

Anger management: What's it all about?

By MAX SEIGLE 11/11/2004, Medill News Service

Lynette Hoy has been a counselor for 16 years, but just recently added a new specialty: anger management.

"I would say this is definitely a growing field," said Hoy, of CounselCare Connection in Oak Park.

Just last year, the American Association of Anger Management Providers was created and currently includes about 136 providers nationwide. Co-founder and anger management counselor George Anderson says the emotional aftermath of Sept. 11 catapulted anger management into the public arena.

"After 9-11, the entire world was destabilized," he said. "Suddenly you have all of these referrals."

Anderson said the American Psychological Association is working on establishing anger management as a recognized mental illness.

"Anger management is definitely the 'in' thing," said Steve Kelly, an anger management specialist with The Success Center in south suburban Lansing.

Both Kelly and Hoy say their services reach a cross section of people, ranging from court-ordered individuals to couples having trouble in their relationships. Companies also send them employees who lose their tempers with customers or supervisors.

The two counselors say they generally work with adults rather than children, and Kelly says he serves more men than women.

"I would probably say it's one female for every four males I get."

Kelly's practice offers both individual and group sessions, while Hoy tends to do more one-on-one counseling with her anger management patients.

Hoy also runs an on-line business for people ordered to take anger management classes. She has workbooks with as many as 32 lessons that can be purchased from her website.

In his group sessions, Kelly said his patients sit in a circle and begin by talking about their lives. Then Kelly tackles issues like stress management, communication skills and emotional intelligence to recognize the emotions causing the anger.

"The idea is to really get to the bottom of what type of 'stressors' the clients have in their lives and then teach them things they can do to really get rid of the stress," Kelly said. "The first step is to become aware of it."

Kelly said he also teaches patients exercise and relaxation techniques to alleviate their anger.

He said his sessions are not designed to fix people overnight.

"What it does for them is force them to take a look at themselves and think about what types of changes [they] need to make," Kelly said.

Hoy encourages patients to take a time-out after their anger explodes.

"Anger escalates within one to three seconds," she said. "That hormonal surge does not dissipate."

Taking a Christian approach in her work, Hoy also suggests patients seek "a little supernatural help" and offer forgiveness once things have settled down.

Both Hoy and Kelly admit there is somewhat of a social stigma attached to the anger management phenomenon made famous in the 2003 movie starring Jack Nicholson and Adam Sandler. But their experiences show their instruction is valuable.

"After [people] have taken it, they realize, 'I did have an anger problem,' Hoy said. "It kind of wakes them up."