



Anger – a guide to helping young people

What is anger?

Anger is a natural human emotion – everyone gets angry at some point and this is healthy, as anger is a natural response to many events that can happen in life, like being attacked, insulted, lied-to or feeling misunderstood.

When someone becomes angry, adrenaline rushes through their body, often giving them nervous-type energy and causing tension to build. Common to anger is the ‘fight or flight’ response – where you make a split-second decision to stay and ‘fight’ the thing that is making you angry, or ‘flee’ from it to escape the situation.

What causes anger?

The causes of anger and how we deal with it will often be heavily influenced by our upbringing and cultural background.

Some people are brought up exposed to excessive anger, and to believe it is always acceptable to act out anger, however aggressive or violent it may be. In this situation they won’t learn to understand and regulate their emotions, which can lead to angry outbursts.

Equally, witnessing a parents’ (or other adults’) anger when out of control, can make young people view anger as terrifying, destructive and unacceptable; an emotion to be avoided at all costs.

They might have been brought up to not complain, put up with injustices, or suffer punishment for expressing anger. This can lead them to suppress anger long-term, and can mean they react inappropriately in uncomfortable situations.

So, whilst it is completely fine to feel angry from time to time, anger can become an issue if it is bottled up or if it begins to take over.

Being angry is not, in itself, a problem, but the way someone deals with it might be.

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E: info@no5.org.uk | W: no5.org.uk
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When does anger become a problem?

Essentially, anger becomes a problem when it harms us, or people around us.

When we aren't able to express our anger, or express it at inappropriate times or in unsafe ways, then it can damage our health and relationships.

Suppressing anger may also lead to other types of behaviour in young people, like responding to people sarcastically, being obstructive, or refusing to speak to someone. Or you may find they get excessively angry too quickly or too often over small things. They may feel unable to let go of their anger in the moment.

If someone experiences any issues with anger they might:

- Develop issues with friends, family or in a relationship
- Get into difficulties at school, college or with the police
- Act violently
- Shout at others
- Try to wind up other people
- Socialise with people who get them into trouble
- Their emotions can feel very close to the surface
- They can feel like they have no control over their actions and responses
- Feeling embarrassed or ashamed after they've been angry
- Going out of their way to avoid situations that could upset them or trigger anger
- Get overly upset about things that don't usually bother them
- Struggle with low self-esteem
- May become depressed
- May display self-harming behaviours such as eating issues, drinking excessively, putting themselves in danger and self-injuring
- Isolating themselves by not talking to anyone or refusing to go to school

Managing anger: Identifying triggers

It can be really useful to look with a young person at what is triggering their anger in the first place. Keeping a simple diary/journal detailing times when they have felt angry can be really helpful in finding out what's at the root of the problem. Encourage them to ask themselves questions like:

- What was happening at the time?
- Was it something someone said that set off feelings of anger?
- How were they feeling in the moment?
- How did they behave in response?
- What were their feelings after the event?

Keeping notes may feel like a chore or be painful to write about for them, but sticking with this can help them and you see patterns appearing in their behaviour and responses.

It may be that working out their triggers alone can be enough to help them deal with anger better, but there are lots of other actions you can take if they need more help.

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Recognising warning signs

When we're angry and upset it's very easy to think in 'black and white', assuming someone is out to get us, they dislike us or are targeting us. Making impulsive assumptions like this can lead young people to have angry outbursts, or harbouring resentment towards people. Whilst there will sometimes unfortunately be people deliberately trying to upset them in life, sometimes it can be reading too much into another person's actions. Before they react, it can be useful to encourage them to take a step back and assess how we're feeling. Are they:

- Feeling their heart beat faster?
- Clenching their fists?
- Breathing heavily?
- Becoming restless?
- Feeling like they could explode?
- Could they cry in frustration?

If they can take a second in the moment to recognise these anger warning signs, then they might be more able to diffuse their emotions and avoid a massive conflict. It could help to:

- Count to ten before acting
- Leave the situation if they feel a lack of control
- Find a trusted friend/teacher/parent to talk about the event with
- Write down their feelings to look back on later

Calming techniques

Taking time to look after ourselves is really important to our emotional wellbeing. Young people all have their own interests and hobbies - it's about tailoring techniques around what makes them feel happier. Some things to try are:

- Deep breathing – they might feel silly doing it, but breathing in and out slowly helps slow our heart rate and reduce sensations of anxiousness
- Listen to their favourite music
- Reading a new book or playing a computer game
- Throw themselves into something creative like writing, drawing, painting or making a video
- Going for a walk
- Exercising a little – it could be their favourite team sport with mates or going for a run alone to clear their heads
- Having a long soak in the bath or taking a hot shower

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Dealing with anger assertively

Expressing anger is healthy if we can do it effectively and without violent behaviour. If a person reacts aggressively, others will tend not to focus on why they are upset, only on the anger itself. If young people can manage difficult situations assertively, they are less likely to get out of control; it can boost their self-esteem and make communicating their point of view much easier. Some tips for helping a young person with assertiveness are:

- Taking a moment (by counting to ten) to think about why they're angry
- Think about what should happen next – do they just want to explain they are angry, or does something need to actually change to avoid the situation in the future
- Remember their deep breathing techniques, and use them!
- Be specific when explaining their point of view e.g. "I feel angry with you because..." Using 'I' avoids blaming anyone, and the other person is less likely to feel attacked.
- Listening to the response they get, trying where they can to understand the other person's point of view
- Treating the other person or people how they'd like to be treated, even if they are being difficult – it's good for self-esteem
- Being realistic that the situation could erupt again and trying to spot this - walking away and returning to a conversation when they are calmer is assertive!

Getting further help

Sometimes, despite their best efforts, a young person's emotions can overwhelm them and they need more help with managing them than just dealing with them alone. You can help them by:

- Encouraging them to talk to you, or another trusted friend/parent/carer or teacher
- Supporting them to speak to their doctor about their feelings
- Help them seek a referral for counselling – this is confidential and they'll work with a trained counsellor to look at their issues and work through them in their own time in a safe environment. Remind them that no one needs to know they're attending counselling if they don't wish them to

How can No5 help?

Learning to effectively channel anger can make life feel much more manageable. Too much anger, either internally or externally, can lead to depression and anxiety issues. These can become longer-term problems so it is important to talk to somebody about it if things are becoming too much for them to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 10-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping them to work through problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment.

Ways to contact us:

Counselling Phone: 0118 901 5668

Admin Phone: 0118 901 5649

E-mail: info@no5.org.uk

Address:

No5 Young People's Counselling and Information
2-4 Sackville Street
Reading, RG1 1NT

Social Media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/no5youngpeople>

Twitter: @no5youngpeople

Our Opening Hours are:

Monday	16:00 – 21:00
Tuesday	10:00 – 13:00 and 16:00 – 21:00
Wednesday	16:00 – 21:00
Thursday	16:00 – 21:00
Friday	16:00 – 21:00
Saturday & Sunday	Closed

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