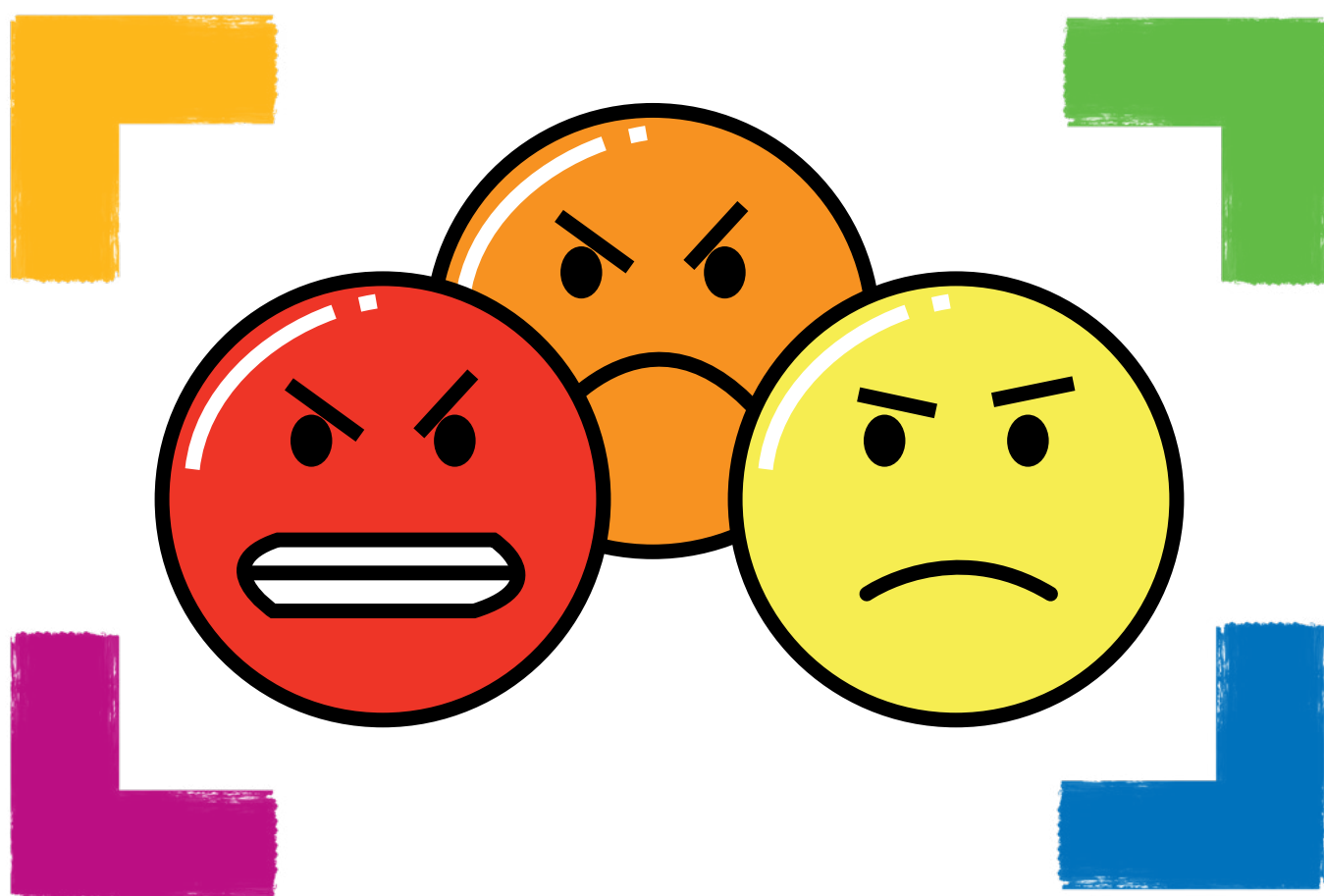


An introduction to understanding and working with



Children and young people with anger issues

According to Aristotle...

Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody's power, that is not easy.

Anger is an inevitable part of life, although it is a common assumption that the expression of anger, particularly by children or young people is unacceptable.

It can be useful to think of anger as an iceberg. The angry behaviour being the top part that can be seen above the water, with all the other things that can lead to anger being below the surface, which we can't see.

One of the major problems in dealing with anger with children and young people is the angry feelings that are often stirred up in us. So, we need to be aware of our own feelings and how we identify and manage our own anger, before we can even begin to assist children and young people to manage theirs.

There are a number of anger styles:



Bottle and blast

You bottle up your anger and then let it out all at once in an explosive manner



Bottle and cap

You keep it all inside



TNT

You usually explode right away, you have a very short fuse



Cold shoulder/iceberg

You are cold and usually give people the silent treatment



Nag and carp

You are constantly nagging someone to do something



Kick the dog

You misdirect your anger and take it out on someone or something else

Think about which style represents you and answer the following:

- Where did you learn this style? (e.g. parents, peers)
- What are the pay offs of this style? (e.g. cold shoulder may prevent a confrontation)
- What are the negative consequences of this style? (e.g. cold shoulder might lead to a lack of intimacy, loneliness)
- How does this anger affect you physically? (e.g. headache)
- How do you imagine others are affected by this style? (e.g. hurt, defensive)

Types of anger

Secondary emotion – e.g. arises from fear, embarrassment and may be a defence to avoid painful feelings. Anger may be related to anxiety over situations that the child or young person has no control over. Think of anger as being a master of disguise!

Instrumental behaviour – anger achieves particular outcomes, such as attention.

Reflection of emotional difficulties – release of pent up emotions.

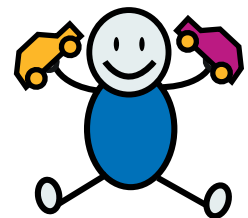
Fight or flight – response to perceived threat.

Biological response – such as allergy, physical problem, learning difficulties or developmental delays.

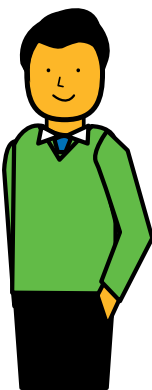
Environmental response – such as new teacher, friend being away, anger over belongings (toddlers).

Developmental anger

Toddler - At this age children start to become more independent. They want to be able to do things that they don't have the skills for, and their lack of communication skills adds to their frustration. They may express their frustration at this by kicking, screaming and having a tantrum.



School aged children have a lot to cope with. They are learning lots of different things such as academic knowledge, how to socialise and how to manage their emotions. At this age children also often start to compare themselves to other children. They begin to feel the need to belong and form close friendships, but these friendships can also be triggers for anger. The ins and outs of friendships can make children feel insecure through teasing, bullying, jealousy and feeling 'left out' or lonely. If children don't feel secure in their friendships, they can feel unhappy or frustrated which may show up as angry behaviour.



Adolescence brings new worries and a set of tasks to learn. Young people at this age are developing a new level of independence and experimenting with their identity. Not surprisingly, any conflict or stress can be to do with whether they feel they have enough control over their lives. Understandably, friendship groups become more important during adolescence because young people can share each other's experiences. Therefore, the need for acceptance and belonging becomes even more important than at other stages of childhood. This need can bring with it a lot of sensitivity. This sensitivity, along with the emerging sense of identity and the physical changes of puberty, may increase angry feelings and outbursts.



Events that affect all ages -There are situations and events that can result in anger regardless of age; such as the death of a loved one, divorce, separation, bullying and abuse. These events can shake a young person's sense of safety and trust. If this happens, the person may feel scared and look out for any other dangers.

How we deal with anger

Displaced anger

Anger may be displaced onto another person or object that is not the focus of the anger; usually because it is considered unsafe to do so. An example may be if a child or young person is experiencing trouble at home but is unable to express the anger for fear of making it worse or risk of physical or emotional abuse; at school, the anger may be displaced onto a teacher.

In the short term, it may leave the child or young person feeling better due to the release of physical and emotional tension. But in the long term, it may spoil relationships at school, hamper learning, damage self-esteem, lead to guilt and it doesn't help or resolve the conflict at home.

Repressed anger

Anger may be repressed into the unconscious.

Suppressed anger

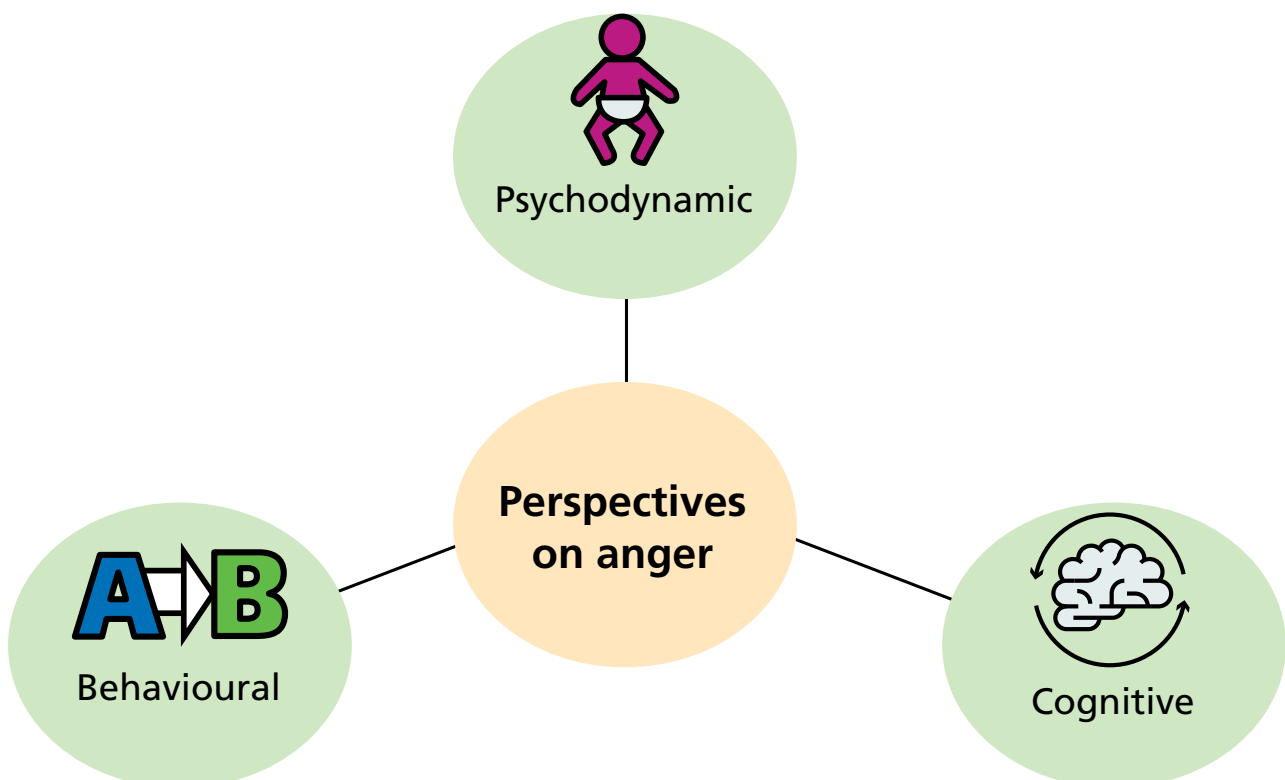
Anger may be suppressed in order to avoid hurting those we care about.

Factors affecting what we do with anger

- **Learned responses** - modelled from parents and past experiences
- **Belief system** - own thoughts and beliefs 'light the fuse'
- **Unconscious motivators** - fear of rejection
- **Individual differences** - biological predisposition

We live in a violent world, where there are many influences that have powerful effect on how children relate to the world and solve their problems.

Perspectives on anger



Some child developmental theorists see anger as an inevitable part of normal development. Whether those feelings persist depends very much on how certain basic needs of young children are met.

Behavioural approach

Behaviourists see behaviour as the primary response, which is controlled by history of rewards/punishments.



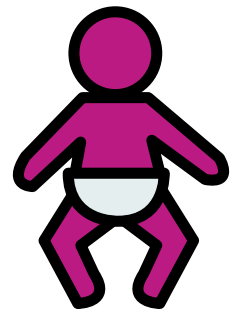
Social behaviours are learnt in the same way as other behaviours. For instance, as a rule, there is a greater probability of me hitting somebody if that hitting is reinforced by somebody immediately complying with my demand and giving me their sweets. Behaviour which is followed by an aversive consequence is less likely to be repeated.

Psychodynamic approach

This approach believes emotions are drive-related primitive forces that can make us do things we don't want to do, which we cannot be held responsible for because powerful passions overtake us.

Transference/projection - we carry around a vast amount of emotional baggage and unfinished business (e.g. to authority, to women) laid down in our early emotional history.

Attachment - secure emotional base which all children need and from which they begin to explore the interpersonal world around them. Early security and bonding is crucial to the growth of mature independence and begins in childhood and continues. When this sense of security is threatened, disturbing and aversive emotions are experienced, leading sometimes to desperate attempts to re-establish contact with emotional security. Anger is one of the felt responses to a threat of security.

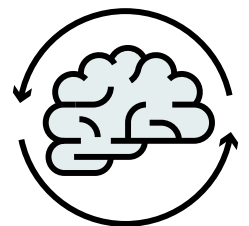


Attachment theory reminds us of the importance of belonging, which links with a feeling of being valued/self-esteem.

Cognitive

Nothing makes us angry, in reality; we make ourselves angry by our own interpretation of an event.

Involves distorted or unhelpful thought processes, internal dialogue and irrational beliefs which may result in a situation being perceived as an attack, prompting an angry response.



The amygdala plays a central role in producing and controlling emotions and in producing the physical effects associated with feeling emotions.

Anger and the body

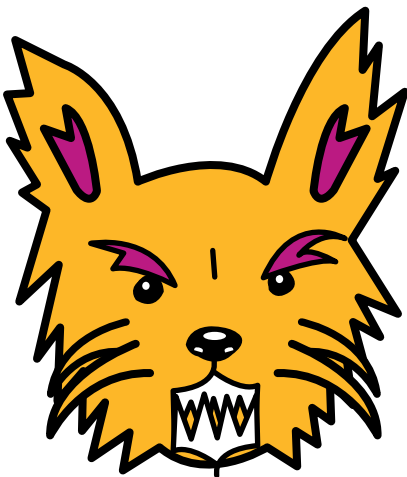
The amygdala plays a central role in producing and controlling emotions and in producing the physical effects associated with feeling emotions.

The amygdala is so efficient at warning us about threats, that it gets us reacting before the cortex (the part of the brain responsible for thought and judgment) can check on the reasonableness of our reaction. In other words, our brains are wired in such a way as to influence us to act before we can properly consider the consequences of our actions. This is not an excuse for behaving badly - instead it means that learning to manage anger properly is a skill that has to be learned, instead of something we are born knowing how to do instinctually.

Your amygdalae (there are two of them in the brain) are essential to your ability to feel certain emotions and to perceive them in other people. This includes fear and the many changes that it causes in the body. If you are being followed at night by a suspect-looking individual and your heart is pounding, chances are that your amygdalae are very active.

The awesome power of our emotional brain is normally kept in check by our rational brain. But when you are angry, excessively angry or in rage, your rational brain gets muted or sidelined.

The beast within our brain is unleashed...



As you become angry your body's muscles tense up.

Inside your brain, neurotransmitter chemicals known as catecholamines are released causing you to experience a burst of energy lasting up to several minutes. This burst of energy is behind the common angry desire to take immediate protective action.

At the same time your heart rate accelerates, your blood pressure rises, and your rate of breathing increases. Your face may flush as increased blood flow enters your limbs and extremities in preparation for physical action.

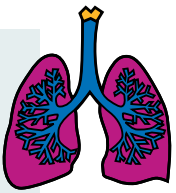


Your attention narrows and becomes locked onto the target of your anger. Soon you can pay attention to nothing else. In quick succession, additional brain neurotransmitters and hormones (such as adrenaline and cortisol) are released which trigger a lasting state of arousal. You're now ready to fight or flight.

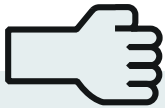


Conflict heightens senses - the body prepares to take action

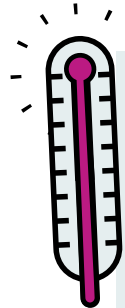
Heart speeds up, lungs take in more air - deeper, faster breaths providing oxygenated blood to burn sugars and create energy



Muscles store energy and tense ready for action



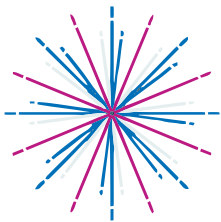
Stomach churns to digest food quickly, accessing the sugar to turn into energy



Blood is directed rapidly to the brain, muscles, heart and vital organs only. Raising the body temperature and transporting sugars

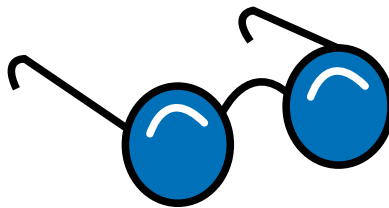
UNHELPFUL THINKING

BLOWING THINGS UP



Things are blown out of all proportion, making it seem so much worse than it is:
"I only scored one goal in football today so I may as well stop playing."

NEGATIVE GLASSES



Only let you see one side of the story - the negative:
"Going bowling with school was rubbish, I didn't win one game."

FORTUNE TELLING



Making predictions about what will happen in the future without enough evidence:
"If I read this out in the assembly, the whole school will laugh at me."

DUSTBIN LABELS



Attaching a label to yourself and think of everything you do in these terms:
"I am useless and everything I do is wrong."

MAKING IT PERSONAL



Blaming yourself for things that are not your fault:
"As soon as I got on the bus, it broke down."

Unhelpful thinking (cont.)

There are several negative self-talk strategies that we use at the onset of anger. These often exacerbate the anger cycle, as they can involve irrational and/or inappropriate thinking.

To understand this, we need to learn a little more about negative automatic thoughts. They have a number of things in common.

Automatic - they just happen. They pop up without you having to think of them

Distorted – when you stop and check you will find that they don't really fit all the facts

Continuous - you do not choose to have them, and they can't easily be turned off.

They also seem true and therefore are seen to make sense, so you accept them as true without stopping to challenge and question them.

Because our automatic thoughts seem very reasonable, we listen to them. We become very familiar with them because we hear them so often. The more we hear them, the more we believe and accept that they are true.

Challenging the unhelpful thinking

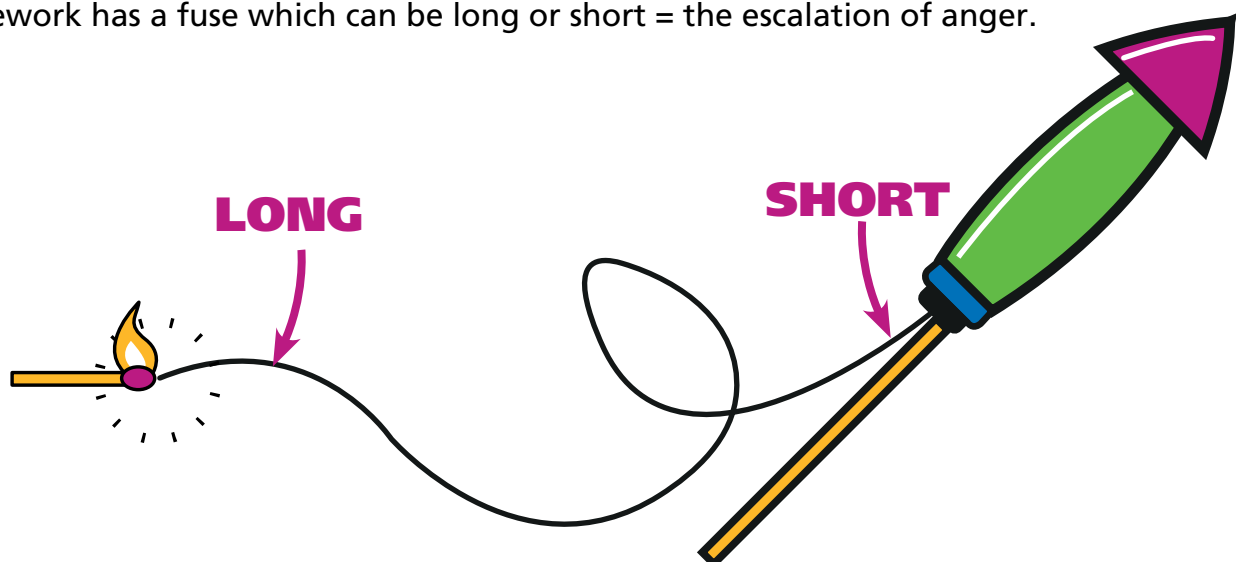
- What evidence is there to support this thought?
- What would my best friend/teacher/parent say if they heard me thinking in this way?
- What would I say to my best friend if he or she had this thought?
- Am I making any thinking errors?

The firework model

One model that can help us describe anger to children and young people is the firework model as outlined by Faupel et al.

Anger is often a difficult emotion for children and young people to discuss and express. It is therefore useful to have an analogy with which they can easily identify e.g. anger can be like a 'firework'.

A firework has a fuse which can be long or short = the escalation of anger.

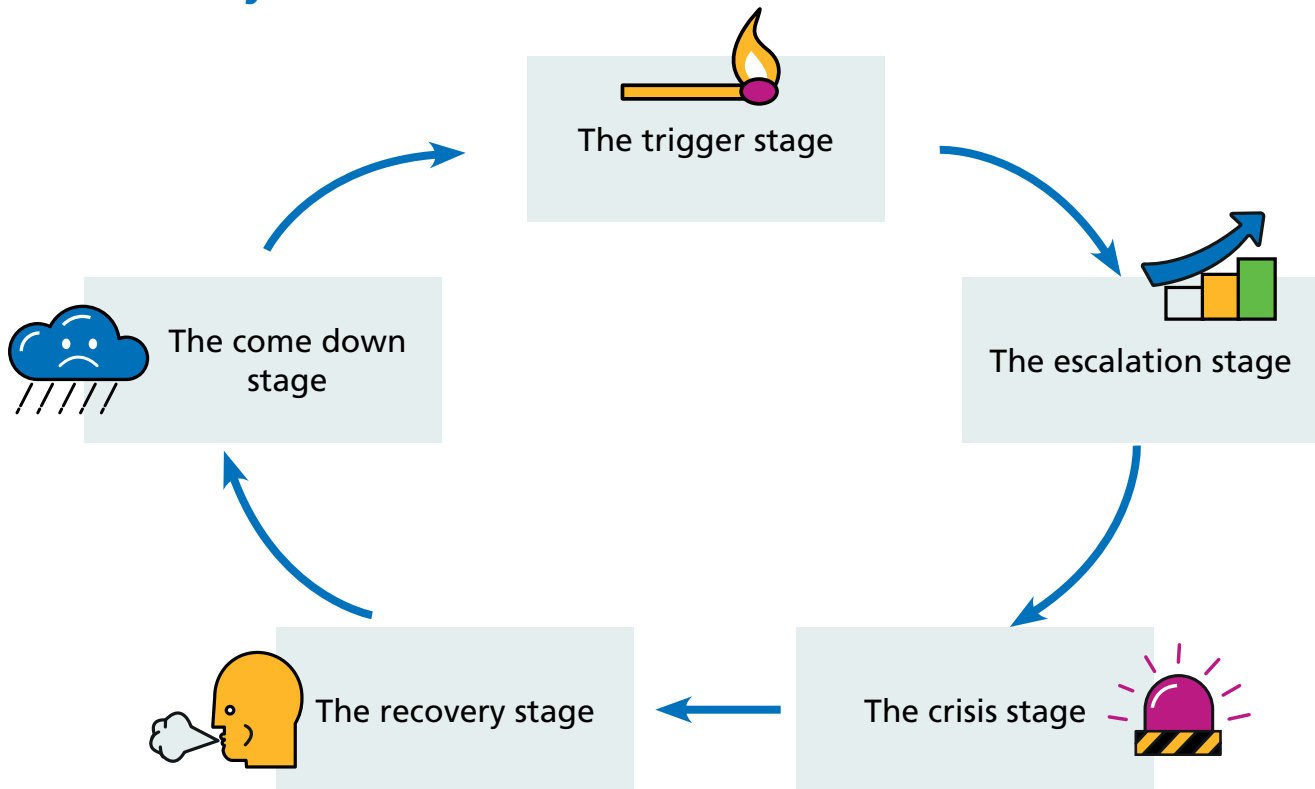


The explosion of the firework = the angry outburst.

- The **trigger** is the match that lights a person's fuse
- The **fuse** is the mind reacting - the thoughts and feelings which a person has, such as feeling fear, feeling threatened etc.
- The **explosive cylinder** is the body responding physiologically, which may lead to anger being expressed.

The same process can be used with the volcano analogy.

The assault cycle



Trigger stage - This is when the child or young person has thoughts and feelings that raise their anger, when an incident is seen as threatening. This can be a threat to self-esteem and self-image as well as physical.

It is best to help here as the person has not become physically fired up that they are incapable of listening or responding to others.

Once the body has prepared for 'fight or flight' or has reached exploding point, it is much harder to change the course of events.

Escalation stage - This is when the body is physically preparing itself for 'fight or flight'. Adrenaline is released, muscles tense, breathing becomes rapid and blood pressure rises. Although it is possible to change the child or young person's behaviour at this stage, it is difficult because they are less able to think clearly and rationally.

Crisis stage - At this stage the child or young person is almost unable to think clearly or to understand other people's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, trying to help at this stage is often difficult; instead it is better to keep them and those around them safe until the outburst is over.

Recovery stage - This is when the anger starts to go away. It takes time for the body to return to normal and another outburst can easily get set off again. At this stage the child or young person may also feel vulnerable, confused and potentially guilty. These emotions may feel threatening to the young person and trigger another outburst. Therefore, it can be helpful to allow them some space before trying to talk things over or giving out consequences.

Post-crisis/depression stage - This is where the body needs to recover and rest following its outburst. The child or young person's ability to listen and think clearly returns and they may feel guilty about what they have done, leading to unhappy feelings about themselves. They may need reassurance that they are still ok and loved, although also a consequence to learn their behaviour is not acceptable. It may also help at this stage to talk about other ways of managing anger.

We can underestimate how long the last two stages take. In adults it can take up to 90 minutes after a serious outburst for the body to return to normal levels. It is sensible to leave 45-60 minutes after an incident with a child before you are able to discuss the incident effectively.

The amount of time needed for a young person to unwind depends on the age of the child and the severity of the incident. Young children are much quicker to recover from strong feelings and are likely to be feeling fine; whilst the adult is left feeling drained and uncomfortable.

Things to consider

- Why did this happen today/now?
- Is this normal/typical behaviour for this age?
- Does this reflect a familial/cultural belief?
- What do I know about this child/young person?

Ask yourself:

- What does this child/young person feel, need or want?
- How is the environment affecting this child/young person?
- How can I best respond?

Assessment

Observation of the child or young person's behaviour is essential in order to attempt to identify 'early warning signs' or possible 'triggers'. As part of the initial assessment process, the "W5 technique" can be used:

- **What?** - does the child normally do when angry?
- **Where?** - does the child manifest angry outbursts?
- **When?** - do they usually manifest angry outbursts?
- **Who?** - with whom do they tend to become angry?
- **Why?** - do they become angry?

The first part of making any change is identifying in what context the anger occurs. This is where the use of mood and behavioural charts are useful.

Strategies



Trigger stage

Obviously dealing with the triggers will not always prevent angry outbursts, but this is the best time to intervene:

- Personalise – use the child or young person's name
- Reassure - use praise where possible
- Interrupt
- Distract
- Re-direct
- Use humour
- Ignore
- Slow down approach - talking slowly and deliberately, asking open questions and using reassuring gestures in an attempt to slow down a situation that is beginning to escalate.



Escalation stage

It is important that adults remain calm and speak in a confident, controlled manner to an agitated child. Reacting in a similar tone of voice may only exacerbate the situation.

Speak slowly and deliberately - At this point the child/young person's mind is likely racing, limiting their ability to think straight. They will likely make decisions quickly and speak rapidly.

Be assertive - "I" messages are less confrontational to the angry child or young person and enable you to remain in control. These have three elements:

- The behaviour is described (remember to separate the behaviour from the child)
- The effects of the behaviour for you and others present are outlined
- You describe how you feel.

E.g. "If you interrupt when I'm talking to the class the other pupils can't hear what I'm saying, and we all feel annoyed."

Active listening - Use active listening and clarificatory questions in order not to get side-tracked by the child or young person and to clarify what they are trying to say (their attempts to communicate may well be muddled and aggressive).

Paraphrase and summarise - Repeat statements in your own words e.g. "You're annoyed because John hit you?"

'Broken record' technique - Focus on the primary behaviour and avoid getting sidetracked e.g. you merely repeat your initial instruction/request and do not respond to irrelevant issues ('red herrings') the child may try to introduce.

Emotional labelling - This involves showing genuine concern to the agitated child/young person. E.g. acknowledging their anger "You seem angry..." or "I can see that you're angry...". Above all try not to take what is said personally!

Crisis stage



At this stage the emphasis is on protection. What we say and what we do as adults at this stage is of crucial importance. Beware of your body language:

- Is it confrontational?
- Are you standing close to the child/young person in a threatening manner?
- Are you 'eye-balling' the child/young person?
- Is your body language compatible with what you are saying?

At this stage the emphasis should be on trying to keep the anger controlled and exhibiting it in a socially acceptable manner. E.g. remind the child/young person that it is OK to be angry, but we should try not to hurt ourselves and others or to damage and destroy.

Protection

Of the child involved in the confrontation

Of others present

Of self and other staff

Within schools

When you encounter an angry outburst in school, you have to decide very quickly:

"Do I need help?" and "Can I contain the situation?"

If you require help, how will it be summoned and what is the purpose of such? It is therefore important that schools develop an emergency plan – planned so that the teacher or classroom assistant knows what to do in a crisis. For example; how to contact another member of staff for help, what to do with the angry pupil and the other pupils in the class.

For an older pupil, it may also be beneficial to let them leave the room voluntarily if they are able to recognise that they cannot control their anger. There are obvious supervisory and management issues here that should be outlined in the emergency plan.

It is preferable that staff plan responses to angry incidents before they occur, based on knowledge of pupils who have previously exhibited angry/aggressive outbursts. Dealing with a pupil's anger within the classroom situation can be very time intensive.

Conflict-escalating strategies	Conflict-reducing strategies
'You' statements	'I' statements
Focusing on the pupil	Focusing on the behaviour
Stating what you do not want	Stating what you do want
Accusing the pupil	Expressing concern
Communicating vaguely	Communicating clearly
Trying to change the pupil's view	Trying to understand
Asking leading questions	Asking open questions
Interrupting frequently	Listening actively
Acting indifferently	Showing interest/concern
Interpreting and judging	Clarifying
Trying to get the upper hand	Seeking a solution
Being critical	Being positive
Being defensive	Asking for opinions and advice
Focusing on the past/blaming	Focusing on the future/negotiating

General principles for helping children and young people to learn to manage anger

Be a model for children/young people

Show them how you use appropriate ways to tell others you are angry and sort out problems.

Discuss feelings

Helps children/young people learn that having angry feelings is normal and is something that can be talked about. For them to learn to manage anger effectively they need adult support and guidance. They need to know that anger is a normal human emotion and that there are acceptable ways of expressing it. They need to feel understood and supported rather than judged or blamed for feeling angry.

Children/young people can often explode in anger, yet not be able to tell you what their anger is all about. This may be because their abilities to reason and think logically are not yet well developed. Teach children/young people to recognise their feelings. For example; I feel.... when.... because.... or reflect to the e.g. it looks like you may be feeling angry...

Anticipate and prepare





Adults can help children/young people manage their anger by identifying situations that often trigger angry responses and by being prepared to offer support. This may include diversional techniques and planning with an individual child/young person in advance how he or she can handle a challenging situation.

Manipulate the surroundings, try to plan the surroundings so that certain things are less likely to happen, identify a special safe place to 'cool down' (the use of time out cards in school are effective).

Use positive discipline

Providing specific praise when children/young people manage their anger well supports their learning. Setting clear rules and predictable consequences for children/young people's behaviour helps them know what you expect.

Cool down steps to teach children

Recognise that you are angry 	Notice the body signals that mean you're angry, such as getting hot, heart racing, tense muscles etc. Give a number from 1 to 10 to show how angry you are (or use a thermometer).
Cool down your body 	Breathe slowly Take time-out in a quiet place Go for a walk, do something physical Relax.
Use coping self-talk 	"It's okay. I can handle this."
Try to solve the problem 	Talk to someone who is a good listener Plan what to do next time.

Taking charge of angry feelings means developing a 'bag of tricks' or coping skills that can be used for different situations.

Learning to recognise when they are getting angry helps children/young people understand how angry feelings work. This is the first step to managing them.

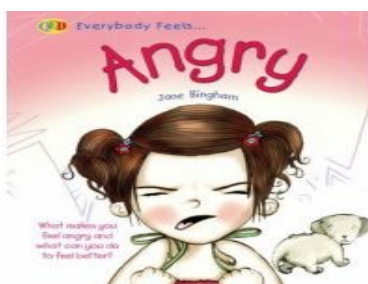
Children/young people can be taught to be aware of what triggers their anger as they may become angry if they simply don't know how else to express their frustrations. Anger causes a very physical response from most children and young people and they can be taught to recognise these physical reactions and learn how to relax.

Young children need assistance with learning, remembering and using the steps. Positive self-talk involves two basic strategies - telling yourself to stay calm and telling yourself you can cope.

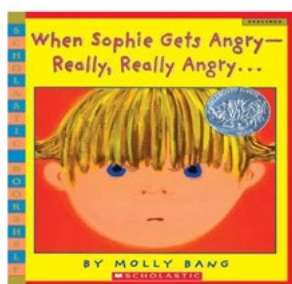
Older children can be encouraged to produce a phrase that they say repeatedly, sub-vocally, when they feel threatened e.g. "I'm in control and I'm not going to lose it".

A child who has lots of practice in thinking of different ways to solve a problem is much more likely to solve a conflict in a positive way.

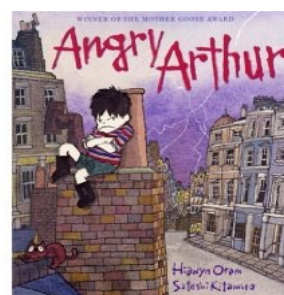
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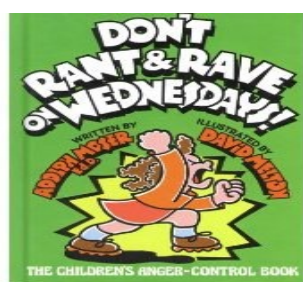
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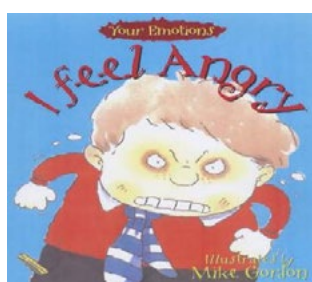
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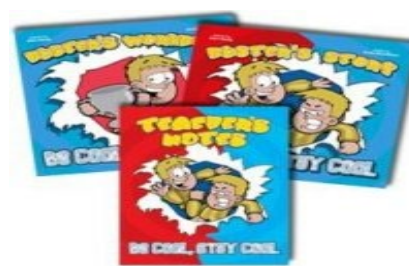
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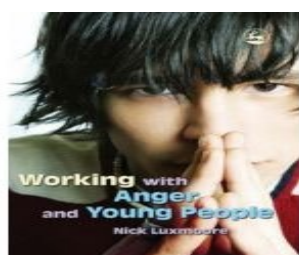
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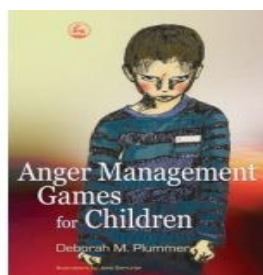
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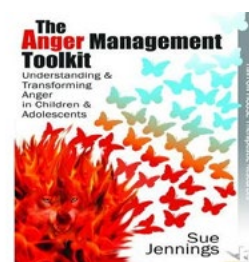
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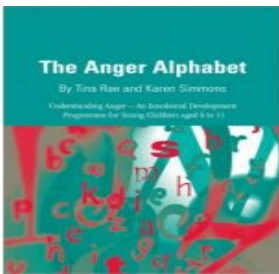
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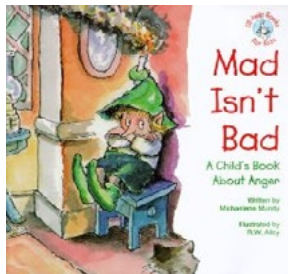
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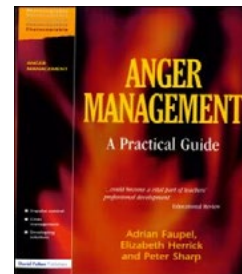
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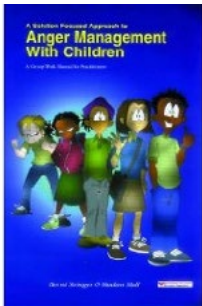
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Sage Publications Ltd (2003)



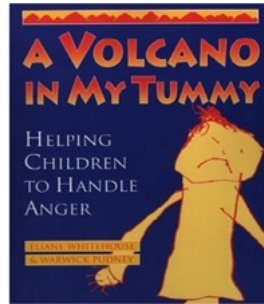
Mad Isn't Bad: A Child's Book about Anger
by Emily Menendez-Aponte and Mundy Michaelene
Caring Place (1999)



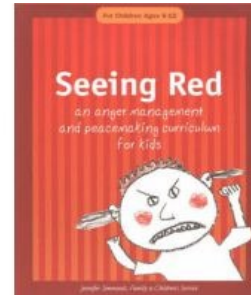
Anger Management: A Practical Guide
by Adrian Faupel, David Fulton (1998)



A Solution Focused Approach to Anger Management With Children
by Berni Stringer and Madan Mall
Questions Publishing Co Ltd (1999)

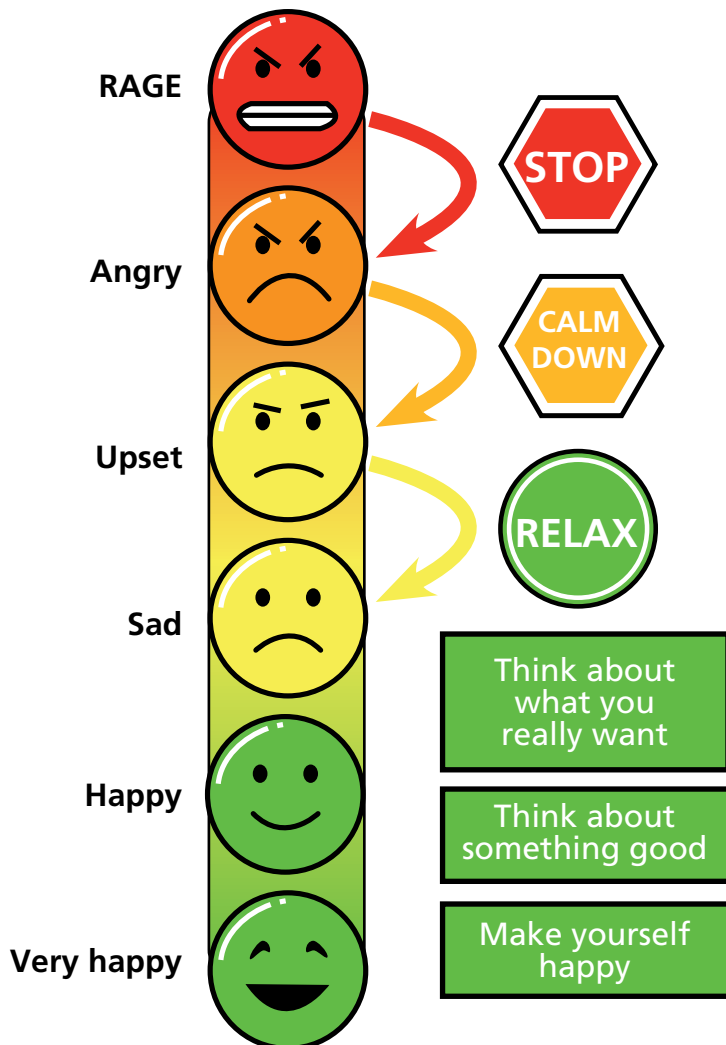


A Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger
by Elaine Whitehouse
New Society (1997)



Seeing Red: An Anger Management and Peacemaking Curriculum for Kids
by Jennifer Simmonds
New Society (2003)

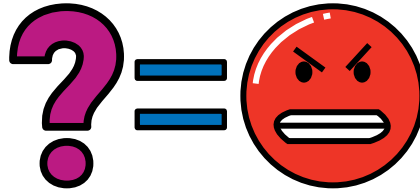
Example of a feelings thermometer



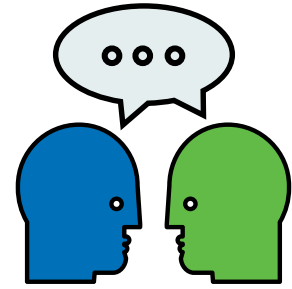
Example of coping cards – anger management strategies for children



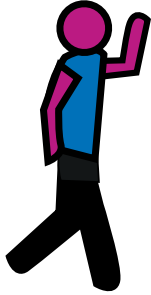
Remember it is ok to feel angry,
it is not ok to hurt myself,
someone or something else



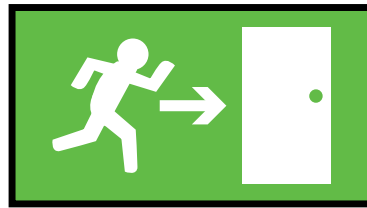
Find out what makes me angry



Tell someone how I am feeling



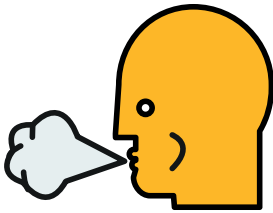
Go for a walk



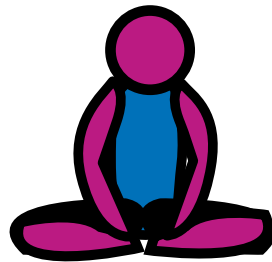
Just walk away



Count to 10



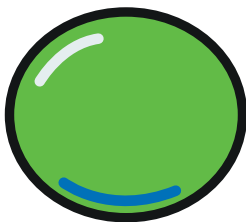
Breathe in through my nose and
out slowly through my mouth



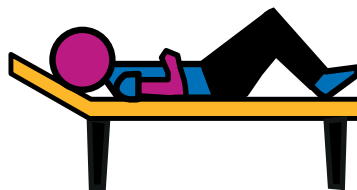
Practice my relaxation exercises



Notice the changes in my body



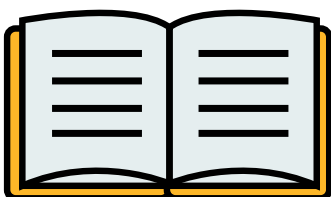
Squeeze a soft ball



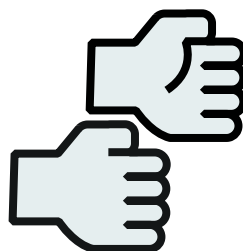
Relax



Play a sport



Write about my feelings



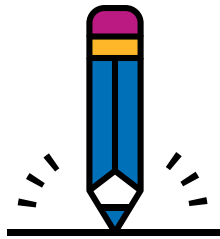
Ask someone for a hug



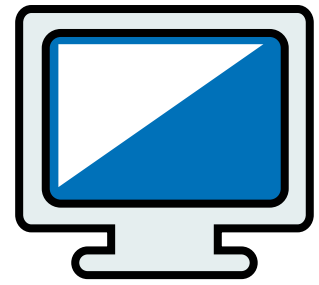
Stop and ask myself
if I am really angry



Don't hang around with other angry people



Draw a picture of my feelings



Do something I enjoy



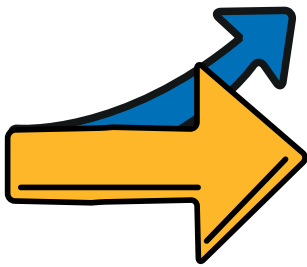
Stop and think



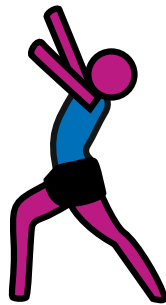
Go somewhere where I can have a scream



Tell my anger to "GO AWAY"



Think about something else



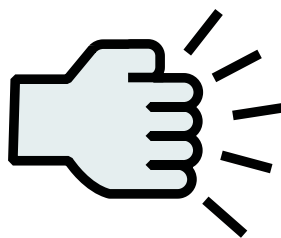
Do an angry dance



Write the person I am anger with a letter and then put it in the bin



Scribble on paper and then tear it up



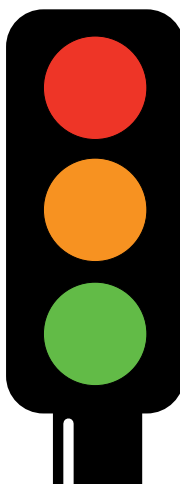
Hit a soft object like a pillow



Go for a run



Listen to music



RED

Before you do anything, think of the red traffic light and stop.

AMBER

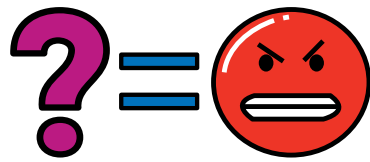
Plan and think about what you want to do or say

GREEN

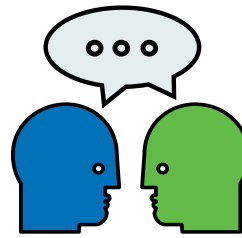
Go with your plan.



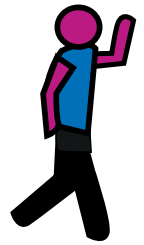
Remember it is ok to feel angry, it is not ok to hurt myself, someone or something else



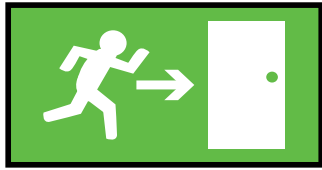
Find out what makes me angry



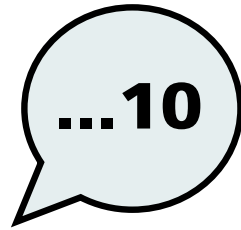
Tell someone how I am feeling



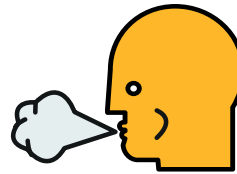
Go for a walk



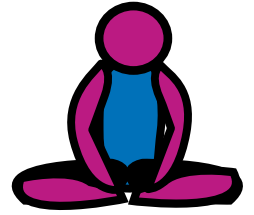
Just walk away



Count to 10



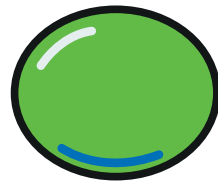
Breathe in through my nose and out slowly through my mouth



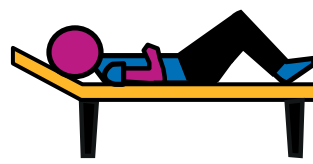
Practice my relaxation exercises



Notice the changes in my body



Squeeze a soft ball



Relax

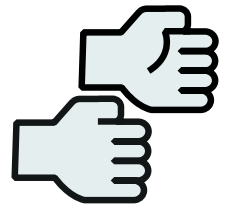


Play a sport



Write about my feelings

WAYS TO DEAL WITH MY ANGER



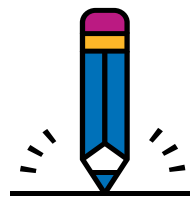
Ask someone for a hug



Stop and ask myself if I am really angry



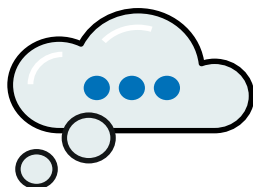
Listen to music



Draw a picture of my feelings



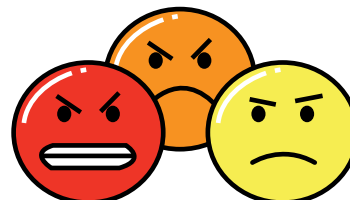
Tell my anger to "GO AWAY"



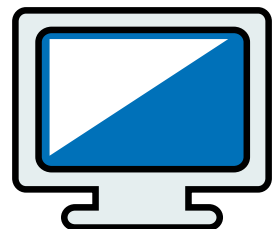
Stop and think



Go somewhere where I can have a scream



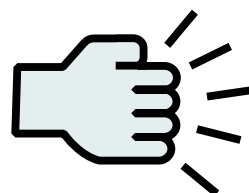
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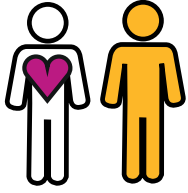
Write the person I am angry with a letter and then put it in the bin

Example of coping strategies for young people



Think of someone you admire

This could be a sports person, actor, musician, or relative. Think about how they control anger. Find out about people you do not know from books or interviews. Try to put their ideas into practice. Imagine them stood next to you when you are feeling angry. What would they advise you?



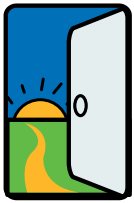
Think of someone beside you

When feeling angry, it can help to imagine there is someone beside you for support. We can all use this image to help us through difficult situations. All of us have times when we need reassurance. How could your 'grown-up' self reassure your more vulnerable side?



Think of a theme tune

If someone is winding you up and you cannot get away, imagine a tune playing in your mind. This can provide a welcome distraction. What would the theme tune to your life be? It may be a song that describes you well, makes you laugh, or inspires you.



Think of a place

We all have times that make us feel happy when we remember them. When you are getting angry, think of a good memory and imagine that you are there. Holidays are good times to use, as we are often calmer. Imagine yourself on your favourite beach, listening to the waves.



Visualise anger

You can visualise anger in many ways; as a monster, pixie, dragon or alien. If you visualise anger as a dragon, imagine yourself as a knight who can defeat anger with your shield and sword. When you feel yourself starting to get angry, imagine putting on a full suit of armour to protect yourself. As a knight, nothing can hurt you and you remain in control.

- Recognise the angry feelings
- Listen to music
- Talk to someone - this can help put things in perspective
- Go for a walk
- Have a long hot bath
- Take slow deep breaths when you feel anger coming on
- Draw, paint or write in your diary what you are feeling
- Run, cycle, play football or other energetic sport
- Listen to a relaxation tape
- Get into a good book or computer game
- Have a long hot bath

