

## Information Sheet: Anger

### What is anger?

Anger is an emotional response: often triggered by events, which are seen as threats to our well-being. Triggers can include: being treated unkindly or with disrespect, not getting what we want, feeling helpless/out of control, or being made to look stupid.

Whilst anger can feel uncomfortable - and not something we like to admit to – it is a normal response - just like joy or sadness. However, if it has too great an influence on our behaviour, it can cause real problems in our lives and personal relationships.

### Problems caused by anger

Common angry behaviours include: snappy and irritable behaviour; shouting and arguing; saying something unkind; crying; walking away from the situation (angry withdrawal). Unfortunately, angry behaviour can lead to angry responses from others.

Sometimes anger takes the form of physical violence (including domestic violence) which can lead to loss of friends and family, jobs, money – or even personal freedom.

However, trying to suppress anger (“bottling it up”) can also be damaging. Depression is said to be anger turned inwards. If we learn as children that it’s not acceptable to express anger, we are likely to keep it hidden inside, which can leave us feeling miserable. Hidden anger can also lead to eating disorders, self-harming behaviours, alcohol and/or drug abuse and lack of confidence/low self-esteem.

The physical symptoms of anger include: tight chest; tense muscles; headaches; heart pounding, racing or skipping a beat; rapid short breaths; legs going weak; stomach churning; feeling very hot; sweating; needing to go to the toilet.

### How to help yourself:

Here are seven simple but effective ways to manage your anger -

1. “Take time out”. Step out of the situation in which you feel angry for five minutes (or for more time if you need it). Walk away and come back later when you feel calm. Remember to let the other person know what you are doing.
2. Keep an Anger Diary. Writing about times when you got angry (what was the trigger – what did you think and feel – what did you do – what happened next) can

help you to understand your anger – and identify different ways of behaving. You can find an example of a (blank) anger diary by going to the following website: [http://www.mhco.org.uk/files/Therapy\\_Templates/MHCO520.pdf](http://www.mhco.org.uk/files/Therapy_Templates/MHCO520.pdf)

3. Challenging your own angry response can give you a different perspective by asking questions such as: “Perhaps I’ve misunderstood the situation?”; “Am I over-reacting?”; “Am I angry with the right person? Maybe it’s *me* I’m cross with?”
4. Do something else as a distraction e.g. cooking, gardening, the ironing etc.
5. Relaxation techniques. Some people can relax by listening to music, watching TV or reading a book. Others might like to attend a yoga or meditation class. See our Information Sheet on Relaxation for other suggestions.
6. Relaxing ‘Safe Place’ Imagery – see website details below. Imagery techniques have long been used by different cultures and therapies to improve mood states.
7. Practice controlled breathing. Here is one simple breathing exercises

**STEP 1:** breathe out

**STEP 2:** breathe in slowly to the count of four, "one elephant, 2 elephant, 3 elephant, 4 elephant"

**STEP 3:** hold your breath for the count of four

**STEP 4:** breathe out slowly while counting elephants

Repeat until you begin to feel calm. Remember, don’t take too many deep breaths in a row or breathe too quickly, or you will become dizzy. Take a few ordinary breaths in between the deep ones.

### How we can help:

Counselling can help with dealing with anger. Talking in confidence to someone who will not judge you, can help you face your fears and experiment with new behaviours e.g. channelling your anger more effectively to help you get what you want i.e. by being assertive, rather than angry. Counselling can help you find out what your triggers are.

You can access our free counselling service through a referral from your doctor.

### Other sources of information:

‘Overcoming Anger and Irritability’ by Dr William Davies.

Go to [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and enter ‘anger management’ in the search box

Enter ‘about anger’ in the search box on Mind’s website - [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)