



Anger

Anger is a normal emotion we all feel but it can be challenging to manage and control sometimes. This handout has some tips for managing this difficult emotion.

What is anger?

We all feel angry sometimes. It's a normal emotion. Some anger easily and some may have problems controlling it.

Uncontrolled anger often involves hurting others, usually their feelings, but sometimes physically too. It can damage your personal life, affect your work and make you feel guilty and ashamed.

Anger generally results from feeling helpless or unable to control certain situations. We feel trapped and can't see a way out.

If it remains unresolved it can have negative effects including relationship breakdown and physical and mental health problems.

Anger is the body's response to an event, another person or anxiety. When we're angry we can feel like a coiled spring – ready to fight or run. Those feelings need to be expressed.

If you feel unable to express your feelings in a way that won't hurt yourself or others, then you need to find other ways to express that anger.

Expressing and controlling anger

The instinctive way to express anger is to respond aggressively. It's a natural reaction to threat that allows us to fight and to defend ourselves when we are attacked.

We need a certain amount of anger to survive but we can't physically lash out at every person or object that irritates or annoys us. Thankfully there are a number of ways to deal with anger.

Expressing anger assertively, not aggressively, is the best approach. To do this, you have to learn how to make your needs clear, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.

Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. This happens when you hold in your anger, stop thinking about it and focus on something positive. The aim is to convert the anger into something more constructive.

Physical exercise is very effective. Or perhaps your feelings can be redirected into something creative such as art, reading, music or dancing. Calming down means you can control how you act and learn to relax so that things don't bother you in the same way.



It's important to find out what is causing you to feel angry – and then find ways of dealing with that. Identify what triggers your anger, and why. Talk to others who are involved in your situation and work together to find ways of removing triggers and dealing with anger.

Avoid alcohol – if you drink you will have less control over your actions. Alcohol often fuels violence.

Specific ways to control your anger

- Walk away! Come back later
- Counting to ten really does have some benefit. Concentrating on counting slowly will give you time before you respond
- Take deep and slow breaths, thinking about nothing except your breathing. Go out for a run, a bike ride or a walk
- If all else fails - thump a cushion or kick a bean bag. DON'T do anything that will hurt yourself or someone else
- When you feel calmer, talk to those you were with at the time and explain why you were feeling that way – calmly!



If you feel unable to control your anger, then seek help – from your doctor, community mental health nurse, friends and family or self-help groups*

* Source: www.cwgsy.net/community/mind-info/anger.htm

Helping young children cope with anger

Children become angry in a variety of situations. When their parents are getting divorced they may be extremely angry with one or both parents.

Many adults have learned to ignore their own feelings of anger or express it by hitting or shouting so they don't model healthy ways of dealing with this emotion. Adults often deal with a child's anger by demanding that he or she stop being angry. They might send a child to his or her room until the child calms down or may hit the child. However, these actions do not help children learn to handle strong emotions such as anger.

Children need to learn positive ways to cope with anger. We can teach them the difference between feeling angry and acting in anger.

Children need to be told that feeling angry is neither good nor bad, but hitting someone out of anger is not okay. In the short run, life at home will be easier when children learn how to work through anger. In the long run, children will continue developing ways to cope with anger.



Specific ways children can cope with anger

Children can learn to handle their anger in several ways depending on their age and personal development. Give children several choices so they can pick those that work best for them. Remember that some angry episodes take longer than others to solve.

- **Do something physical.** Do something active such as stamping their feet (the 'Mad Dance'), running around the house or punching a pillow. Or play with Play Dough, clay or bread dough, which can be rolled out, pounded, twisted, and pulled apart. Any of these physical activities can help children focus their anger onto something else and help them to calm down.

- **Talk about their feelings.** Some young children can talk to a parent, brother or sister, grandparent, a childcare provider or a friend about what is making them angry. Talking helps some children work through their anger so they can accept what is making them angry, or solve the problem in a positive way. If children can't or won't talk to a person, they can be encouraged to talk to a family pet, a puppet, or an imaginary friend.

- **Sing an 'un-angry' song.** Help children make up words to a song or poem that expresses what they're feeling. Words from a favourite song can be substituted with this 'un-angry' song. For example, the words 'I'm so cross 'cause I can't play. Go away, go away, day!' can be sung to a familiar or made-up tune.

- **Ask other** people how they cope with their feelings of anger. Help children collect ideas from other people on how to cope with anger. Help them decide which ones are okay. For example, some people take a fast walk to drain off anger, while others take deep breaths when they get angry.

- **Drain the anger from their body.** Let children relax with some water play activities or finger-painting. Or let the child scribble as hard as he/she can on a scrap of paper and throw the paper away as if throwing the anger away. Or encourage the child to dictate a story to an adult about what has made him/her angry. The adult can read the story back and the child can then crumple up the paper and throw it away.

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