

# how do I deal with anger and its effects on mental health?

**Everyone feels angry sometimes. Anger becomes a problem when it begins to impact a person's daily life and causes them to react in a way that might hurt themselves or those around them.**

## **When is anger a problem?**

Feeling anger is OK. Anger can help get us through hard situations, help us understand ourselves better and can motivate us to change things we don't like about our life.

Anger can become a problem when it affects a person's daily life and relationships. This might be because they find their feelings of anger overwhelming or hard to control, because they express their anger in ways that might hurt themselves or others around them, or because they find it hard to express their anger. Difficulties with anger can be a sign that someone might be experiencing sadness, depression, isolation, discrimination or another mental health difficulty.

Learning to be aware of our anger, and to express it in a safe and healthy way, is an important part of good mental health. If you feel angry a lot, or have trouble controlling or expressing your anger, there are lots of things you can do to help manage this in a healthy way.

## **Signs my anger might be a problem**

Some signs may include:

- feeling angry a lot of the time at an intense and overwhelming level
- behaving aggressively (verbally, physically, passive aggression)
- having trouble expressing anger
- feeling sad and distressed as a result of getting angry
- using alcohol or other drugs to manage anger
- feeling the need to use aggression to get people to do something
- withdrawing from people or situations
- bottling things up
- regretting the things you did or said when you were angry
- expressing anger by saying or doing something violent (e.g., shouting, swearing, throwing or hitting things).

## **Why do I feel angry?**

Anger can be our way of expressing or responding to a range of other feelings, like:

- frustration
- embarrassment or humiliation
- guilt or shame
- jealousy
- hurt or sadness
- feeling unable to control a situation
- feeling threatened or scared
- feeling unfairly treated
- feeling misunderstood or not heard
- feeling the pressure of living in two worlds
- feeling a loss of connection to family, community or identity.

## Anger vs aggression

Anger can sometimes lead to people acting in an aggressive or violent way, but they're not the same thing. Anger is a feeling. Aggression and violence are actions. It's these actions that can lead to problems.

Anger can sometimes feel intense and overwhelming, but it doesn't necessarily lead to violent or aggressive behaviour.

## How can I manage my anger?

Here are five steps you can take to help manage anger in a healthy way:

- 1 Start to understand your 'angry' triggers and signs.** Think about the things that regularly trigger your anger (like running late or being blamed for something you didn't do). This might help you find a way to respond differently. It might be possible to avoid these triggers in future, react differently when they happen, or allow you to let others know your triggers so that they can help.

Know your 'angry signs'. These can be things like; feeling hot or flushed, clenched fists or teeth, a tight feeling in your chest, or your heart beating faster. If you recognise the early signs of anger, you're in a position to try some new ways to manage this feeling.

- 2 Neutralise the situation and your body's reaction.** As anger increases, so does our body's physical reaction. There are a few ways to reduce the intensity of our body's reactions:
  - Slow your breathing. Taking some long slow deep breaths can help to slow down your heart rate, lower your core temperature, and get your thinking brain back online.
  - Taking a break. Leave the situation until you've calmed down – this can stop you from acting in a way that hurts you or someone else.
  - Reconnecting with nature. Connecting with nature can help calm down the mind and body and give you some space so you can decide how to respond to the situation.
  - Using delay or distraction. Count slowly to 10 or do something physical – like push-ups or bouncing a ball.

These strategies can help you feel more in control, and stop you from saying or doing something that you might regret.

- 3 Understand why you're feeling angry.** Understanding the underlying things that may be contributing to your anger can help you to get back in control of your response to anger. This can make it much easier to work out solutions or alternatives to aggression.

- Did someone do or say something that upset me?
  - Do I have other feelings right now that might affect the way I'm reacting – like being sad or embarrassed, or feeling a loss of connection to people that are important to me?
  - Does the situation bring up bad memories?
- Some people find it easier to write down or draw their answers to these questions.

- 4 Explore your solutions.** This can be hard to do when you're angry. It's best to try these when you're feeling calm and safe. Think of some helpful ways to express and resolve your anger. Ask yourself questions like:

- How can I explain the situation in a respectful way?
  - How might other people feel about this situation?
  - What might I suggest to a friend if they asked me for help in this situation?
  - What have I seen other people do that helps them deal with anger?
- We can't always change the things that make us angry, but we can change the way we respond.

- 5 Reach out.**
  - Your family and friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders, might have ideas about how you can express your anger in healthy ways. Talking with them can be a great place to start.
  - If you're being harassed, bullied or discriminated against, there are people who can help. A counsellor, a welfare officer at your school or your GP (general practitioner) could help you manage what's going on.
  - If your anger-related problems continue without improvement, then talking to your GP or a mental health professional can help. They can teach skills, like relaxation and communication, help you understand your anger, and help you deal with anger in a healthy way.



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)**



**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

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