

Understanding and Managing Anger for young teens



Designed and produced by the Involvement, Recovery and Wellness Centre

Please contact 01625 505647 for further information

Helping people to be **the best they can be**



References

Page 1: match picture www.pixabay.com

Page 6: content www.youngminds.org.uk/

Page 7: lion picture www.pixabay.com

Page 8: anger iceberg www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk

Page 9: content and picture www.youngminds.org.uk/

Page 11: grizzly bear photo www.pixabay.com; content www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Page 13: alarming adrenaline www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Page 14: life factors content www.mind.org.uk

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Page 16: vicious cogs blank diagram www.getselfhelp.co.uk Carol Vivyan

Page 17: hot thoughts www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/cheshirevale/leaflets/selfhelp/Controlling%20Anger.pdf; volcano picture www.pixabay.com

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Page 19: vicious cogs anger diagram www.getselfhelp.co.uk Carol Vivyan

Page 21: writing picture www.pixabay.com

Page 22: managing anger content Mental Health Foundation Cool Down booklet and www.mind.org.uk

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Page 29: rainbow circle picture www.pixabay.com

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Page 37 and 38: circle of concern and control adapted from Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People book

Page 39: problem solving content adapted from Expert Patients Programme

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Page 41: assertiveness content www.cci.health.wa.gov.au, picture <https://www.primaryteaching.co.uk/products/p22/keep-trying-you-can-do-it-stamper-25mm>

Page 42: www.getselfhelp.co.uk assertiveness content

Welcome

We're glad you're here

This booklet has been created for 12-15 year olds to use if you feel you would like to manage anger better. It can be used alone or alongside other support you might be receiving.

⇒ In part 1 we look at anger, how it works in the body and mind and things that keep it going. We look at anger being a normal emotion but also at when it hurts us more than it helps us.

⇒ In part 2 we look at ways we can learn to soothe anger, if that's what we choose to do, both quickly in the moment and over the long term. This section has techniques you can try yourself and decide what helps you the most.

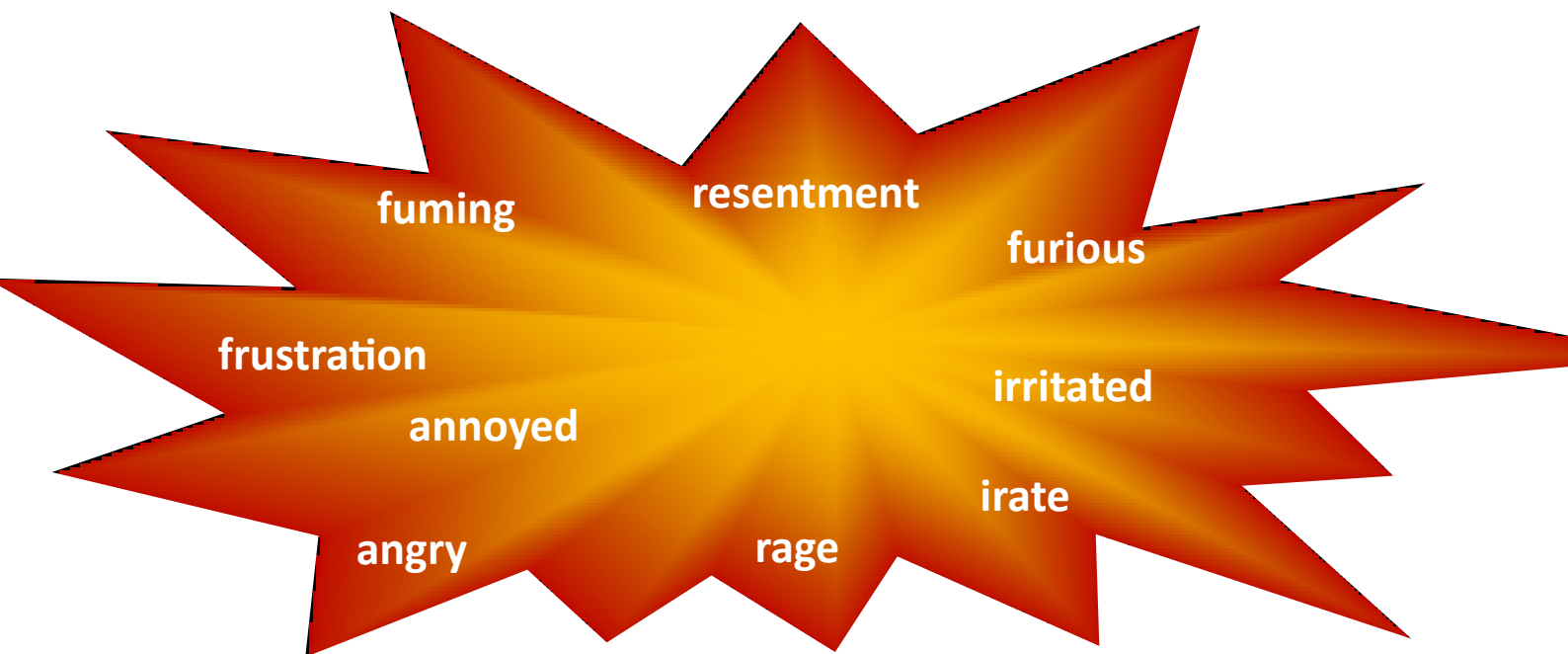
You deserve to feel better and we hope that you find this booklet helpful.

If you have any feedback, please get in touch with us on 01625 505 647 or cwp.involve-and-recover@nhs.net.

Part 1

Anger is an emotion

Anger is a normal and healthy emotion, just like the other emotions like happiness, sadness and fear for example. Sometimes we know what's made us angry and other times we don't. That's okay. It could be something that's happening at the moment, or it could be something that's happened in the past that's making us angry. It is perfectly normal to feel angry for teenagers and for adults. Anger can feel like lots of different things:



Can you think of any more words to describe how you feel when you are angry?

Anger is an emotion

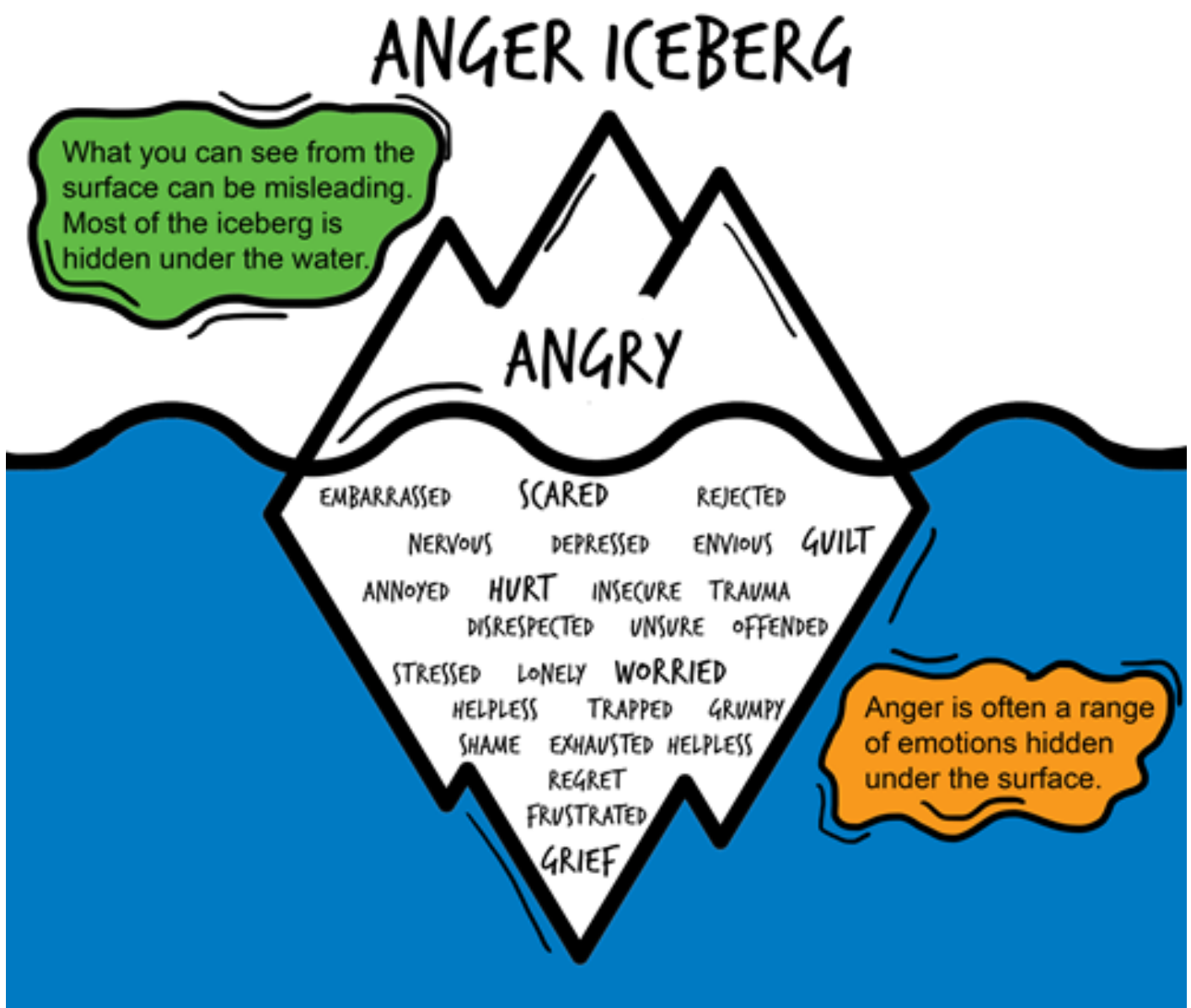


Sometimes you can feel angry and feel other things at the same time too. This can feel confusing, but it's okay and normal too. For example, you might feel angry and sad that your pet has died or you might feel angry and lonely when a friend has fallen out with you. Maybe if you didn't get a good grade on a test you feel angry but also relieved that the wait is over or you confused about your sexuality and feel angry and alone.

Emotions are all okay and all part of being human.

The anger iceberg

Sometimes anger can be just anger, or there could be other feelings floating beneath the surface. We might have been brought up to not show emotions such as being embarrassed for example, so we could be in the habit of showing anger instead when we are embarrassed.



Anger can be helpful when it motivates us to make a change or when it helps us to recognise that our boundaries are being crossed and we are not happy with something. This can help us to be aware of ourselves and what is okay for us.

When is anger a problem?

Anger becomes a problem when it hurts us or others around us. This means things like being aggressive towards other people or towards yourself.



Outward aggression can include being mean and hurtful to others through words or actions. Others around you might be scared of you or feel intimidated. It can give a sense of relief from anger, but in the long run it might lose us relationships that are more important than what we were angry about. It might hurt others.

Inward aggression is when we are angry and turn it in on ourselves, beating ourselves up by saying mean things to ourselves. It can feel like thinking you don't deserve nice things, that you're useless or not letting yourself enjoy life. This lowers our self esteem and enjoyment of life. No one deserves to feel that way and this isn't healthy for us.

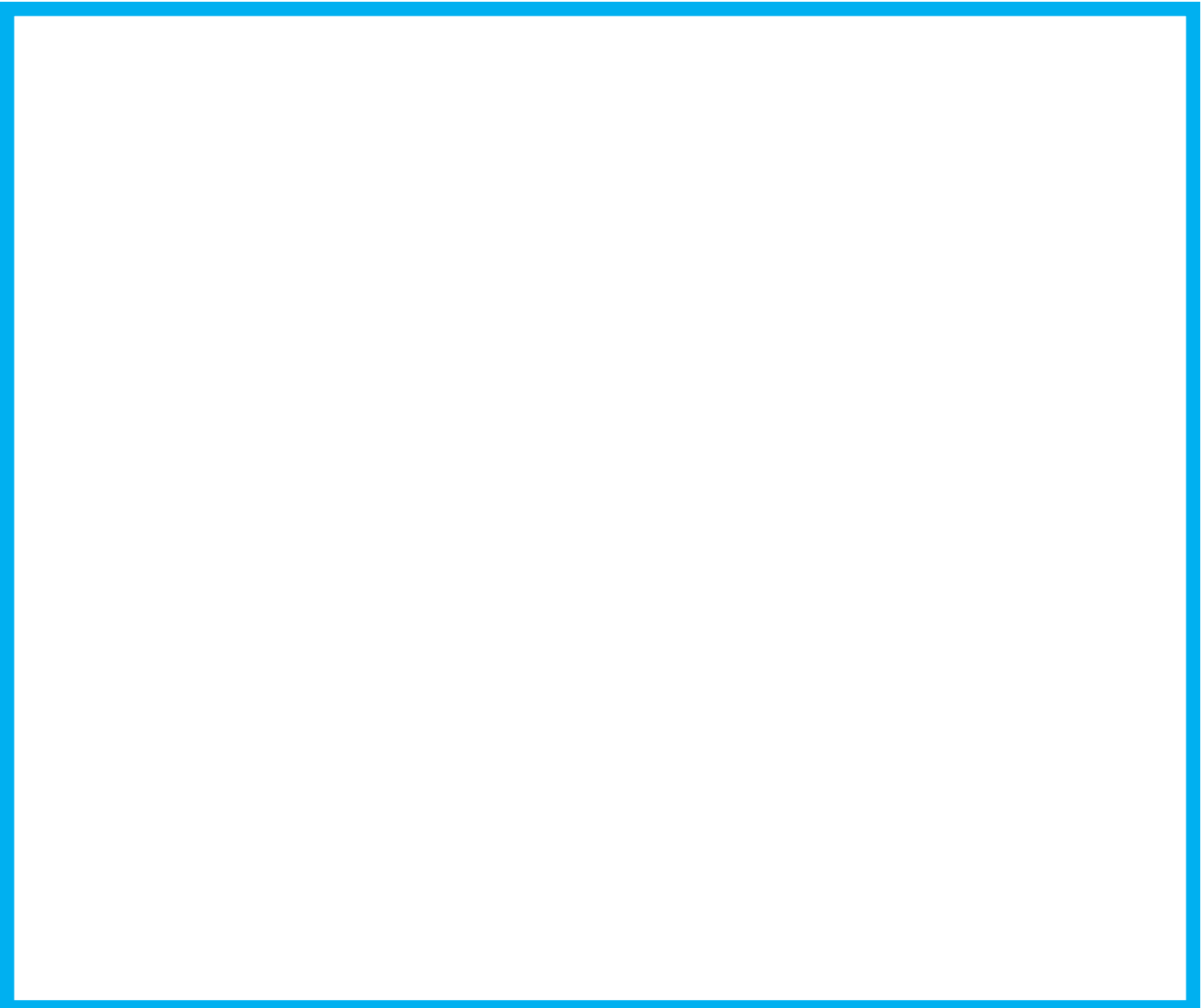
Being **passive aggressive** is when we are angry but don't show this directly, but instead slam a door or ignore someone for example. This shows we are angry, but doesn't solve the problem and doesn't always mean the other person will approach you to solve the problem.

When is anger a problem?

Can you think of any times when anger has caused a problem for you or for others, or where it has not been helpful for you?

If you can, don't beat yourself up for it. You are here to learn better ways of coping. If you can't, you can come back to this page later.

How did you feel at the time? How did you feel when you weren't angry anymore?



Fight or flight

You might have heard of the “fight or flight” response. This is something that can be triggered by emotions like anger or anxiety. This is a normal response to situations that feel threatening to us and are wired into our brains from a long time ago.



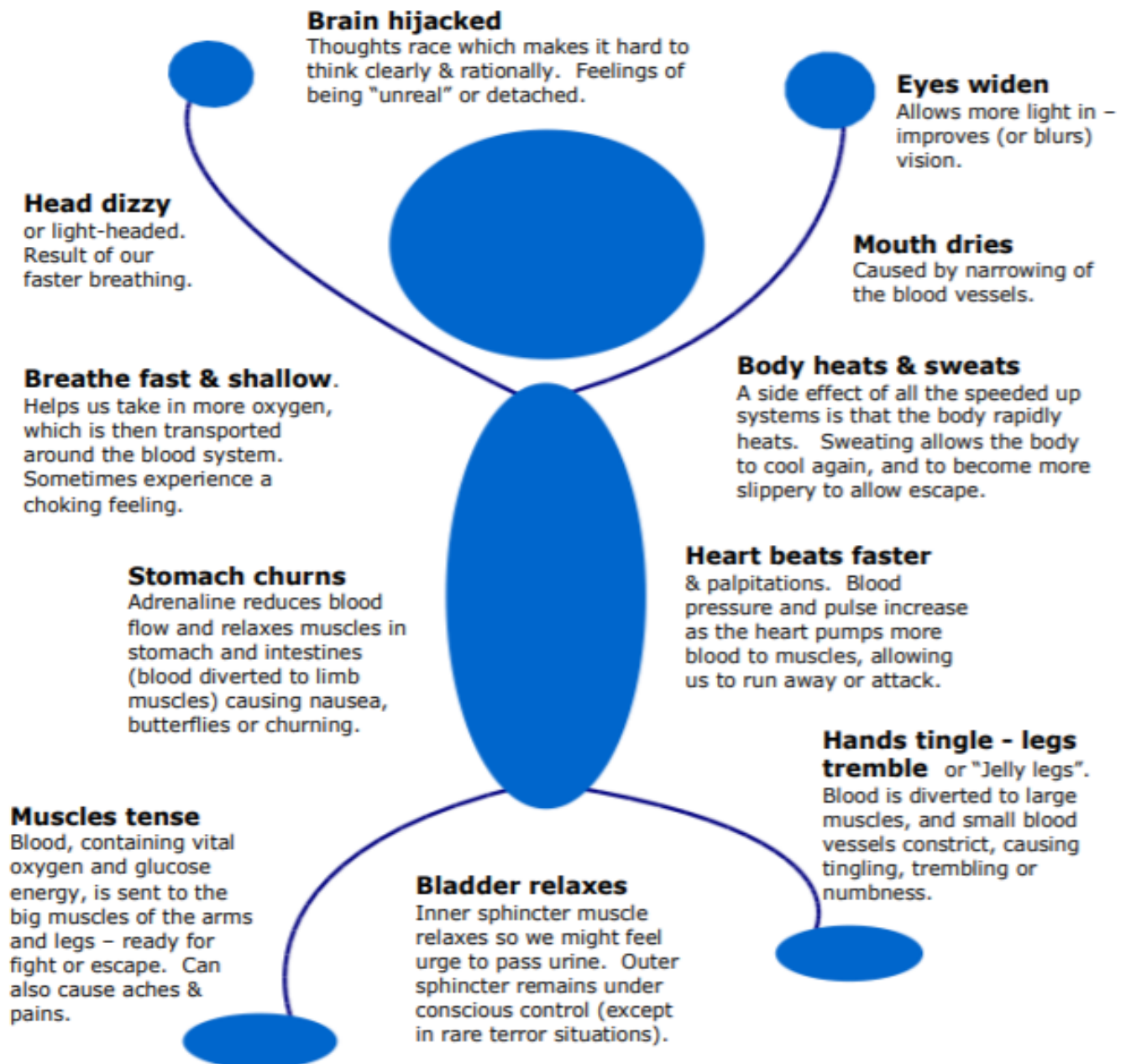
A long time ago, when we were out hunting for animals and suddenly found ourselves under attack, we would need to either fight the predator or run away (flight). Survival of the fittest meant that those with the best “fight or flight” responses survived and this has been passed down to us. The problem is however, now that when we are faced with a threat (a test, presentation, someone being rude to us) sometimes fighting or running away isn’t the best option anymore. Yet our body still produces these automatic responses to “help” us.

Fight or flight

ALARMING ADRENALINE !

The body's alarm system

When the brain perceives a threat, it activates the body's "fight or flight" alarm system, and adrenaline is released into the blood from the adrenal glands. We experience uncomfortable feelings because the adrenaline makes the body systems speed up, diverting blood towards the big muscles, preparing us to attack (anger) or escape (anxiety).



After the adrenaline has died down, we can feel exhausted, shaky and weak.

Fight or flight

Can you recognise any of the “fight or flight” symptoms in yourself when you are angry or anxious? Are there any that aren’t on the diagram that you experience? Remember that everyone experiences this individually, so no two responses will be exactly the same.

Make notes, draw or make a diagram of what you can recognise about your own “fight or flight” response below.

Why do I get angry?

Lots of things contribute to why we might get angry. Everyone gets angry, teenagers and adults, and everyone has different reasons for why they might feel angry. When looking at why we get angry, it can be helpful to look at how things can add up in life to get to where we are right now. The way you respond to situations can be affected by:

- **your childhood and upbringing**

- **past experiences, including traumatic experiences**

- **current circumstances**

Can you think of any situations in your life that might be adding to your anger? Write them in the boxes above.

Whether your anger is about something that happened in the past or something that's going on right now, thinking about how and why we interpret and react to situations can help us learn how to cope with our emotions better. It can also help us find ways to handle our anger.

What keeps anger going?

There are also many different things that can keep anger going. A helpful way of explaining this can be thinking of these things as lots of little cogs with anger being the big cog in the middle.



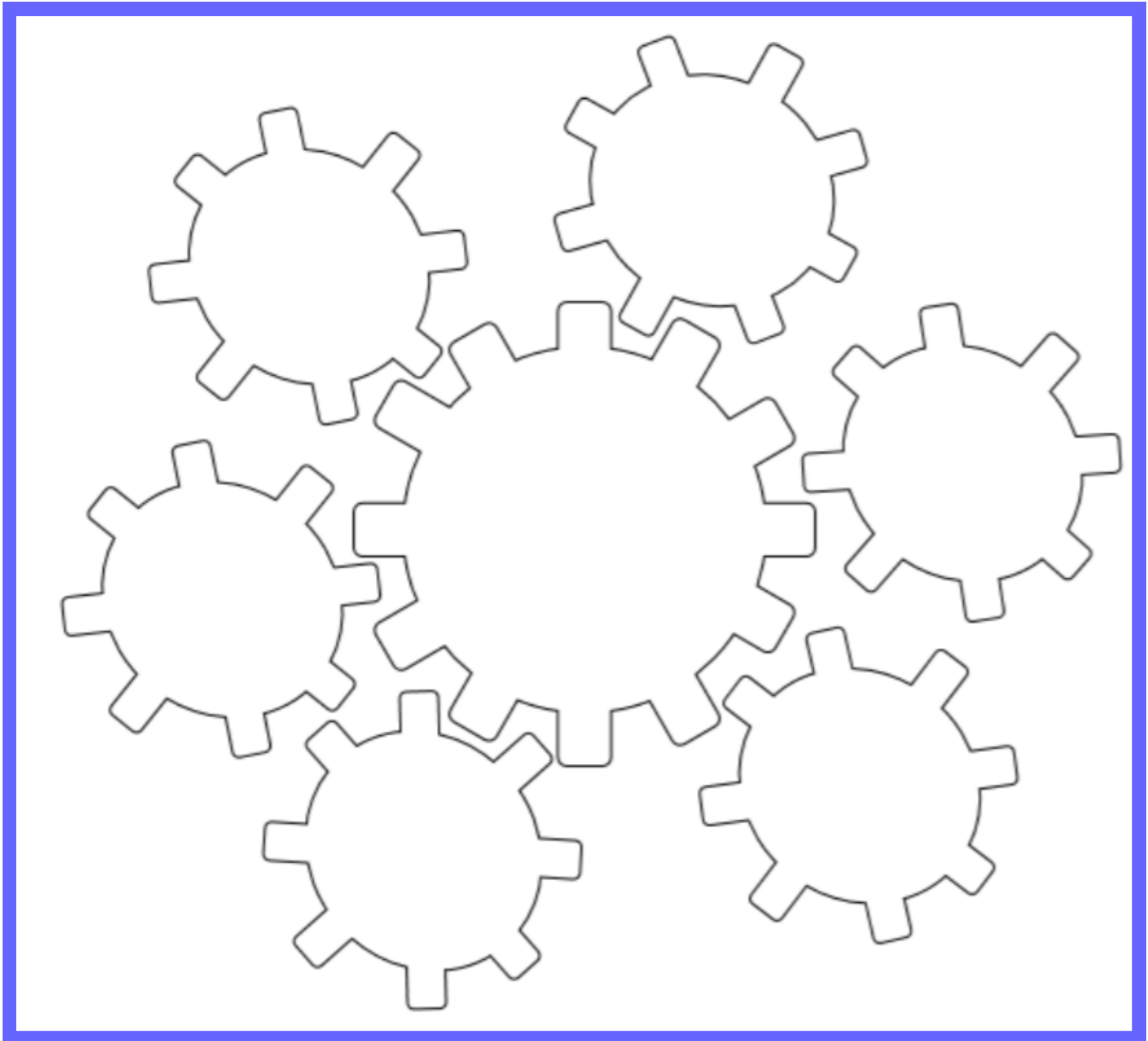
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All of the little cogs keep each other turning and they all keep the big cog turning. But if we slow down just one of the little cogs, the others might become easier to slow down and the bigger anger cog can slow down too. It can be hard to know where to start, but just being aware of this at first is a good start and then we can try and slow each cog and see what works.

What keeps anger going?

Here is a blank diagram of the cogs that you can fill in yourself. This can be hard as we have only just started thinking about anger, so feel free to start and come back to this once you learn more about yourself.



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Once you have a couple of cogs filled in, can you think of which you would like to slow down to slow the big cog down? Where is good to start for you?

Hot thoughts

We've had a look already at what happens in our body when we are angry by looking at the physical feelings we get—the fight or flight response when we are trying to fight or run from a bear in our minds. This is like a big warning sign in our heads lighting up urging us to do something quickly, now!



At the same time as all of this is going on, we might also have thoughts that are adding to our anger too and urging us to act on our anger. These are called “hot thoughts”. A hot thought (it might be something true or something that seems true because of how angry we are) increases our anger. Sometimes we might have the same hot thoughts again and again.

Hot thoughts

Some examples of hot thoughts are:

“He is so stupid”

“She’s making me look like an idiot”

“You’re selfish”

“I’ll show you”

“I hate this place”

“You never listen”

Can you think of any hot thoughts you have?

Anger cogs part 2

Thinking back to the diagram of all the little cogs feeding into the big anger cog, we have several cogs, can you see how they all feed into each other?



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We might experience the initial thing that made us angry or the “trigger” and have a hot thought, which kicks off our emotions and physical sensations or “fight or flight” mode... We then act angry (towards ourselves or others) and this can feed our anger even more and give us “evidence” that our hot thoughts are true. This can all happen really quickly!

Part 2

How do I deal with anger?

The good news is, there is lots we can do to slow the cogs of anger down. This next part of the workbook will give you some ideas. Some techniques focus on the feelings in your body, others on your thoughts, and others on your behaviour.

When you use this booklet, try to give each technique a good go, and pick out the ones that work best for you. Each person is unique and what works best for each person is unique. Some techniques also take time to work, so try each one a few times if you can.

This part of the workbook will be split into two sections. The first section will cover quick ways to soothe anger in the moment and the second section will focus on more long term ways of looking at anger.



Quick ways to soothe anger

These quick ways to soothe anger can buy you a bit of time when you feel like exploding. They can soothe you quickly in the moment and give you a clearer head to deal with a problem if there is one or to not make the situation worse.

Positive Self talk

These are phrases or mantras that you can tell yourself to keep yourself going, or you could write them on a piece of paper to keep in your pocket. Phrases that some people have found useful are “it’s okay, this is just my fight or flight response” and “this too shall pass” and “give it 10 minutes and come back to it with a clear head”.

Step in to a dark room and lie down in a starfish

This might not be possible everywhere! If you are thinking about something that’s making you angry, try this. Doing the opposite of how we are feeling (anger usually directs us to fight or run away, here we are lying down) can “trick” our brain into thinking we are calmer than we are. Your anger is still completely valid and real, but this is just a technique that can calm it down a little so you can find the best way forward.

Writing

Write down what’s worrying you or making you angry and tear it up into tiny pieces. Another take on this is to keep a private, safe diary where you can write anything that comes into your mind.

Quick ways to soothe anger

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention to what's going on in your body and your thoughts and around you like a neutral observer, trying not to judge yourself for anything you might be feeling. You can imagine yourself as an explorer going around your body, or as if you are an alien discovering a new planet. It is observing things exactly as they are without judging yourself. This can be really difficult at first, so if you struggle with this, try our mindfulness workbook. Also, not all mindfulness techniques are the same, so if you don't have success with one, another might work better for you. Remember to use what works for you.

Have a good Cry

Another way of releasing your emotions—if you need to cry, why not have a cry?

Use a distraction technique

Lots of things can work as a distraction technique, for example colouring in, going for a walk, focusing on a hobby or watching a television programme. This gives time for the angry feelings to subside a little and puts you in a better space to address the issue if you need to.

Play a computer game

Either as a distraction or to release anger.

Quick ways to soothe anger

Visualise a peaceful scene

This can be a quick way of distracting yourself from your hot thoughts and focusing on something peaceful. Try to imagine a peaceful or neutral scene in as much detail as possible. This is called “visualisation” and you can find lots of visualisation meditations online and on apps.



Punch a pillow/cushion

Let your anger out in a safer way. You could also scream into a pillow.

Exercise

You could choose something calming like yoga or something high energy to release some energy.

Quick ways to soothe anger

STOPP

This acronym can be useful for when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Step back and don't act immediately

Take a breath

Observe

Pull back : put in some perspective, try to see the whole situation

Practise what works: are there techniques that work for you when you are angry?

Mindfulness 5 4 3 2 1 grounding technique

Sometimes being angry can make us feel a bit spaced out and like we are not in our own bodies, or it can take us away from the reality of where we really are. Grounding techniques can be helpful to ground us back in the moment. An example is below, but again look online and on apps for some more.

Think of:

5 things you can see

4 things you can hear

3 things you can feel

2 things you can smell

1 deep breath

Breathing to calm anger

Changing how you are breathing is another quick way to calm anger. In part 1 we saw how being angry can activate our fight or flight system. Quite often, our breathing is affected as part of this and it can become shallow and quick, like panting. How are you breathing right now?

When we slow our breathing and breathe deeply, this sends a signal back to the body that the threat is passing and that we are now calmer, which soothes how we feel.



The most important technique to learn here is how to breathe deeply into our diaphragm. The best way to do this is lying down on our backs, placing one hand on our chest and one hand just below the ribcage. Take your time to breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, imagining the air going down right to the bottom of your lungs. Your hand resting on your ribcage should rise as your lungs inflate fully. Then breathe out through pursed lips, feeling the slight tension and rush of air as you blow it out.

Breathing to calm anger

On the next few pages there will be another few breathing techniques you can try.



7/11 breathing

This breathing technique involves breathing in for a count of 7 and breathing out for a count of 11. This isn't 7 and 11 whole seconds—just counts in your head.

The aim of this technique is to lengthen your breath out compared to your breath in. This sends a signal to your body that the threat is passing. It does not have to be for 7 in and 11 out—it can be for 2 in and 3 out for example.

Breathing to calm anger

Colour breathing

Colour breathing involves picturing the colour of what you want to let go of in your life and breathing it out. It can be powerful when you close your eyes and image breathing out difficulties.

For example, you could breathe in the colour **blue** for peace and breathe out the colour **red** to breathe out anger. Or you could picture yourself breathing in **gold** and the energy and calm filling your body as you breathe in.



Blue is the colour of relaxation and peace.

Turquoise is the colour of calm and cleansing.

Green is colour of healing.

Magenta is the colour of release.

Orange is the colour of fun, happiness and joy.

Pink is the colour of nurturing and kindness.

Some more examples of colours for colour breathing:

Pick a colour which means something to you and imagine that colour leaving every space in your body from head to toe as you breathe out. The pursed lip breathing described before can be used here too, to really feel the colour drain from you.

Breathing to calm anger

What colours would you try colour breathing with? Are there any colours that mean anything special to you? When you imagine anger, what colour would it be for you? Write your ideas down below.



Managing anger long term

Now that you've had a chance to try some of the quick soothing techniques for anger, we can have a think about how anger can be managed long term.

When we say managed, the goal isn't to never be angry again—that would be impossible. It is to deal with anger which is harmful for you or others in a healthier way. Remember, your anger might be for completely genuine and real reasons, as that can often be the case, but staying angry and doing things to make it worse can make things worse for you in the long run.

Your anger and the reasons for it can be very real and at the same time there are ways to manage it to make the result better for you and others in the end. You get to choose how you respond.

Part of this is understanding what's causing your anger. A good way of starting to become more aware of your own patterns of being angry is by keeping an anger diary. You don't have to show this to anyone—use something private and safe if you can, where you can be honest with yourself, either on a piece of paper, on a phone or laptop. The aim here is to discover more about yourself and what sets off your anger. An example will be given in this section.

Managing anger long term

Date and time	Situation or trigger	Anger from 0 to 100	What I did in response	What happened afterwards	Were there any warning signs?
3pm 10th July	Ignored in group chat	75	Left the chat, threw my phone at the wall	Felt annoyed because I like my phone Felt lonely	Could feel my heart pounding

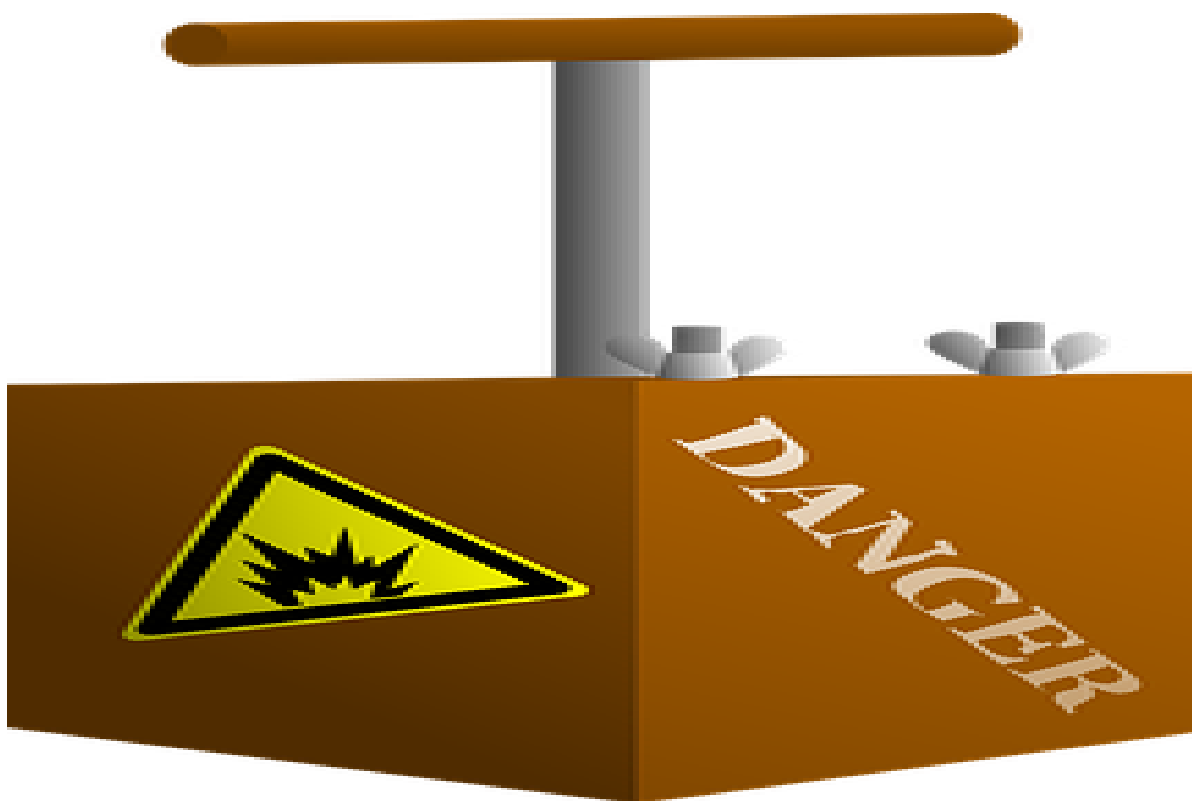
Managing anger long term

Were there any warning signs?			
What happened afterwards			
What I did in response			
Anger from 0 to 100			
Situation or trigger			
Date and time			

Managing anger long term

Recognise Triggers

In an anger diary, you can look at your triggers. What types of situations and thoughts set off anger for you? Is it one big thing or lots of little things? Is it a certain thought or feeling? Are there any patterns? Noticing triggers can help you be more prepared if you know you have one coming up. Make a note here.



Managing anger long term

Look out for Warning Signs

Are there any signs that you are about to get really angry? Signs that you or someone else might notice?



As you work on your anger, it might get easier to spot these signs and step in quickly to prevent anger from building and exploding. Make a note if you see any early warning signs.

Managing anger long term

When you've completed your diary for a week or so, you might see that sometimes there can be a pattern of reacting in a way that we regret in the future or that might cause us other difficult feelings in the future. In the anger diary example, this was throwing the phone and ignoring friends. This could also be things like comfort eating or starving, self harming, getting into dangerous situations and lots of other things that might feel a bit nice at first but in the long run don't help.



That's okay, because part of completing this workbook is discovering more about parts of yourself that are difficult to cope with—many people can spend a lifetime trying to not look at those parts of themselves because it's so hard! It is a courageous thing to do.

Managing anger long term

What you could start doing is when you have an urge to do something that won't help you in the long run, see if you can use any of the other suggestions in the workbook.

This is really hard because usually we are using things that don't help us because we haven't been taught another way of dealing with things or because we know they'll work really quickly— "I'll feel better if I have a go at her straight away" or "I know starving myself works when I feel really bad and nothing else helps." We might not have had the chance or safety to learn other things.

Try some of these other things, they might not be as immediately effective as the things you know already too, but they could bring you down to a level where you feel you have some control in choosing what to do next and importantly they don't cause you or others harm in the long run. With practice, they could get really quite effective:

- deep breathing
- problem solving
- writing it down

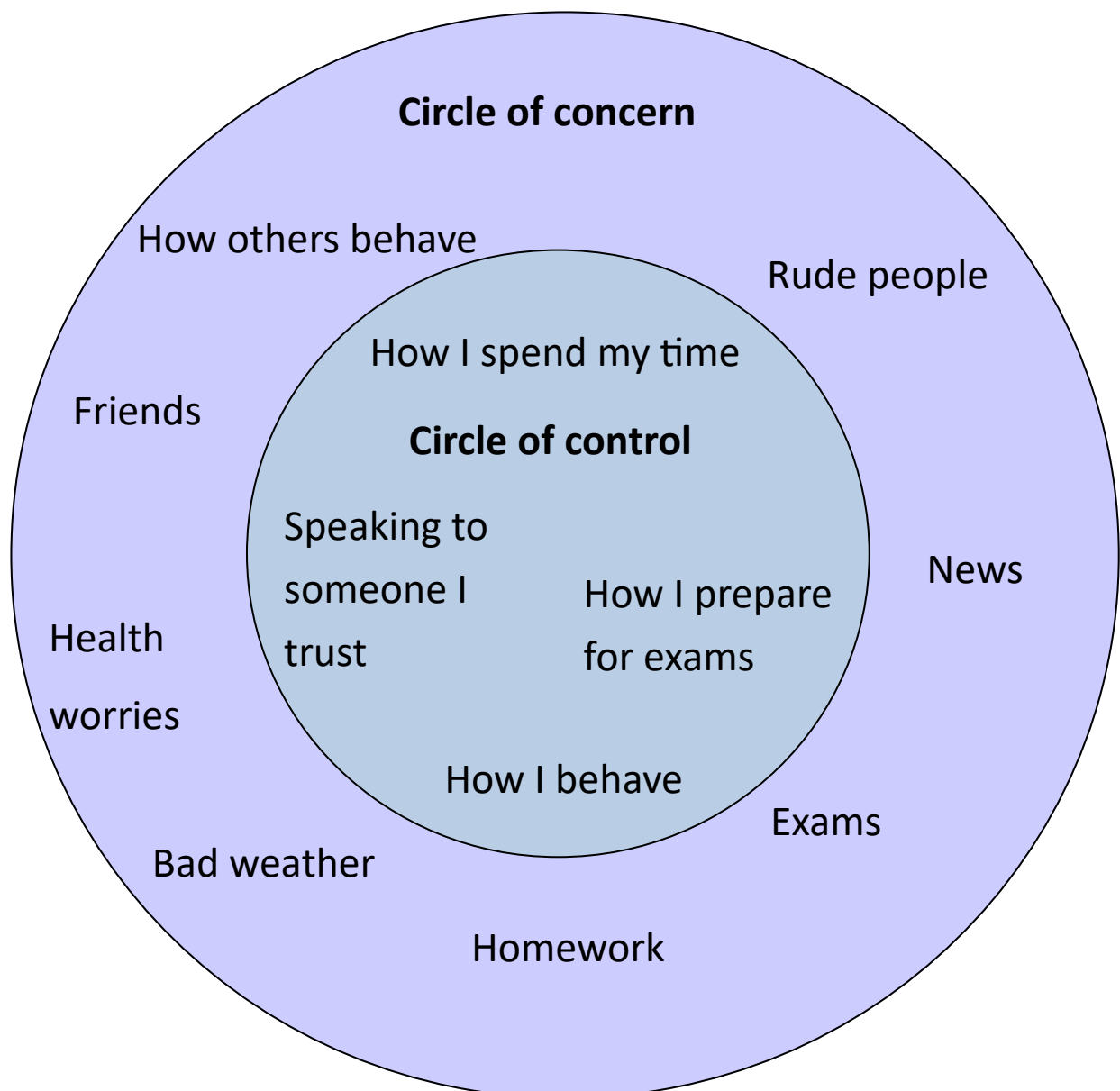
If you feel you aren't able to try some of these other things or that they aren't helping at all, then it could be time to see whether you can have more help from a professional. A good starting point is to speak to your teacher who can refer you to a service that can help you or a family member, or you could see if there are any local mental health organisations that could help you individually or in groups.

Asking for help and getting the help you need can be difficult, but keep trying because you deserve to feel better and it is possible to feel better.

Managing anger long term

Sometimes anger can be caused by things we are currently facing in life. In this case, it can be helpful to look at what is and isn't within our control.

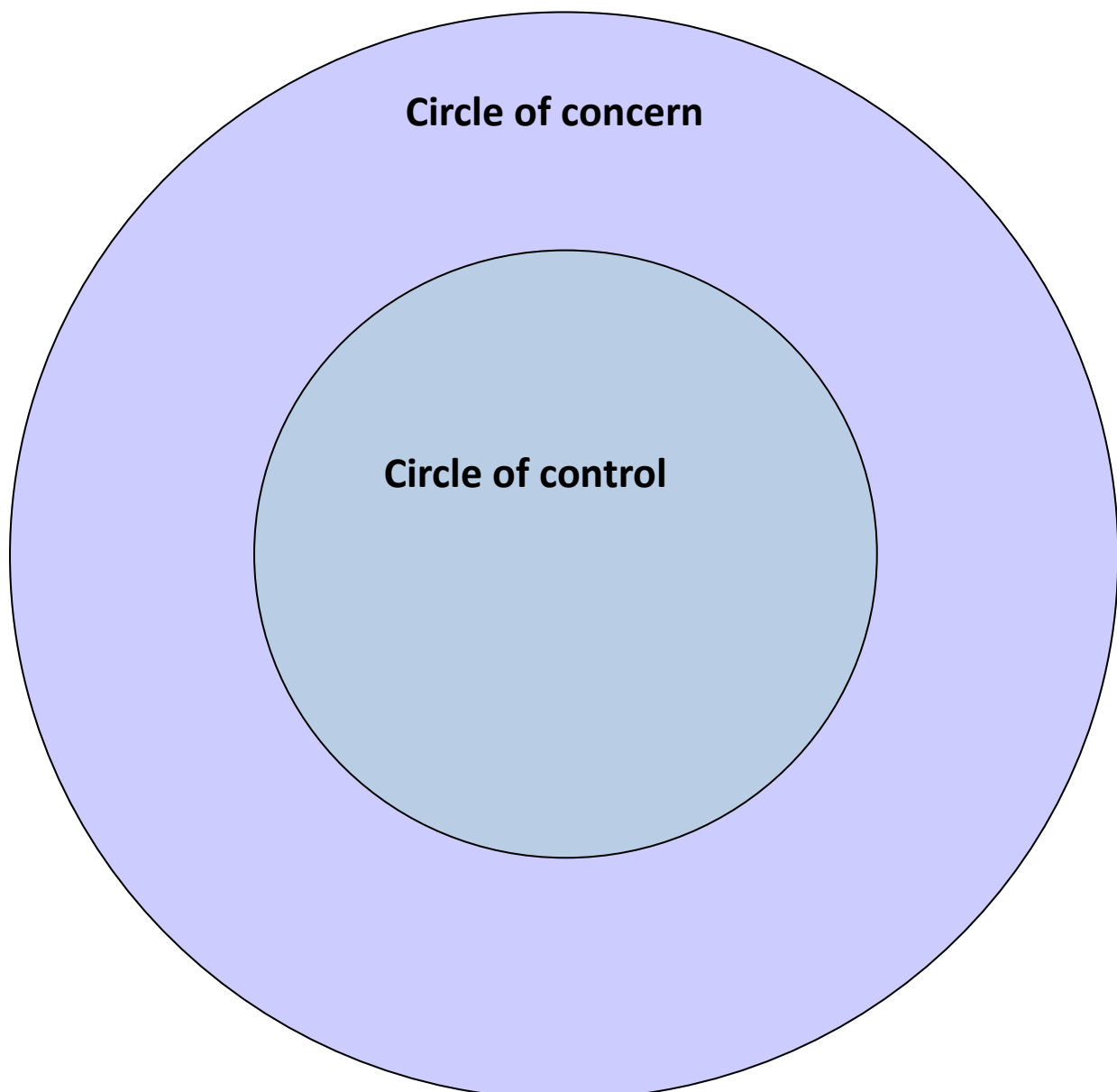
We can use two circles called "the circle of concern" and "the circle of control". Here we can write things that concern us but that we can't really do much about and things that we can do something about.



Managing anger long term

The trick is to try to spend more time in the circle of control, as here are the things that we can really do something about. The more time we spend in the circle of control, the less time we have to spend in the circle of concern. Some problems might fall into both—for example you can't control others, but you can control your own behaviour and choose to have a conversation with someone if they are bothering you.

Fill in your own below.



Problem solving

If you have completed the diagram on the previous page and have something you would like to change, this method of problem solving can be helpful.

1. Firstly, **pinpoint your problem**. Write down exactly what the problem is and try to be specific as possible, so that if someone else reads it, they would know exactly what your problem is.



2. Next, take some time to **list all possible solutions**, even if they sound silly. Here we are just trying to come up with as many possible ideas.



Problem solving

3. Then look at your list again and **pick a solution** to try out first. Circle the solution and think of when you would like to try this.

4. When you've given it a go, **think about how it went**.

Did it work? Great!

Did it not work? Try another idea, using what you have learned from trying your previous idea.

5. Remember that you can also **ask for help** from friends, family and healthcare professionals.

6. If you have tried all of your solutions and there doesn't seem to be an answer at the moment, sometimes we need to **accept that we can't solve a problem at the moment**. This can also be used for things in the "circle of concern".

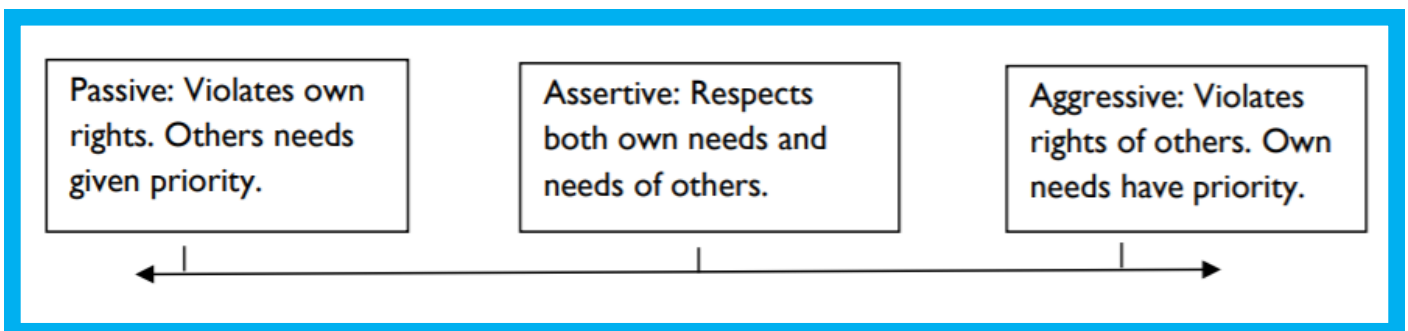
Acceptance does not mean you are happy with the problem or admitting defeat—it means you have tried every available solution and don't want to waste energy on something that cannot be changed at the moment.

It could be that you use one of the "quick ways to soothe anger" now and come back to it later.

Communication skills

Sometimes anger can get in the way of you expressing yourself in an effective way. We might lash out or squash all of our problems down. We might let them all build up inside and then explode or hurt ourselves.

Here you can see some different styles of communication. When we act passively or aggressively, sometimes this makes things worse for us and others in the long run. If you are very passive, you might find that you feel taken advantage of and not really listened to. You might feel hurt or resentful. If you are very aggressive, you might find it hard to keep friends and relationships, as others might feel hurt and disrespected. You might lose the respect of others and hurt them.



No one is assertive all of the time, but if you learn the skill of assertiveness, you can choose where and when you use them and they can help you when you are having trouble speaking to someone about something that has made you angry.



Communication skills

Passive



Assertive



Aggressive



General

Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts self down, praises others

"I don't mind...that's fine....yes alright"

Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others

"That's a good idea, and how about if we did this too..." or "I can see that, but I'd really like..."

Sarcastic, harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, patronising, disrespectful of others

"This is what we're doing, if you don't like it, tough"

Beliefs

You're okay, I'm not

Has no opinion other than that the other person/s are always more important, so it doesn't matter what they think anyway

I'm okay, you're okay

Believes or acts as if all the individuals involved are equal, each deserving of respect, and no more entitled than the other to have things done their way

I'm okay, you're not

Believe they are entitled to have things done their way, the way they want it to be done, because they are right, and others (and their needs) are less important

Eyes

Avoids eye contact, looks down, teary, pleading

Warm, welcoming, friendly, comfortable eye contact

Narrow, emotion-less, staring, expressionless

Posture

Makes body smaller – stooped, leaning, hunched shoulders

Relaxed, open, welcoming

Makes body bigger – upright, head high, shoulders out, hands on hips, feet apart

Hands

Together, fidgety, clammy

Open, friendly and appropriate gestures

Pointing fingers, making fists, clenched, hands on hips

Consequences

Give in to others, don't get what we want or need, self-critical thoughts, miserable

Good relationships with others, happy with outcome and to compromise

Make enemies, upset others and self, feel angry and resentful

Places where you can find more Anger Resources

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

A variety of resources and easy to understand cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) tools

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Mental health charity for young people's mental health, includes blogs about experiences of other young people

