



What is it like to be angry?



After school, you go to the local shop. You're waiting to pay when two people from school push in front of you as though you weren't there.

You try and keep your temper and not say anything. They take their time, finally as they reach the door, one of them looks back at you. Then she turns around and says something to her friend and they both laugh as they leave the shop.

You feel angry and think "they've made a fool of me". The rest of your day is spoilt, you can't relax, you feel irritable.

Everyone feels angry at times. This is normal.

Anger becomes a **problem** when it becomes **too strong**, or spoils things.



There are two sections to this booklet.

Understanding Anger and its

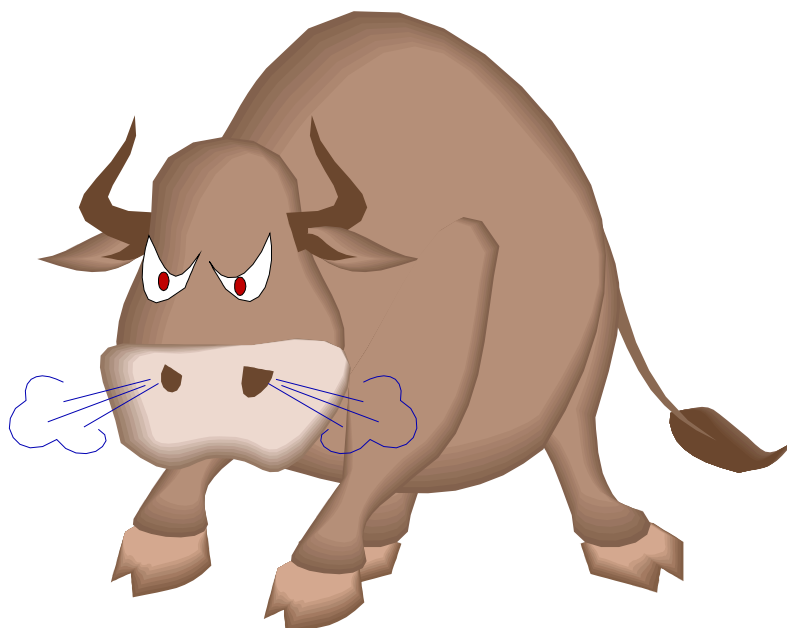
Causes

- 1 What is anger?
- 2 What causes anger?

Controlling Anger

- 1 Angry thoughts
- 2 Physical symptoms of anger
- 3 Angry behaviour
- 4 Solving problems
- 5 Communication
- 6 Long term beliefs

*There is a lot of information in this booklet, and it may help to **read just a section at a time.***



What happens to your body when you are angry?

Heart pounds, races, skips a beat,
Chest feels tight,
Stomach churns,
Legs go weak,
Tense muscles,
Go very hot,
Having to go to the toilet.
Sweating.
Head buzzing, pounding.

How you think

Can't concentrate
Mind goes blank
Everything is a big problem
It is not fair



What you say to yourself

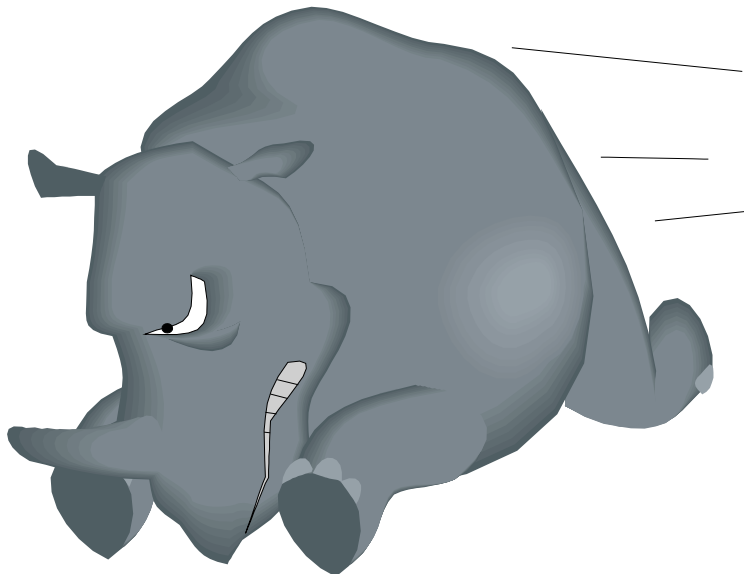
"Everything is ruined"
"I look stupid thanks to you"
"If I don't do something I'll explode"
"They deserve this".
"You let me down"

What you do

In a bad mood
Shout and argue
Hit out
Walk out

Throw something

Understanding anger



Do I have problems with anger?

If you have a problem with anger you probably already know it, but these are some of the signs that you may have difficulty controlling anger.

On the chart on page 7 above, place a tick next to the things that happen to you often:

If you have put a lot of ticks perhaps you have a difficulty with anger control.

The following sections might help, so have a look at them.



1. What is anger?

Often when we are angry, the main thing we think about is our angry mood.

Our mood can vary in strength from a mild irritation to a white hot rage.

When it reaches its strongest, we forget about everything else. We most often think it is caused by other people, like the rude people in the shop.

Our mood is a big part of the anger, but it is not the only part.

It is helpful to separate anger into

- **mood,**
- **thoughts,**
- **bodily reactions** and
- **impulsive behaviour (things we do without thinking).**

We also need to look at

- how changes affect us
- how what we do makes a difference to what happens



An Angry Mood is

Irritable

Angry

In a rage

What things in the outside world make us angry?

- Other people
 - No money
 - Stress
 - Frustration
-What else?

What thoughts in our head make us angry?

- They are making me look stupid
-What else?

How we react to being angry

- Attack
 - Argue
 - Run away
 - Break things
-What else?

How our body reacts when we are angry

- heart rate goes up,
- blood pressure goes up
- heart races
- tense
- hot
- breathless

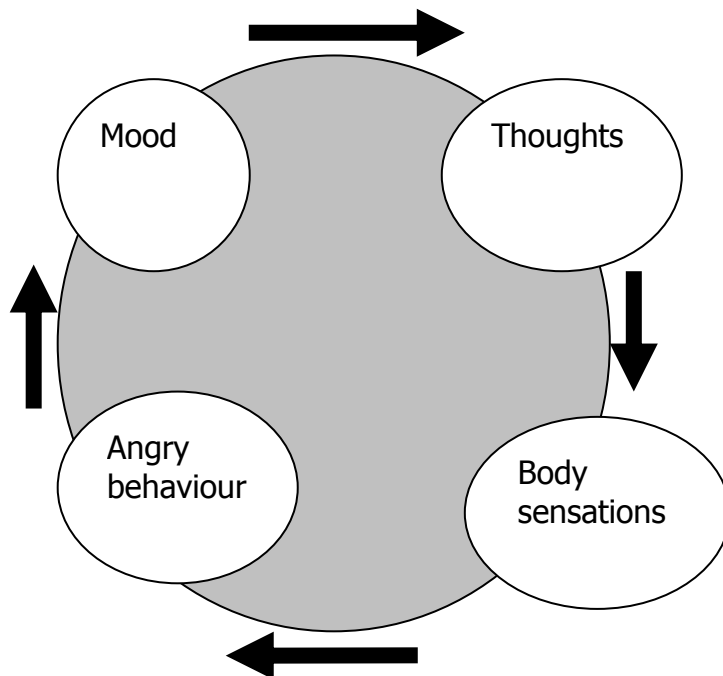




Anger can spiral out of control.

- Being angry can make other people angry with us.
- Bodily signs of anger can make us feel out of control
- If we have angry 'hot' thoughts we can just get angrier and angrier
- And all this can make our mood worse.

When anger is very strong there is a vicious circle of mood, thoughts, bodily sensations and behaviour that is hard to stop.



**Anger is sometimes
a vicious circle**

What causes anger?

It is **our reaction** to

Things **outside us**, like

- other people
- things that happen
- events

and

Things **inside** us, like

- worries
- upsetting memories.

Remember

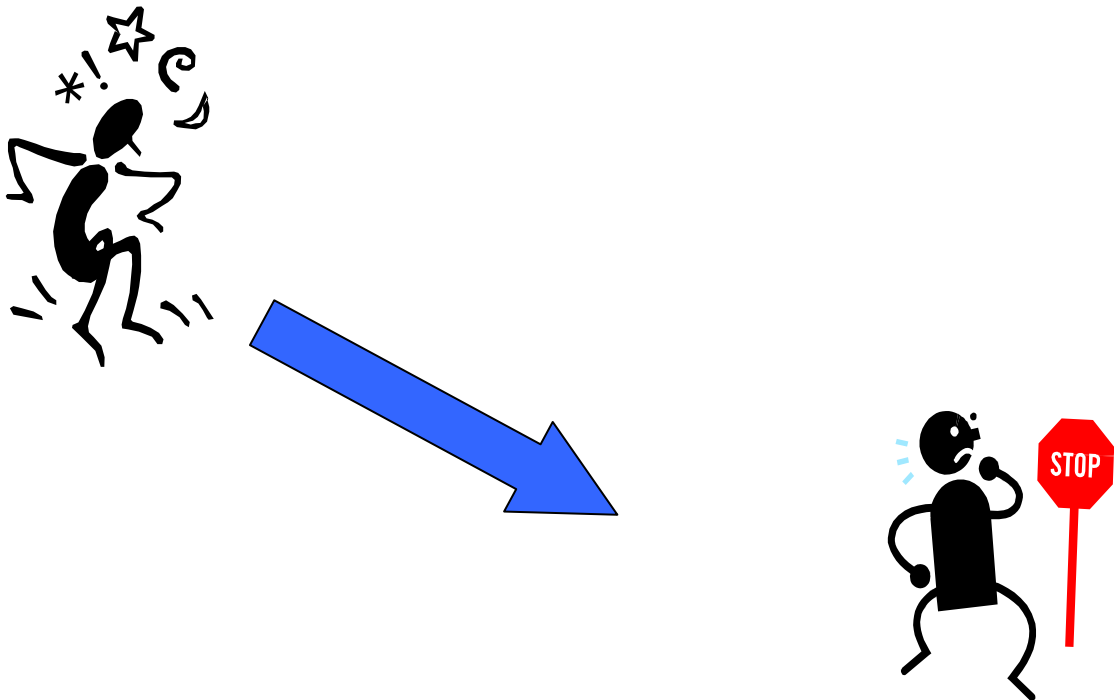
**It is not people or events that make us angry –
it is how we react to them.**

What triggers your anger?

Outside (people, things that happen)

Inside (thoughts, worries, memories)

- Getting very angry is **never helpful** and the belief that it can make you feel better is not true.
- If you let your anger loose it can get out of control.
- Being angry means you do not learn to handle the situation.
- It is best to begin to understand your anger and gain control over it.



- Anger affects the way we **feel, think** and **behave**.
- It causes symptoms in our body.
- It can be caused by our
- reactions to things happening around us or by our own thoughts and worries.
- Some of us get angry quicker than others.
- We can all learn to control our anger and express our feelings more helpfully.

Controlling anger

1. Angry Thoughts

We have seen that thoughts can make us feel angry, but often, people who have a problem with anger do not notice these angry thoughts.

It is important that we begin to recognise and challenge those thoughts.

'Hot' thoughts

'Hot thoughts' are angry thoughts that flash into your mind and make you feel worse, for example:

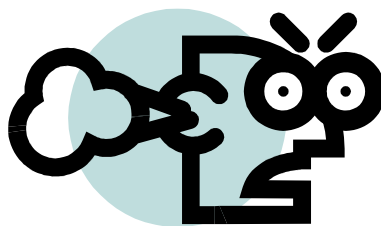
"I hate this place"

Do you have similar hot, angry thoughts? – jot them down.

.....
.....
.....

These "hot" thoughts are often backed up by ways of **negative thinking**.

It may help you to decide if you are making any of the following **thinking mistakes**.



Thinking Mistakes

Taking things personally

People who are angry often take things personally and feel hurt by it. They expect criticism from other people.

If someone doesn't speak to them in a shop they may feel that person dislikes them, when in fact it may be that he or she is just shy or worried.

If someone looks over at them they may think "he thinks I'm stupid", when in fact the person is just glancing over without any such thought.

Do you think you sometimes take things personally and feel hurt or angry, when it may have little to do with you? - jot down some recent examples

Ignoring the positive

People who get angry tend to focus their thinking on negative or bad events and ignore positive or good events..

Do you sometimes ignore the positive? – jot down some recent examples

Perfectionism

People who become angry often expect themselves and everyone else to do things perfectly.

If these standards are not met, then they feel badly let down and hurt. This hurt becomes anger.

For example,
Mary has a friend who had agreed to go out with her but let her down at the last minute. Mary felt the friend had failed her and decided that she did not want to be friends any more. This was despite the fact that the friend was really a good friend.

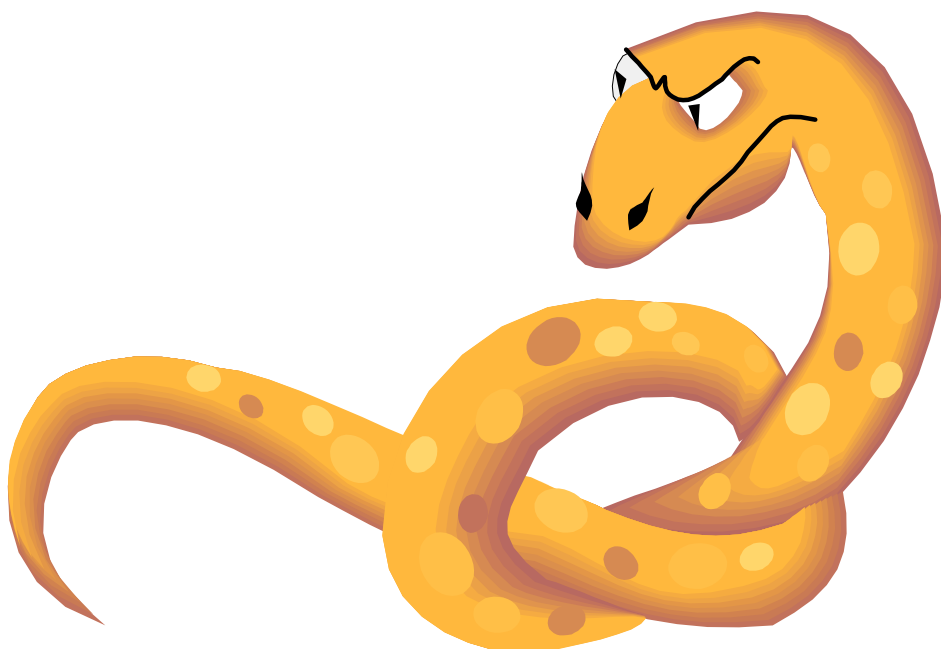
Do you sometimes expect perfection from yourself or others?
jot down some examples

All or nothing thinking

Thinking in all or nothing terms is common in people who get very angry. We either ignore something or else we think it is a big disaster. If we are like this we need to try to be more realistic about a situation.



Do you sometimes think in all or nothing terms?
– jot down any recent examples



If you find yourself making thinking mistakes like these, it can help to try and think more balanced thoughts.

One way of doing this is to write two columns, one for angry thoughts and the other for a more balanced thought.



Angry 'hot' thought

"She just doesn't care about me, she is selfish"

More balanced and realistic thought

"I know she let me down, but she does care, she usually tries to be kind"

Write down some of your thoughts now and write as many answers or balanced thoughts as you can.

The aim is to get faster at catching these **"hot thoughts"** when they come into your head and answering back straight away.

It takes a lot of practice but really does work.

Beliefs about anger that can be unhelpful

Some people hold beliefs that make it harder for them to bring their anger under control.

The beliefs sometimes excuse anger or make it seem the only response.

The beliefs are sometimes held because of life experiences or personal values.

People may have lived with these beliefs for so long that they accept them without question, but it is important to question them to help overcome anger.



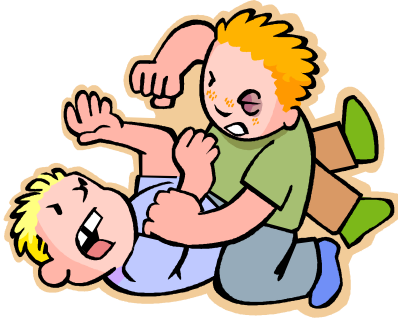
Here are some examples of these unhelpful beliefs and ideas on how to challenge and question them.

“I can’t control my anger, my father was angry and it is something I got from him”

This is the idea that anger is something you can’t change – it’s something you were born with.

But it is just an excuse that we tell ourselves.

We know that some people are more emotional. But the way we react to these emotions is learned, and we can learn better ways of reacting to things.



“If I don’t let my anger out I’ll explode”

Some people say that emotions and build up, like steam in a pressure cooker and need some way out or else they become harmful.

If you hold this point of view you might think losing your temper is healthy.

But we know from research that people are often left feeling much WORSE after losing control of anger. Shouting, hitting, slamming doors can all increase and strengthen feelings of anger.



“If you don’t show anger you’re weak”

Maybe you think that if you’re not angry and aggressive then you’re a hopeless wimp.

But the best way to deal with situations, both for yourself and those around you, is not to be angry and out of control, but to be calm, firm and clear- to be assertive.

“My anger is something people fear and it stops them taking advantage of me”

Good friendships are not formed on fear and you will be unlikely to have good friendships because of your angry behaviour.

Also, other people with problems of anger will see you as threatening and possibly pick fights with you.

“If I get angry it takes my stress away”

This belief is often found in people who have been the victims of violence or aggression.

You will be happier if you try and tackle your stress in other ways rather than just swapping it for anger.

“I have good reason to be angry because of things other people have done to me”

Anger is a natural reaction when we are treated badly. But if this anger gets into all areas of your life then it will cause difficulties for you.

It may help to ask “where does this anger get me?”.



In summary

We need to look carefully **at the angry “hot thoughts”** we have and try to see if we are making **thinking errors** in the way we view situations.

It can help to try and have more **balanced thoughts**. We also need to examine **long held beliefs** about our anger and challenge those, which are unhelpful.

2. Controlling the physical symptoms of anger

Relaxation and calming methods can help to reduce angry feelings.

You need to learn to use the following approaches automatically if you are in a difficult situation.

Reducing physical symptoms



You can prevent anger becoming too severe by using relaxation techniques. Some people can relax through playing about, exercise, listening to music, watching TV, or reading a book.



Picturing a pleasant scene in your mind can also help.

Remember relaxation is a skill like any other and takes time to learn.

Keep a note of how angry you feel before and after relaxation, rating your anger 1-10.

Controlling breathing

When someone gets angry it is very common for their breathing to change.

They can begin to gulp air, thinking that they are going to suffocate, or can begin to breath really quickly.

This is called over-breathing, it has the effect of making them feel dizzy and therefore more tense. It can lead to unpleasant feelings but is not dangerous.



Try to recognise if you are doing this and slow your breathing down.

Getting into a regular rhythm of “in two-three and out two-three” will soon return your breathing to normal.

Some people find it helpful to use the second hand of a watch to time their breathing.

3. Controlling angry behaviours

If we look back to the vicious circle of anger, we can see that if we can **challenge our angry thoughts** and **reduce the physical symptoms of anger** then we should not get to the point where we begin to behave angrily.

No one is perfect however! It helps to have ideas on how to tackle the angry behaviours we might normally show. We can do this in three stages:

Stage 1

Know what **your angry behaviours are** – what comes **before** them and what happens **afterwards**. It can help to keep a diary over a short period to help you understand this.

For example, Alex continually loses his temper.

He has tried to understand this by keeping a diary of what happens .

He found out that when there is an argument or he has an angry thought, he acts angrily and then leaves the situation.

Stage 2

Make a list of all the other things you can do instead of behaving angrily.

When you have done this choose the best new ideas to try in difficult situations.



Here is Alex's list as an example.

If I start to get angry I can:

I can politely **excuse** myself and leave the situation for a minute, and return when calmer.

Take a deep breath and **relax myself** for a second.

Count to ten before saying anything.

Go for a quick walk.

Ask yourself at the time "**Why** is this making me angry?"

Ask yourself at this time, "Is this **worth** getting angry about?"

Say calming things to yourself, in your head, eg
"calm down",
"getting mad won't help", "just forget it".

In summary

In order to control angry behaviours you need to:

1. **Know** what your angry behaviours are.
2. Decide what **other behaviours** might take the place of your angry behaviour.
3. Practice them!

4. Problem Solving

Sometimes real worries and stress can make us more irritable and angry.

A problem solving approach may help in this.

A good way to begin is to write down a problem. Describe it as clearly as you can, for example "I never have any money", is too vague, something like "I need to pay off that debt" is more helpful.

Next, **write down** as many **possible**



solutions as you can.

It doesn't matter how silly you may think the solutions are, the point is to think of as many as you can.

Try to think how you have solved similar problems in the past. Ask a friend what they might do. Think to yourself what possible solutions you might advise a friend to do if they had the same problems:

If you have a problem that may be making you anxious, try writing it below:

Now list as many possible solutions as you can:-----

Choose what seems like the best solution and write down all the steps it would take to achieve the solution.

Who might help?

What might go wrong?

Often it is helpful to think

"What is the worst thing that could happen?". If you can think of a plan to cope with this, your stress might go down.



Stressful lifestyle – general tips

Nowadays life is often stressful, and it is easy for pressures to build up. We can't always control the stress that comes from outside but we can find ways to reduce the pressure we put on ourselves:

Try to identify situations you find stressful by noticing the



beginnings of tension.

Take steps to tackle what it is about these situations that you find stressful.



Make sure you have time for things you enjoy.



Take up a relaxing hobby.



Make sure you get enough sleep.



Eat a well balanced diet.



Take regular exercise.

Learn to relax.



4. Communication



We have learned in the section of this book on thinking errors that angry people tend to **take things personally** and will often **jump to conclusions**.

It is therefore important to try and improve how you communicate so that misunderstandings are less likely to happen.

Here are a few tips.

Slow down and listen to the other person – don't rush in and say the first thing that comes to mind.

Don't jump to conclusions about what the other person is saying or thinking; ask them to tell you more about what they are trying to say.

Don't try to mind-read.

If someone is sounding critical, don't immediately fight back. Try and **understand the feelings** behind what they are saying.

It may be that the person feels worried or upset about something.

If you can keep calm and try and find out more about how the other is feeling then a row can be avoided.



Try and **explain** what **your feelings** really are, rather than going into angry words.

Most often what is behind anger is fear, hurt or frustration.

Of course you need to try and be clear in your own mind first, why you feel angry.

6. Long term beliefs

Sometimes people have long held views about themselves that are very self critical – for example

“I’m not a very clever person”.

These beliefs can make you more sensitive and this in turn may lead to anger towards yourself or others.

Try not to knock yourself down, look at the good things about yourself not the bad, don’t stick with negative beliefs that are there because of unhappy times in your past.



In summary

How can I help myself overcome anger and aggression?

1. Recognise your **angry thoughts** and begin to challenge them.
2. **Challenge** any unhelpful thoughts or beliefs that don't allow you to let go of anger.
3. Use **relaxation** and other ways to control the physical symptoms of anger.



4. Understand and control **angry behaviour**, try new calmer actions.
5. Improve **communication** and **problem solving**.
6. Do not allow yourself to knock yourself down all the time.

Where can I get further help?

If you feel the problem is getting worse then get more help.

If you feel so distressed that you have thoughts of harming yourself or you feel you are at risk of harming others, then talk to someone as soon as possible and explain how you are feeling.

This booklet has been adapted by Sarah Kendal from original work by Lorna Cameron, Frank Charlton and Lesley Maunder, Northumberland Department of Psychological

Services and Research, Newcastle, North Tyneside & Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust, St George's Hospital.

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