

# Anger Management

## Understanding and working constructively with anger

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Anger is a normal, valid emotion, not a character flaw. It signals that something matters to us, that a value has been threatened, a limit crossed, or an injustice perceived. The problem is rarely anger itself, but what we do with it. Unmanaged anger damages health, relationships, and wellbeing. Learning to work with anger, rather than suppress or explode it, is a *learnable* skill.

### The Anatomy of Anger

Anger involves a physiological activation (adrenaline, increased heart rate, muscle tension, narrowed thinking), an appraisal ("this is unfair / threatening / disrespectful"), and a behavioural impulse (usually fight or withdraw). The window between trigger and response is where change is possible.

#### Anger beneath anger

Anger is often a secondary emotion → a more powerful feeling that covers hurt, fear, shame, grief, or powerlessness. The presenting anger may need to be addressed, but the deeper emotion underneath is often what actually needs to be heard.

### Warning Signs: Your Personal Anger Profile

Learn to recognize your early warning signals before anger peaks. These might include:

- Physical: jaw clenching, shoulder tension, chest tightness, flushing, rapid breathing
- Cognitive: racing thoughts, black-and-white thinking, "always" and "never" statements
- Behavioural: raised voice, sarcasm, shutting down, pacing
- Emotional: feeling disrespected, helpless, unheard, overwhelmed

### Evidence-Based Tools

#### 01 Create Distance: The Pause

Anger narrows cognition. Before responding, create space. If safe to do so, say: "I need a few minutes before I respond to this." Take 20–30 minutes minimum → it takes that long for adrenaline to metabolize. Use this time to cool down physically (walk, cold water) before attempting problem-solving or conversation.

#### 02 Physiological De-escalation

Long, slow exhalations (longer out-breath than in-breath) activate the vagus nerve and reduce physiological arousal faster than any other technique. Try 4 counts in, 6–8 counts out. Repeat until you feel the activation decreasing. Physical movement also metabolizes stress hormones.

#### 03 Cognitive Restructuring

Anger is fuelled by "hot thoughts" — extreme appraisals that escalate emotional intensity. Identify your hot thought ("he's doing this to disrespect me," "they always do this"). Ask: What is another explanation? Is this catastrophic framing accurate? What is the evidence? Replace with a more accurate, cooler appraisal.

#### 04 Assertive Communication

Anger often escalates when we don't know how to express needs clearly. Practice: "I feel \_\_\_because \_\_\_and what I need is \_\_\_." Speak from your own experience (not accusations). Use a calm, even tone. Separate the behaviour from the person. Aim for resolution, not winning.

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#### 05 Problem-Solving

After physiological calm is restored, engage the prefrontal cortex: What actually needs to change? What is within my control? What is a realistic solution I can propose? Focus on the problem, not on punishing the other person.

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#### 06 Addressing Underlying Contributors

Chronic anger is often sustained by unaddressed pain, trauma, stress overload, sleep deprivation, substance use, or depression. Anger management techniques help, but if anger is a recurring pattern, exploring the root causes in therapy provides lasting change.

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### When Anger Requires Additional Support

If anger has led to harm to others or yourself, if you feel out of control during anger episodes, if anger is affecting your relationships or employment, or if you are experiencing rage or violent impulses, please seek professional support.

### Helpful Resources

- Mind (UK): [mind.org.uk/anger](http://mind.org.uk/anger) — evidence-based information and self-help
- Centre for Clinical Interventions: [cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au) — free anger management workbooks