usually returning fully to their mainstream classroom within two to four terms. Nurture groups do not in any sense stigmatise the children

who attend since the intervention is planned as part of a whole school approach to supporting children. In fact the children generally have strong links with their mainstream class, for example registering there in the morning, attending selective activities and spending social time in lunchtimes with their classroom peer group.

The nurturing group takes place within the nurture room, which aims to provide a secure, predictable environment to meet the different needs of each child. There is a strong focus on supporting positive emotional and social growth and cognitive development at the level of the individual child by responding to each child in a developmentally appropriate way.

The guiding principles of any nurture group are as follows:

1 Children's learning is understood developmentally.
2 The nurture group class offers a secure base.
3 Nurture is important for self-esteem.
4 Language is a vital means of communication.
5 All behaviour is communication.
6 Transition is important in children's lives.

While the Anger Alphabet programme can be used to support social and emotional skills development within a nurture group which adheres to these guiding principles, it can also be used within both mainstream and special contexts in order to also further develop children's skills and self-coping mechanisms. It is strongly recommended that the most vulnerable and insecurely attached children receive a programme of support within the context of a nurture group in which programmes such as Anger Alphabet can be incorporated and differentiated as appropriate. However, it is also evident that all children, in all contexts, will benefit from such an intervention – not just those who have difficulties in expressing anger and 'strong' feelings.

A Key Objective

Clearly, the main objective of any kind of intervention for young people who have evident difficulties in this area is ultimately to engage them in the effective expression of anger, encouraging their ability to learn through self-reflection and experience and also building their self-esteem and confidence levels so that they can allow others to have their point of view and respect and tolerate difference. For those who do exhibit so-called problem anger, there are some significant, major, long-term effects that need to be considered. These include detrimental effects on physical and mental health; problems in family life and friendships/relationships; difficulties in achieving and being successful in a school or learning context; involvement with the law (e.g. when young people 'lose it' and engage in aggression and violence towards others there are inevitable consequences in terms of the criminal justice system); personal and social financial costs are also usually major long-term effects for the young person who exhibits a problem with anger.

Setting Up a Group or Whole-class Intervention

Anger management groups and schemes of work are fairly standard within many mainstream and special contexts. They are usually provided for children who have been identified as having difficulties in this area prior to the start of the course. However, in my experience it is essential to ensure that there is a balance of appropriate role models within the group. For example, one or two young people who have serious difficulties can usually be included within the group as they will provide an opportunity for some positive peer interactions and role models to emerge.

At the outset it is vital that the children themselves understand the objectives of any such intervention: Why are they there? What are they doing? And why are they doing it? They need to be aware of the fact that this is not a negative intervention and it is, in effect, designed primarily to ensure that they remain included within the learning context. It is also an intervention designed to ensure that they develop the kinds of life skills that they will need in order to be successful later on in the workplace. For example, if you are someone who displays problem anger, it is highly likely that you will find it extremely difficult to hold down a job or maintain a positive relationship later on in your life. The idea here is to support students in developing their own internal locus of control and also to have a positive attitude towards change and self-management.

Any anger management group needs to focus upon developing children's self-esteem and self-confidence while also encouraging them to develop their own self-management strategies, i.e. strategies that work for them. So while the facilitator may present a range of tried-and-trusted techniques, the idea here will primarily be for students to develop and maintain a repertoire of skills and strategies that actually work for them in the real world. Like stress, anger is person-specific and will require a personalised approach in order to ensure success.

Course Structure

Any such course will begin with the setting of groundrules and introduce the concept of anger, usually by referring to Novaco's anger model and the assault cycle. These are provided in Appendix 2 and discussed further on p. 20-21. There will be some form of pre-course assessment in which children can reflect upon their current levels of skills in this area. Very often these assessments can take the form of self-rating on a range of factual statements, for example, what do I know about my anger?

- ▶ I understand why I get angry
- ▶ I understand why others get angry
- ▶ I know the triggers that start my anger
- ▶ I know how to stop my anger escalating
- ▶ I know what happens to my body when I get angry
- ▶ I understand the pattern of my angry outbursts

- ▶ I know that I can cope when other students get angry
- ▶ I know that I can cope when adults get angry
- ▶ I can reflect on my behaviours
- ▶ I can set realistic targets for change
- ▶ I can plan ahead and predict my behaviours
- ▶ I have a system to solve my problems
- ▶ I can use self-calming strategies, e.g. counting, deep breathing, relaxation
- ▶ I can talk myself down
- ▶ I can use time out effectively
- ▶ I can use 'I' messages
- ▶ I can problem solve with friends
- ▶ I can problem solve with adults
- ▶ I can manage my stress
- ▶ I can understand how others are feeling and change my behaviours towards them if I think they are getting angry

Children can rate themselves against such statements on a scale of 0–10 (0 = not very much or never, 5 = medium amount/sometimes, 10 = a lot or almost always). This kind of pre course assessment can then be repeated at the end of the course and students can identify any developments that they have made in these key areas. The pre and post course assessment may also include the range of strategies or tools that are to be introduced by the facilitator. The initial session can also introduce a strong feelings diary. The central point of any kind of group work is to ensure that children keep a log, identifying difficult situations on a daily basis and particularly analysing the triggers to their anger: What was it that caused the problem? When did they lose it and why? What could then have been done in order to change the context for them? What could have made a difference in order to help them to de-escalate and diffuse the situation? The pre and post course checklist can be found in Appendix 1 and the strong feelings diary in Appendix 4.

Subsequent Sessions

Review this strong feelings diary on a weekly basis while also introducing and discussing a range of anger management strategies and tools. As stated earlier, it is important to emphasise the fact that these are merely ideas and strategies that others have used or found helpful. Students themselves will not necessarily find all of these things helpful. The idea here is to present them with as many ideas as possible in order to ensure that they feel empowered and skilled up.

Subsequent group sessions can then follow a similar pattern, reviewing this feelings diary, discussing how things could have been done differently or how they might have responded more positively, introducing and identifying anger management strategies, and planning and setting targets for the week ahead.

The Anger Alphabet Programme

The resources from the Anger Alphabet programme are intended to provide teachers and facilitators with a series of activities, strategies and tools for use within these subsequent sessions. It may be useful to follow the programme in sequence but this is not a prerequisite. The teacher can opt to choose useful strategies for any particular group at any given time.

The Anger Alphabet programme is specifically designed to provide such support for teachers in their work with children. It is designed to dispel many of the fears surrounding this feeling of anger by providing the children (and teachers and parents) with a range of skills and strategies for coping with angry feelings and conflict situations safely and in an emotionally literate way. A central or core belief which underpins the programme is that it is OK and sometimes necessary to experience and show anger. What really counts is how we show that anger and what we do with it.

The sessions in this programme aim to dispel any myth that anger is a 'bad' or 'negative' feeling, by encouraging the children to identify and understand the positive uses of anger and to identify their personal triggers to anger, via the modelling of safe and non-violent ways of expressing and responding to anger. It is hoped that the latter will ensure a more positive outcome and allow children to experience anger as a normal and healthy emotion that they can channel positively and also make use of in order to prompt positive choices, i.e. becoming solution- focused problem solvers (Rhodes & Ajmal 1995).

Objectives

The 26 sessions in this programme consequently aim to meet the following objectives:

▸ To enable children to distinguish between behaviours and emotions.

▸ To encourage children to develop and make use of their own anger management strategies in order to manage these strong feelings more effectively.

▸ To teach children a range of anger spoilers which can be used in a variety of contexts/ problem situations.

▸ To encourage children to recognise the symptoms of anger in the early stages so that they can make a more considered choice as to how to deal with it.

▸ To raise children's self-esteem and their locus of control, i.e. to encourage them to have internal control and to reject the 'blame' culture.

▸ To enable children to further develop and appreciate the perspectives of others, i.e. develop empathy.

▸ To encourage children to become more reflective and to further develop an emotional vocabulary and the descriptive language needed to objectively describe behaviour.

▸ To enable children to identify when they should feel/need to feel angry, e.g. if someone is behaving in a racist or abusive manner towards them.

- To enable children to choose when they need to take time out in order to cool down or calm down and to make appropriate use of such a strategy.
- To increase self-awareness and self-knowledge.
- To encourage children to learn and make use of alternatives to physical or verbal aggression/violence and to learn how to express their feelings and views in a positive and assertive way.
- To enable children to develop ways of coping effectively with the anger of others.
- To encourage children to recognise their own triggers to anger alongside those of their peers and adults in their social contexts.
- To recognise that feeling/experiencing anger can lead to a positive outcome or ensure a change for the better – particularly when it is initially handled in a positive way.
- To develop teachers' and parents' awareness and understanding of a range of strategies to effectively manage anger.
- To encourage teachers, and parents, to adopt a consistent approach in terms of developing a child's emotional literacy, social skills and self-esteem.
- To enable teachers to review their current policy and practice in terms of managing both children's and adults' anger within the school context and to further develop 'healthy' initiatives and programmes which promote inclusive practice – particularly for those 'angry' pupils who present as being most at risk.

The extent to which these objectives are met is perhaps the best indicator as to the success of the programme.

The Structure of the Programme

The programme is divided into 26 sessions, each of which focuses on an aspect of anger management and provides a complete lesson, ideas for reinforcement and follow-on work. The lessons are arranged in the sequence of the alphabet as follows:

A is for Anger – Focusing on my anger triggers.

B is for Bottled-Up – Focusing on how we can control the explosion.

C is for Cool It – Focusing on how we can cool ourselves down.

D is fore Dynamite – Focusing on how we can learn to recognise our triggers and how to dampen the fuse.

E is for Explosion – Focusing on how we can learn to avoid the explosion or cope more effectively with it.

F is for Fuse – Focusing on how we can extend our fuse so that it becomes too long to burn.

G is for Grumble Jar – Focusing on how we can sort out our grumbles.

H is for Helping Yourself – Focusing on safe ways to manage angry feelings.

I is for 'I' Messages – Focusing on how we can learn to tell others what we want and feel.

J is for Joke – Focusing on the use of humour to deflect anger.

K is for Kettle Boiling – Thinking about how we can turn the kettle off and let off steam safely.

L is for Listening – Focusing on how peaceful music and listening to others can calm us down and keep our friendships positive.

M is for Move It – Focusing on how we can let our anger out by taking exercise.

N is for No – How we can learn to say 'no' to people who make us feel angry.

O is for Outside – How we can take time out when the situation gets too hot.

P is for Post It – How we can write problems down, post them and deal with them later.

Q is for Quality Talk – How we can help each other to cope better by sharing and talking together.

R is for Rules – How we can develop and keep our anger rules.

S is for Shield – How our shields can protect us from angry feelings and hurtful words.

T is for Traffic Lights – How we can use this stepped approach when we feel angry.

U is for Understanding – Why it is important that we understand our own feelings and behaviours and those of others.

V is for Vocabulary – How we need to learn the right words to express our angry feelings so that we can talk rather than hit out.

W is for Wind Down – Using relaxation strategies to calm down.

X is for X-ray Eyes – The importance of reading and understanding others' anger.

Y is for Yell – Considering times and places when yelling out your anger would be a good strategy and when it wouldn't be appropriate.

Z is for Zero – Visualising the tension scale in order to sort out anger problems.

The Structure of the Sessions

Each of the sessions is structured to a five-point plan, as follows:

▶ Poster discussion (5 minutes)

The teacher presents the poster and talks through the points indicated in the lesson plan. This activity will usually introduce or reinforce a specific anger management strategy or spoiler to the pupils.

▶ Questions for Circle Time (15 minutes)

The teacher then poses a series of questions which pupils can answer and/or discuss in the circle.

▶ Worksheet (15 minutes)

Pupils can complete the worksheet, which usually reinforces the concepts discussed during the Circle Time session.

▶ Plenary (10 minutes)

During this part of the session the teacher engages the pupils in further conversations, enabling them to feed back on their work and their responses to the set activities or topics introduced.

▶ Ideas for follow-on work (time to be allocated at the teacher's discretion), including outdoor activity ideas

These aim to reinforce the strategy or skill introduced in the session and encourage pupils to practise the skill or strategy.

NB All timings are suggested and can be adjusted to suit the individual group or class of children.