

Anger Management Toolbox



COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT ANGER

I need a physical release for my anger.

Research has found that the cathartic effect of expressing your rage by hitting something- a punch bag, a cushion- is counterproductive: Although it can help relieve that 'pent up' feeling and make you feel better in the short term, you are training your brain to associate hitting something with feeling relief. Over time your brain expects you to hit something to feel better when you're angry, and this association grows stronger each time you do it, until it becomes an automatic response.

I need to give the people that are making me angry a piece of my mind. If I don't people will think I am a target.

You don't have to "get it out". This doesn't mean you should let your anger simmer until you explode. This means that yelling at the cause of your anger and acting aggressively won't help.

We can express anger assertively in a way that shows respect for others. The most effective way of affecting others is to have a calm, rational approach to dealing with opposing views. Calmness and rationality communicate real strength.

."If I don't say what I'm thinking, I'm being dishonest, and I'll be even angrier later."

When we are angry, our judgement is severely flawed. The rational regions of our brain are overwhelmed by the impulsive regions. People don't say what they really mean when they're angry, people say what they think will hurt another person, or what they think will allow them to control a situation. Save what you want to say for later when you can consider what you will say and how you will say it.

Anger is bad/negative/unhealthy.

Anger is a normal emotion and there is no such thing as a good or bad emotion. It is a natural instinctual response to situations where we feel offended, wronged, denied or frightened. What can be judged as good or bad, positive or negative, and healthy or unhealthy is how we react to anger. When controlled, anger energizes us, boosts our self-esteem, increases our communication with others, and protects us against fear and uncertainty. Anger becomes bad when we act in rage. People who vent their anger aggressively simply strengthen their anger and inevitably increase their aggressiveness.

I can't control my anger.

We are not slaves to our impulses. Awareness of anger dynamics and a conscious effort to rise above our anger can help us control our behaviour. Bear in mind anger doesn't build up until it is uncontrollable. We can control it before it controls us through different techniques that include relaxation, meditation, better communication and problem solving, humour, frequent exercising, and seeking help when needed.

It is just a learnable skill; Practice, practice, practice!

The 10 rules of fair fighting

1 Do not be under the influence

If either of you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol do not proceed with the discussion. Immediately call a timeout and agree to return to the issue when you are no longer under the influence.

2 Do not use threats or violence.

Using physical force or *threatening* to use force (i.e. a raised fist or a verbal threat) in any way is unacceptable. Develop the self-discipline to set limits on your anger and your behaviour before you reach this level.

Use of force includes pushing, shoving, grabbing, hitting, punching, slapping or restraining. It includes punching a hole in a wall, throwing things or breaking something in anger. Acting out your anger in these ways violates the other person's boundaries and sense of safety. Each of us has a right to be safe and free of abuse or physical danger in our relationships.

3 No degrading language, no shouting.

Avoid name-calling, insults or swearing. Putting your partner down or criticizing your partner's character shows disrespect for their dignity and is intentionally hurtful. This will just lead to more character assassination while the original issue is forgotten. When you intentionally hurt your partner, it's like saying, 'You are not safe with me. I will do whatever it takes to protect myself or to win.'

Shouting does not get us anywhere either: nothing will get resolved when your emotions are running so high. Keep in mind that shouting can be subjective. What is yelling to your partner may not be yelling to you. However, if it feels like shouting to her, then you are at least raising your voice, if not shouting. Make a conscious effort to lower your voice. If you can't tone it down because you are too upset, then it is probably best to take a time-out.

4 No stonewalling.

Sometimes the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This refusal to communicate is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you cannot continue, ask for a timeout and resume the discussion later.

5 Do not threaten to end the relationship.

In the heat of an argument, threatening to leave the relationship is manipulative and hurtful. It creates anxiety about being abandoned and undermines your ability to resolve your issues. It quickly erodes your partner's confidence in your commitment to the relationship. Trust is not easily restored once it is broken in this way.

Speak for yourself and express your feelings.

6 Use words that describe how **you** feel, and what you want and need, *not* what you think your partner feels, wants, or believes. Telling your partner what he or she thinks, believes or wants is controlling and presumptuous. It is saying that you know their inner world better than they do. Instead, work on identifying your own unmet needs, feelings, and ways of thinking and describe these needs and feelings to them.

Using I-statements helps express how we feel more accurately and with less hostility, informs someone that their behaviour is causing a problem and minimizes the chances of the other person feeling guilty, put-down, & resentful.

7 Stay in the present. Tackle one issue at a time.

Are you upset because your partner didn't put the cap on the toothpaste, or because you feel like they're not doing an even share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument. When an argument goes off topic it can easily become about everything a person has ever done wrong. As we've all done a lot wrong this can take us into a dead end of tit-for-tat, so resist the temptation to bring up other issues from the past.

Try to keep your focus on what can be done today to resolve the issue at hand and go forward from there. If you get off-topic, on to other issues, stop yourselves and agree to get back on track. You can always come back to other issues later.

8 Take turns speaking AND listening.

Let one person speak at a time. When one is speaking, the other should be listening—*really* listening, not just planning what they're going to say next. Take turns speaking and listening so that you both have a chance to say what you need.

Have you ever tried to work through a difficult issue when the person was talking over the top of you and interrupting you? How did you feel? Consciously remind yourself about this when you feel an overwhelming urge to interrupt or speak your mind.

9 Attempt to come to a compromise or understanding.

There isn't always a perfect conclusion to an argument. Life is too messy for that. Aim to come to a compromise- requiring give and take on both sides. Be prepared to have been in the wrong and be prepared to apologise. If you can't come to a compromise, merely acknowledging that you understand where each of you are coming from can soothe negative feelings.

10 When necessary call a timeout

Violating these fair fighting rules is typically a sign that you have already crossed a threshold. Signals from the more primitive, impulsive parts of your brain have begun to drown out the signals from the more rational parts of your brain. In this fight-or-flight state, creative problem-solving and mutual cooperation are unlikely. You end up in an escalating argument that becomes more and more hostile and defensive. This is when it's time to call a timeout.

Making a timeout contract

You need to do this with your partner/ex when you are both calm and have an opportunity to talk without distractions. Timeouts are not used to procrastinate or avoid difficult conversations, but to ensure that difficult conversations can be had safely and effectively.

1. Agree when at which point *either* of you can call a timeout. Determine the point on the anger thermometer you feel in danger of becoming aggressive or hurtful. This means you will need to be aware of your signs and symptoms of anger that tell you when you have reached this point.
2. Decide on how long the timeout will last- it needs to be at least 20 mins and shouldn't last longer than an hour. If after this time either of you are still too angry to communicate you can always ask for another timeout, but you need to tell your partner this rather than refusing to return for an unknown length of time.
3. Agree to respect the timeout. This means that you both have a responsibility to respect each other's right to take this time to calm down and allow sufficient space to do so without continuing to harass the person.
4. Agree what you will both do and not do during the timeout: Decide for yourself a 'menu' of self-soothing activities you know will work. The main purpose of the timeout is to give you an opportunity to calm down, so choose an activity that will help you do so.

DO NOT drink alcohol or use drugs to help you calm down. DO NOT drive. DO NOT abscond- if you need to leave the house tell your partner where you will be going. If you need to leave the house DO NOT go to the pub, off licence, bookies, drug using associates, dealers...

- As you calm down during your time-out, take some time to try to figure out any deeper feelings you may have underneath the anger. For example, do you feel sad? anxious? betrayed? Anger can hide other emotions that can be better dealt with when they are recognised for what they are and expressed honestly.
- Be aware of your self-talk. Notice irrational, unhelpful and untrue statements you are making to yourself. Our inner dialogues can make situations much worse than they actually are, especially when we are very negative. Try to challenge your negative thinking when you notice it and change your thoughts to more rational ones.
- Plan what you are going to say and how you want to say it. Use 'I-statements':

I feel (*describe your feelings/emotions*)...**when you** (*describe behaviour*)...**because** (*explain why this behaviour has caused you to feel like this*).

Time out contract

We, _____ and _____,
agree to the following time out process and to follow that process to the best of our ability.

1. Either of us may call a time out by saying or doing the following:

2. When either of us gives this signal we will postpone any further discussion for a timeout period of _____ minutes.
3. When possible we will withdraw from each other's company during the timeout.
4. During the timeout we agree to calm ourselves before continuing to talk about the issue. To help us calm down we will do the following activities:

During the timeout we will absolutely abstain from the following activities:

5. After the timeout we agree to begin a constructive discussion about the topic that led to the time out, following the Fair Fighting rules included in this document.
6. If this discussion leads to anger we agree to call a 2nd time out using the same signal and repeat the process.
7. If we feel we need to call a further timeout this will last until the next day when we will resume our discussion at a mutually agreed time and place.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Daily routine activities to manage my anger

- **Physical activity-** Maintaining a regular exercise schedule will help you regulate stress and negative emotions. While you exercise focus one-mindfully on the actual activity and on your body, and avoid ruminating about what has been on your mind recently.

Get a Leeds Card (fill in the form in at local leisure centre) and arrange a gym induction while you're there.

Swimming- check times to avoid lessons or special sessions

Exercise for at least 30 minutes 5 times per week- this doesn't need to cost anything; walking, jogging, bodyweight exercises, gardening, or anything else that raises your respiratory and heart rates count.

- **Improve your sleep hygiene.** Better quality sleep will help you become more resilient and help manage your mood. Ask the groupworker for more advice about improving sleep without relying on tablets.

Stick to the same bed time and getting up time every day

Avoid day time snoozes

Avoid drug and alcohol use

Establish a healthy and relaxing evening routine

- **Communicate assertively and use I-statements**

Using I-statements can feel uncomfortable and artificial at first. The more you practice the easier and more natural it will seem- discuss the technique with your partner and ask them to practice with you- chose neutral topics that don't trigger any negative feelings

If something is annoying you, don't bottle things up but discuss it assertively- think about what you will say and how you will say it- address the behaviour not the person- be conscious of your body language, choice of words and tone of voice.

- **Try different methods to self-soothe, relax your body and calm your mind.** Find the methods that work for you, and do them as part of your daily routine.
- **Practice your chosen Mindfulness exercises every day. Try to do things one-mindfully.**
- **Be active in your recovery.** Gaining control over your addictive behaviour will be one of the most significant turning points of your adult life and could provide untold benefits to your relationship. Make a proper care plan with your worker and get extra support from SMART, NA or AA. Get to other group work programmes offered in FL. Get the support you need from your recovery coordinator, other services available in Leeds, and others in recovery.
- **Review your triggers-** do you need to prepare for any unavoidable trigger situations?

Managing anger when it happens

- **Deep Breathing** - Breathe slowly and deeply: in through the nose and as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, pause for a couple of seconds, and out through the mouth, holding on for a couple of seconds before you breathe in again. Concentrate on keeping an even rhythm to your breathing, so the in-breath and out-breath last the same amount of time. Repeat for 3 minutes.
- **Statue-** Sit down or stand up straight, close your eyes and concentrate on being as still as possible. See if you can keep your eyes beneath the eyelids still as well. Combine this with the deep breathing exercise.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** requires you to focus on tensing and relaxing muscle groups in your body. Combine this with deep breathing, tensing the muscles as you inhale, relaxing the muscles as you exhale. Start at the bottom of your body and work up, concentrating on isolating each muscle group as you tense them and keeping the rest of your body relaxed.
 1. Foot (curl your toes downward)
 2. Lower leg and foot (tighten your calf muscle by pulling toes towards you)
 3. Entire leg (squeeze thigh muscles while doing above)
 4. Repeat on other side of body
 5. Hand (clench your fist)
 6. Entire arm (tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder and “make a muscle”, while clenching fist)
 7. Repeat on other side of body
 8. Buttocks (tighten by pulling your buttocks together)
 9. Stomach (as though you are preparing to receive a punch in the stomach)
 10. Chest (tighten by taking a deep breath)
 11. Neck and shoulders (raise your shoulders up to touch your ears)
 12. Mouth (open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw)
 13. Eyes (clench your eyelids tightly shut)
 14. Forehead (raise your eyebrows as far as you can)

As you relax each muscle group concentrate on that feeling of tension release. It may help to imagine the tension *flowing* down through your body and out from your feet and hands.

- **Release endorphins**

If your emotions feel particularly extreme, induce your body to release endorphins to ease the intensity. The endorphins that come from intense

exercise can help you calm down, and moving your body provides a physical outlet for your rage. Try these vigorous activities to get a release.

Run up and down the stairs.

Go for a run- a short, hard, exhausting sprint rather than a jog.

Run hard, on the spot.

Do star jumps/press-ups/sit-ups.

Put on the radio and dance.

- **Grounding Techniques:** assist you to stay in the present moment during episodes of overwhelming emotions. Staying in the present moment allows people to feel safe and in-control by focusing on the physical world and how they experience it. Grounding techniques help bring us back into the here and now in a safe way. The more present you are in your body, the calmer and safer you will feel.

Grounding is easy to do. Just focus on some aspect of the physical world, rather than on your internal thoughts and feelings. Focus on the present rather than the past. Practice your grounding techniques so that they will come naturally when you are upset.

Run cool water over your hands.

Place a cool washcloth on your head/face.

Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.

Dig your heels into the floor-literally “grounding” them. Notice the tension centred in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself you are connected to the ground.

Carry a grounding object in your pocket, which you can touch whenever you feel triggered.

Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; wiggle your toes in your socks; the feel of the chair against your back.

Stretch.

Roll your head around.

Clench and release your fists.

Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left or “right”... in detail to yourself.

Eat something, describing the flavours to yourself.

- **Repeat self-calming statements.** Find a statement that is meaningful to you, and try focusing your attention on this statement as you repeat it. Here are a few you could try:

“This situation is only temporary.”

“I can make it through this.”

“I might not like it, but it’s not going to kill me.”

“I will keep my cool about this.”

“This isn’t worth getting upset about.”

- **Use visualisation techniques-**

Imagine a ‘STOP’ sign and command yourself to STOP.

Imagine yourself in a scene you find relaxing. It could be a quiet forest, a solitary island or an imaginary land - any place that makes you feel at home and peaceful. Focus on imagining every detail of this place: the light, the noises, the temperature, the weather, and the smells. Keep dwelling on this place until you feel completely immersed in it, and hang around there for a few minutes or until you feel calm.

Play the tape forward- what will be the most likely outcomes if I react angrily in this situation?

Visualise the positive things about your relationship or the things you have achieved... is it worth putting these things at risk?

- **Try to identify any underlying emotions** that may be driving your anger. If you can determine these emotions concentrate on how you can assertively address them.
- **Listen to your self-talk**; what are you saying to yourself? Use the ABC technique to dispute irrational beliefs and thoughts and replace them with more realistic and effective ones.
- **Talk to someone** you trust- you don’t even need to mention you’re upset. Just have a conversation.
- **Distract yourself one-mindfully** with something that requires focus- housework, reading, puzzles or games, playing with your pet, whatever it is concentrate on what you are doing. If thoughts or emotions distract you from the task in hand, refocus on what you are doing. Keep refocussing as many times as you need to.
- **Self-soothing techniques** Coping strategies focused on improving your mood that you can do on your own are sometimes described as *self-soothing* or *self-care* coping strategies. These help you calm and relax when you are feeling overwhelmed physically and emotionally.

Effective self-soothing coping strategies often involve one or more of the five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound).

Listed below are some examples of self-soothing strategies for each sense. When engaging in these activities, focus your attention completely on the task, that is, with one-mindfulness.

Touch	Taste	Smell	Sight	Sound
Soaking in a warm bath. Relaxing in the warmth of the sun. Stretching. Going for a swim. Changing into comfortable clothes. Playing with a pet.	Eating something comforting. Sipping coffee, tea, hot chocolate. Eating raw or unprocessed food. Slowly sucking on a boiled sweet	Smelling flowers. Smelling lavender or vanilla. Smelling a familiar perfume. Lighting a scented candle. Deeply breathing in fresh air	watching a funny film or television show. Reading a good book. Looking at pictures of loved ones. Looking at pictures of a day trip, special event or holiday. Watching the clouds.	Listening to relaxing music. Singing to yourself. Saying positive statements to yourself. Playing an instrument.

- **SOBER Breathing Space (or other Mindfulness practice)**

Stop what you are doing. If you are in a risky or stressful situation back away. If you can't physically 'escape' detach yourself from the situation for a few moments by purposefully taking some deep relaxing breaths.

Observe. Observe and describe to yourself the physical sensations that are happening in your body. Do the same with any emotions, moods or thoughts you are having. Just notice as much as you can about your experience at this moment.

Breathe. Allow your attention to settle on your breath.

Expand. Expand your awareness to include the rest of your body, to your experience, and to the situation, seeing if you can gently hold it all in awareness.

Respond. Respond (not react) mindfully, with awareness of what is truly needed in the situation and how you can best take care of yourself and others.

What coping strategy to use

We need to learn to use different strategies at different stages of our anger. Learn to catch your anger early. It is much easier and safer to deal with it before it has escalated to boiling point.

