



Supporting Young People to Take Charge of Their Mental Health

Anger

What is anger?

Anger is a natural human emotion – we all feel 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 we become angry, adrenaline rushes through our body, often giving us a 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 our anger and how we deal with it will often be heavily influenced by our upbringing and cultural background. Some of us 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 we won’t learn to understand and regulate our emotions, which can lead to our own angry outbursts. Equally, witnessing a parents’ (or other adults’) anger when out of control, can make us view anger as terrifying, destructive and unacceptable; an emotion to be crushed at all costs. We might have been brought up to not complain, put up with injustices, or suffer punishment for expressing anger. This can lead us to suppress our anger long-term, and can mean we 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 we deal with it might be.

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, like responding to people sarcastically, being obstructive, or refusing to speak to someone. Or you may find you get excessively angry too quickly or too often over small things. You may feel unable to let go of your anger in the moment.





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If we experience any issues with anger we might find that:

- we 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 us into trouble
- our emotions can feel very close to the surface
- we feel like we have no control over our actions and responses
- feeling embarrassed or ashamed after we've been angry
- we go out of our way to avoid situations that could upset us, or trigger anger
- we may get overly upset about things that don't usually bother us
- we might struggle with low self-esteem
- we might feel depressed
- we might harm ourselves with eating issues, drinking excessively, putting ourselves in danger and self-harming
- we might isolate ourselves by not talking to anyone or refusing to go to school

Managing anger: Identifying triggers

It can be really useful to look at what is triggering our anger in the first place in order to start addressing it. Keeping a simple diary/notebook detailing times when we have felt angry can be really helpful in finding out what's at the root of the problem. We can ask ourselves questions like:

- what was happening at the time?
- was it something someone said that set off feelings of anger?
- how were we feeling in the moment?
- how did we behave in response?
- what were our feelings after the event?

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

So, as an example, we might find we are getting angry every time a particular teacher tells us to do something that we're not keen on. Anger in this situation could be linked to unpleasant experiences in the past with another authority figure like our Mum or Dad. Or it could be the feeling of a lack of control and feeling domineered that is causing our angry response.

It may be that working out our triggers alone can be enough to help ourselves deal with anger better, but there are lots of other actions we can take if we 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 us to angry outbursts, or to harbouring resentment towards people. Whilst there will sometimes unfortunately be people deliberately trying to upset us in life, sometimes it can be us reading too much into another person's actions.

Before reacting, it can be useful to take a step back and assess how we're feeling. Are we:

- feeling our heart beat faster?
- clenching our fists?
- breathing heavily?
- becoming restless?
- do we feel like we could explode?
- could we cry in frustration?

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

- count to ten before acting
- leave the situation if we feel a lack of control
- find a trusted friend/teacher/parent to talk about the event with
- write down our feelings to look back on later.

Techniques to help us calm down

Taking time to look after ourselves is really important to our emotional well-being. We all have our own interests and hobbies - it's about tailoring our techniques around what makes us feel happier.

Some things we can try are:

- deep breathing – we might feel silly doing it, but breathing in and out slowly helps slow our heart rate and reduce sensations of anxiousness
- listen to our favourite music
- try reading a new book or playing a computer game
- throw ourselves into something creative like writing, drawing, painting or making a video
- go for a walk
- exercise a little – it could be our favourite team sport with mates or going for a run alone to clear our heads
- have a long soak in the bath or take a hot shower – singing is optional!

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Dealing with anger assertively

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

- take a moment (by counting to ten) to think about why we're angry
- think about what should happen next – do we just want to explain we are angry, or does something need to actually change to avoid the situation in the future
- remember our deep breathing technique, and use it!
- be specific when explaining our 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.
- listen to the response we get, trying where we can to understand their point of view
- treat the other person or people how we'd like to be treated, even if they are being difficult – it's good for self-esteem
- be realistic that the situation could erupt again and try to spot this- walking away and returning to a conversation when we are calmer is assertive! Getting further help
Sometimes, despite our best efforts, our emotions can overwhelm us and we need more help with managing them than just dealing with them alone. We can:
- talk to a trusted friend/parent/carer or teacher
- speak to our doctor about our feelings
- be referred for counselling – this is confidential and you'll work with a trained counsellor to look at your issues and work through them in your own time and in a safe environment. no one needs to know we're attending counselling if we don't wish them to.

How can No5 help?

Learning to effectively channel your 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 to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 11-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping YOU to work through your problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment.

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