

## Staying in Control

*“While we may not be able to control all that happens to us, we can control what happens inside us.” - Benjamin Franklin*

Being able to stay in control of your behavior, anger, stress and negative feelings involves two important life skills: **Self-monitoring** and **Self-control**.

First we will describe what these skills are and then we will describe the steps and strategies to help you stay in control.

### Self-monitoring:

- BEING AWARE and keeping track of your feelings and behavior and how they affect others **AND** using this information to change your behavior if needed to accomplish your goals

### Self-control:

- Managing your feelings and behavior so that you are able to accomplish your goals.
- Self-control involves managing anger, stress and negative feelings and reactions so that you can feel good about yourself and the things that you do.
- Self control can prevent you from doing something that could get you into trouble and make you feel bad or worse than you initially felt.

### Let's begin with SELF-MONITORING...

**Self-monitoring** involves five key steps that can be remembered by thinking of the initials or word: **SMART**.

**S**top and

**M**onitor – Think about what you are doing.

*Am I doing what I planned to do?*

**A**ppraise – Think about what is happening.

*How are other people reacting?*

**R**eflect – Think about what might happen because of your

behavior or actions. *Is this likely to turn out the way I want it to? How will this make me or other people feel?*

**T**ry a Different Behavior – Try something else and see how it works in accomplishing your goal.

## Here is an example: **Get S\*M\*A\*R\*T!**

John has a habit of interrupting people when they are talking, especially if he is excited about the topic. His friend Paul is talking about his new video game. John cuts in to talk about another game that he wants to buy.

Then he stops and thinks about what he's doing (**Stop & Monitor**). He notices that Paul looks frustrated (**Appraise**). He realizes that if he keeps interrupting, Paul won't want to talk to him (**Reflect**). So then he changes what he's doing and says, "Sorry I interrupted, tell me more about your game." (**Try a Different Behavior**)

HINTS: Sometimes you might need to use the Goal Setting and Planning Tip or Topic to come up with a good idea for the Try a Different Behavior step. Also, sometimes you might need reminders from others to help you think about and use the S\*M\*A\*R\*T steps.

**S\*M\*A\*R\*T** can work for most behaviors you want to change so you can accomplish your goals.

**Let's review this one more time:**



## **Stop and Think!**

Any time you want to change a behavior you need to stop and think about what you are thinking, feeling and doing.

## **Monitor**

Sometimes monitoring, or keeping track, or being aware of your feelings, thoughts and behavior is enough to change your behavior or actions so you can accomplish your goal. For example, people usually spend less money when they keep track of what they buy.

## **Appraise**

Think about what is happening. When you are with other people, you can get feedback on your behavior by watching how other people react.

- If friends are smiling, laughing, or nodding approval, then your behavior is probably okay.
- If, however, your friends look upset, bored, or confused, then it's time to think about what's going wrong.

## **Reflect**

Think about the possible effects or results of your behavior or actions. After you have taken the time to stop and monitor yourself and appraised the situation it is time to reflect on what's going on.

Think about what's happening and what is likely to happen next.

- Are things going the way you want them to go?
- If not, what can you do differently?
- How can you change your behavior to help you accomplish your goal?

## Try Something Different!

Try something else and see how it works in accomplishing your goal

- If you realize that you are heading down the “wrong path”, try something new. Getting **S\*M\*A\*R\*T** does not happen overnight. It will take practice and some trial and error for you to see what works and what doesn't work.
- If your first solution or strategy doesn't work try something different.
- Remember to ask family members and other supportive people if you need help with any of the steps of **Self-Monitoring (S\*M\*A\*R\*T)**.

**Self-monitoring** is a key part of staying in control so that you can accomplish your goals.

- However, sometimes you might experience anger, stress or negative feelings that will need to be controlled to prevent you from doing something that could get you into trouble. Anger, stress and negative feelings make everyone feel bad, and getting in trouble can make us feel even worse.
- Being able to control these kind of feelings and your reactions or behavior can help you accomplish your goals AND to feel good about yourself, other people and the things that you do.

## So now let's focus on Self Control...



### **Self-Control: Controlling Anger, Stress and Negative Feelings**

If you ever feel like this, you may need to work on controlling your anger and stress.

"Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." - Siddhartha, Founder of Buddhism

## Self-Control and Brain Injury

We all feel angry, frustrated or stressed out at some point in time AND need strategies to help us manage these feelings so that they do not interfere with accomplishing our goals.

- However, after a brain injury, some people find that they get angry, frustrated or stressed out more easily. Sometimes, it may seem like any little thing can set them off and they may react in ways that make the situation even worse.

## Why Am I Angry, Frustrated or Stressed out More Now?

There are different reasons why someone might have more problems with anger, stress or negative feelings after having a brain injury.

- The part of your brain that controls your feelings might have been injured
- You might get frustrated because some things are harder than they were before the injury
- You might feel less connected to your friends and have a harder time laughing things off

## Making Assumptions Might Get You into Trouble

### What does this mean?

Assumptions are beliefs you have about someone else's actions or behavior without having all of the facts.

*For example: You get bumped into while at your locker in school.*

What happened? There are a lot of possibilities, such as:

- Maybe somebody hit you on purpose
- Maybe somebody was not watching where he or she was going
- Maybe you accidentally moved into somebody's way

Here's another example: **Jeremy Is Fired Up!**  
*After being bumped into at his locker, Jeremy assumed that the girls ran into him on purpose. He was very angry and reacted by yelling at them.*



*How do you think Jeremy would have felt if he thought the girls ran into him accidentally?*

- Jeremy might have felt a little annoyed, but probably not too angry

*How would he have felt if he realized that he might have been in their way?*

- Maybe a little embarrassed, but most teens wouldn't feel angry at all

### **What's the correct answer?**

Believe it or not, there might not be one! There's no way to know what others are feeling unless they tell you. Don't make assumptions!

- **The important thing is that Jeremy can control how he reacts.**
- It's hard to keep calm and not react, but no matter what, getting into conflict isn't worth it.
- Only YOU can make YOU angry & stressed out!

### **Another way to help with Self-Control is STARRS**

Steps for Self-Control: Controlling Anger, Stress & Negative Feelings  
Self-Control involves six key steps that can be remembered by thinking of the initials or word S\*T\*A\*R\*R\*S.



**S**top

**T**hink

**A**ccept

**R**elax

**R**eframe

**S**olve

## Stop & Think

Before doing something that could get you into trouble or that you will feel or sorry or bad about. Stopping and Thinking are also key steps of Self-Monitoring.



- How does your body feel when you are getting angry or stressed out?
- Maybe your stomach or shoulders feel tense. Maybe your face gets hot.
- Maybe your heart beats faster. These physical feelings help you to know when you are getting angry, frustrated or stressed out and know when it is time to **Stop and Think!**

## Accept

Accept that you cannot change what has already happened. Acceptance can be hard, especially when you are already angry or stressed out, but acceptance can help reduce your anger and stress.

- Remember that once something has happened, you cannot change it.
- But you can change your reaction. You can choose what you are going to do. Controlling our feelings and thinking of solutions is easier to do when we are calm. If we are upset about a problem it is much harder to think about solutions!

## Relax

It is easier to accept things if you can relax. Look for physical clues that you are getting angry or stressed out, such as: tense muscles, fast breathing, rapid heartbeat, head pounding, and clenched fists or teeth. These signs let you know that it is time to calm down.

Identify some of the things that you do to help you relax and calm down.

- You can write these down

Here are some other things you can do to relax and calm down (you may have identified these things already):

- Take slow, deep breaths. Breathe in, filling your lungs completely with air so that your belly pushes out. As you breathe out, say the word "relax" to yourself. Repeat this several times.
- Use positive self-statements to remind yourself that you are a good and person and able to do many things well.
- Think of something funny or something that makes you feel good, like listening to your favorite music or going to a favorite place
- Talk to a friend or another supportive person
- Take some time to relax and calm down, even if it means walking away from the situation

You don't have to wait until you are angry or stressed out to relax!

These things could also help you to be more relaxed and calmer when dealing with stressful and challenging situations:

- Doing fun and enjoyable things
- Talking to and hanging out with supportive and positive people
- Doing physical activities (walking, hiking, fitness, exercise, dance)
- Doing hobbies or other activities to take your mind off of angry or stressful or other feelings that make you feel bad about something
- Meditating or doing other calming activities (breathing exercises, listening to relaxing music)
- Using positive self-statements (Positive Thinking) on a daily basis
- Preparing and practicing before potentially stressful situations
- Avoiding or leaving stressful situations when possible and needed
- Using different ways to approach the situation (e.g., using self-monitoring (S.M.A.R.T.) strategies)
- Seeking help from others and/or counseling if needed

## Reframe

**Try to see the situation in a different way.** Often, angry or negative thoughts make less sense when we think more about them.

For example, your teacher gives you a lot of homework for the weekend. You can say to yourself: "She always gives me a lot of homework because she hates me and wants to ruin my weekend." This thought would probably make you angry **and** it's almost certainly not true.

Extreme words like **ALWAYS** or **NEVER**, and negative words, labels or thoughts are more likely to make you angry, stressed out and feel bad



**Think about the following example.** Which is more likely to make you angry?

- "My sister *always* steals my clothes and ruins them" OR
- "My sister *sometimes* borrows my clothes, because she thinks they are really cool, but I sometimes I borrow her stuff too"

Relaxing will help give you the time to calm down and challenge extreme thoughts or exaggerations that might not make sense and need to be thought of differently.

Practicing will also help you to recognize and change extreme thoughts that get in the way of you accomplishing your goals.

## Optional Exercise: Reframing extreme and negative words and statements



Think of ways you can reframe the following statements that could lead to angry, stressful or negative feelings and possibly an angry reaction.

There are many ways to reframe these statements so they are less likely to lead to anger, stress or feeling bad about yourself or the situation.

**Remember to find and change the extreme words (always, never) and the negative statements about yourself.** We provided one example for each to start the process.

1. I'm so stupid. I always forget my homework.  
I seem to be forgetting my homework this week. I am going to think of strategies to help me remember.
2. I'm so clumsy. I am always knocking things over.  
I feel kind of embarrassed about knocking things over, but I know that other people knock things over at times too. I'll keep track of this and talk to my family or teacher if this continues.
3. You never listen to me when I'm talking.  
I am feeling like he may not be listening to me right now. Maybe he is distracted or has something on his mind. There are other times when he has listened to me.

## Options When You Still Feel Angry and Stressed out

What if you have tried everything and you still feel angry, stressed out or bad about something?



Sometimes, you may go through the steps of **Stop, Think, Accept, Relax,** and **Reframe,** and still feel angry, stressed out or bad about something. It is OK to have these feelings; just don't take it out on others or yourself. If you can, give yourself time away from others.

Get your anger and stress out by exercising, writing, drawing or doing other fun and interesting activities.

## Solve



**Often, avoiding anger or stress isn't enough. Even if you stay calm, you may still have a problem to solve.**

For example, you may have changed your thoughts and now realize that your teacher doesn't hate you, but you still are stressed out because you have a pile of work that needs completed.

Your coach, family and other supportive people can help you with problem solving.

Problem solving involves finding possible solutions and using strategies and tips to manage your problems or challenges. The process is very similar to the **Goal setting and Planning** process used in the SPAN program:

### **Goal – Identify the goal you want to accomplish**

For example, your goal might be:

- 1) To prevent the problem from happening (for example, not getting angry when you think someone is not listening to you) or
- 2) To manage the problem when it happens (for example, calming yourself down if you start getting angry).

### **Plan – Think about possible solutions for managing the problem.**

Then make a plan with strategies and tips that have been described earlier to try to manage these problems.

### **Do – Try out your plan and strategies**

### **Review – Think about what worked and did not work (make changes if needed).**

\*Remember that you can ask for help from your coach, family and other supportive people if you are having difficulty coming up with a plan or if you need help with **Staying in Control: Self-Monitoring (SMART)** and **Self-Control (STARRS)**.