

Effective Anger Management

Why Do We Need Anger?

Anger is a normal, human and even healthy emotion — but it's important to deal with it in a positive way. Uncontrolled anger can take a toll on both your health and your relationships.

Anger is part of our fight or flight response. It can be helpful to us as it can –

- help us identify problems or things that are hurting us
- motivate us to create change, achieve our goals and move on
- help us stay safe and defend ourselves in dangerous situations by giving us a burst of energy.

Most people will experience episodes of anger which feel manageable and don't have a big impact on their lives. Learning healthy ways to recognise, express and deal with anger is important for our mental and physical health.

When Is Anger a Problem?

Anger only becomes a problem when it gets out of control and harms you or people around you. This can happen when:

- you regularly express your anger through unhelpful or destructive behaviour
- your anger is having a negative impact on your overall mental and physical health
- anger becomes your go-to emotion, blocking out your ability to feel other emotions
- you haven't developed healthy ways to express your anger

Not everyone expresses anger in the same way. For example, some unhelpful ways you may have learned to express anger include:

- **Outward aggression** - shouting, swearing, slamming doors, throwing things and being physically violent or verbally abusive and threatening towards others.
- **Inward aggression** - such as telling yourself that you hate yourself, denying yourself your basic needs (like food, or things that might make you happy), cutting yourself off from the world and self-harming.
- **Non-violent or passive aggression** - such as ignoring people or refusing to speak to them, refusing to do tasks, or deliberately doing

things poorly, late or at the last possible minute, and being sarcastic or sulky while not saying anything explicitly aggressive or angry.

So even if you're never outwardly violent or aggressive towards others, and never even raise your voice, you might still recognise some of these angry behaviours and feel that they're a problem for you. For example, you turn your anger inwards and self-harm or deny yourself food.

How Does Anger Affect Us?

Anger feels different for everyone. You might experience some of the things listed below, and you might also have other experiences or difficulties that aren't listed here.

Effects on your body

- Feeling sick or having a churning stomach
- Feeling a bit breathless or tight in your chest
- Fast heartbeat
- Wobbly legs
- Tension in your shoulders and neck
- Feeling hot and sweaty
- Needing the loo suddenly
- Feeling a bit shaky and/or dizzy

Effects on your mind

- Feeling tense, nervous, unable to concentrate
- Feeling resentful or irritable with other people or situations
- Feeling humiliated or embarrassed
- A 'red mist' of anger clouding your thoughts and feelings
- Constantly thinking about the thing or person that's making you angry – so you can't think about anything else.

Recognising these signs gives you the chance to think about how you want to react to a situation before doing anything. This can be difficult in the heat of the moment, but the earlier you notice how you're feeling, the easier it can be to choose how to express and manage your anger and respond to a situation in a calmer and less distressed way.

Getting Help

Many people we support are dealing with a lot of other problems in their lives. So, you might be feeling much angrier and more distressed than you usually do and

having support from us is a good opportunity for you to get help with these issues and how they are affecting you.

Being able to notice your own anger warning signs as early as possible is really important to being able to get control of your anger before it gets control of you. You probably know what your warning signs are but sitting down with a staff member and discussing them and maybe even writing them down might help you to notice and understand them more clearly.

Talk to us or other supportive people in your life. Express your feelings - describe the situation you are in and what you are thinking and how you are feeling – what is it that's causing you to feel angry? Having someone else's perspective can help us all to see how we might be misinterpreting someone else's behaviour or exaggerating a problem in our minds.

Maybe you don't feel like talking – that's ok! Below, are a number of strategies you can try on your own as well.

Anger Management Techniques

Some of these anger management techniques are things you can do on the spot as soon as you feel your anger growing out of control. Some of them are things you can do to prevent your anger from rising in the first place. And some of them require you to first get out of the situation that has made you angry and get into a quiet place by yourself.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is important for getting your anger under control. However, taking deep breaths alone is often not enough. Trying to clear your mind and breathe deeply may seem like such a challenge that it only makes your anger and frustration worse.

One of the things that you can do to combat this is to do a little imagining with your deep breathing. Instead of breathing deeply to try to force away your anger, breathe into your anger. Imagine that your anger is this driving energy, and as you breathe deeply it gets bigger and bigger. The energy continues to expand until it is far outside of you, and then it can melt away. This might make you feel angrier at first, but it may work to dispel your anger within a few minutes.

Writing Down your Thoughts

Writing down your thoughts – either in a diary or just randomly can be a great way to release anger. As soon as you can after a situation makes you angry, sit down and write out your thoughts and feelings.

The key here is to get all of your thoughts and angry energy and emotions out of you in a healthy and nonviolent way. Writing your thoughts down allows you to give voice to what you are feeling, which is often the best way to allow yourself to calm down and put those feelings behind you.

Positive Visualisation

Think of a place you really love or a beautiful view, or experiencing something you find soothing – a lovely piece of music, stroking your dog or the smell of your favourite flower or taste of your favourite food. Try to imagine it and use that pleasant experience to help you focus away from your anger.

Exercise

Exercise can be an excellent release for your anger. Anger is really not just an emotion – its energy too. When you feel angry you have a ton of energy that is seeking release. Exercise can be a healthy release for that energy.

Of course, it is not always possible to exercise when you get angry. Taking a walk or going for a run is another form of exercise that you can do to release angry energy. Sometimes if you are in a situation that is making you angry, you can leave that situation and just go for a walk around the block. Physical activity can help reduce stress that can cause you to become angry. If you feel your anger escalating, go for a brisk walk or run, or spend some time doing other enjoyable physical activities.

Take Time Out

Time outs aren't just for children. When you feel yourself getting angry or irritated and you are worried that you may easily become angry, take time out. Go to the bathroom or a quiet room and close the door or go and sit in your car for a few minutes. A few moments of quiet time might help you feel better prepared to handle what's ahead without getting irritated or angry.

When you are in the time out, just focus on your breathing and calming your thoughts. You can use visualization techniques to imagine yourself in a soothing

place like a clearing in the woods or your favourite place to go camping. Visualize yourself in nature or some other favourite place. Try to find things in your visualization that engage the senses.

Using Humour

Humour is a great way to diffuse anger. When you can find the humour in a situation and laugh about it, you will find that your anger is instantly released. It is important that you do not make a situation worse by laughing at someone out of hand.

However, if you can think of something funny about the situation and give voice to it in a positive way you may be able to diffuse not only your own anger but the anger of the person you are arguing with. Lightening up can help diffuse tension. Use humour to help you face what's making you angry and, possibly, any unrealistic expectations you have for how things should go. Avoid sarcasm, though — it can hurt feelings and make things worse.

Changing Your Environment.

One of the things you can immediately do when you are feeling yourself getting angry or frustrated is change your environment. Sometimes escaping the situation is the best thing that you can do. This may require you to leave the room or office for a short period of time. Think of this as kind of a timeout, but for a longer period of time.

You can also change your environment in a lasting way that will help you manage your anger. For example, if you are frequently losing your temper because your child does not clean their room, make sure that the door stays shut so that you don't have to look at it. Since seeing it makes you angry, this small change in your environment can help you prevent that anger.

Once You're Calm, Express your Anger.

As soon as you're thinking clearly, express your frustration in an assertive but nonconfrontational way. State your concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or trying to control them.

To avoid criticizing or placing blame — which might only increase tension — use "I" statements to describe the problem. Be respectful and specific. For example, say, "I'm upset that you left the table without offering to help with the dishes" instead of "You never do any housework."

Know When to Seek Help

Learning to control anger is a challenge for everyone at times. Seek help for anger issues if your anger seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret or hurts those around you.

Useful Resources.

A google search will bring you numerous sources of advice on anger management.

Here are some particularly good resources which you might find helpful –

www.thisiscalmer.com

www.mindful.org/why-you-need-a-self-care-plan

www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/07/how-to-create-your-own-self-care-plan/

Enable Guidance Sheets

As part of your support plan, we provide you with Enable Guidance Sheets on subjects you might be interested or need support with – such as sleep hygiene or anger management. These guidance sheets have been written by us to provide useful, general information and you can take them and your support plan home with you when you leave the service. We hope that they will be helpful to you once you are back home.

All the guidance sheets have information about websites etc where you can get more information if you need it. However, if you need more specific advice about your own health and wellbeing, you should contact your mental health team or GP.