

Understanding and Managing Anger Workbook



Designed and produced by the Involvement, Recovery and Wellness Centre

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

References

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Page 6: happy and sad person picture www.pixabay.com; anger introduction www.mind.org.uk

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Page 8: book picture www.pixabay.com

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Welcome

We're glad you're here

This booklet is designed to be alongside the Understanding and Managing Anger workshop and/or any other support you might be receiving. It is designed to help you learn valuable self-management skills for anger. Part of self management is knowing when you need further support. If you find your symptoms continue to stay the same or worsen, please be sure to seek further support from your care team or GP.

This booklet and/or series of workshops should be used to help you with the following:

- Understand more about anger
- Learn to recognise different anger early warning signs and triggers
- Identify the factors which can often make anger worse
- Consider some basic strategies that can be used to manage our anger better
- Learn about using an anger diary

Anger is an emotion

Human emotions are vital to our survival but they can also do us harm. Emotional problems contribute enormously to the burden of human suffering, and learning to cope with our emotions can be difficult, but very worthwhile.



Anger is one of the most basic emotions. Alongside happiness, sadness, fear and disgust, it has played an important part in our evolution. It is pervasive and powerful. It is also widely misunderstood and ignored.

Anger in itself is not good or bad—it is what we do with it that matters.

Anger is an emotion

Everyone has experienced anger. It's normal and healthy to feel angry from time to time in response to certain situations. But sometimes people experience an uncontrollable anger that often escalates, especially when the provocation is minor. Or sometimes people experience frequent anger, anger that feels out of control or disproportionate to the situation. In this case, anger can be a problem for that person.

Can you think of a time when you felt anger that didn't help you in the long run? Make a note of this below if so.

Anger is an emotion

The good thing is, if you are experiencing anger that is not helpful for you or others, there are different techniques you can use to stay in control and feel better. 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 to their full potential.



Anger is an emotion

Sometimes anger can be just anger on its' own, or it can be masking other feelings that may not be seen as "easy" or "acceptable" to show. The anger iceberg shows some of the feelings that might be hidden beneath the surface.



The cogs that keep anger going

One way of looking at how anger is kept going is by looking at all of the things that feed into it. A simple way of doing this is by looking at the cogs of anger in a diagram like the one below.



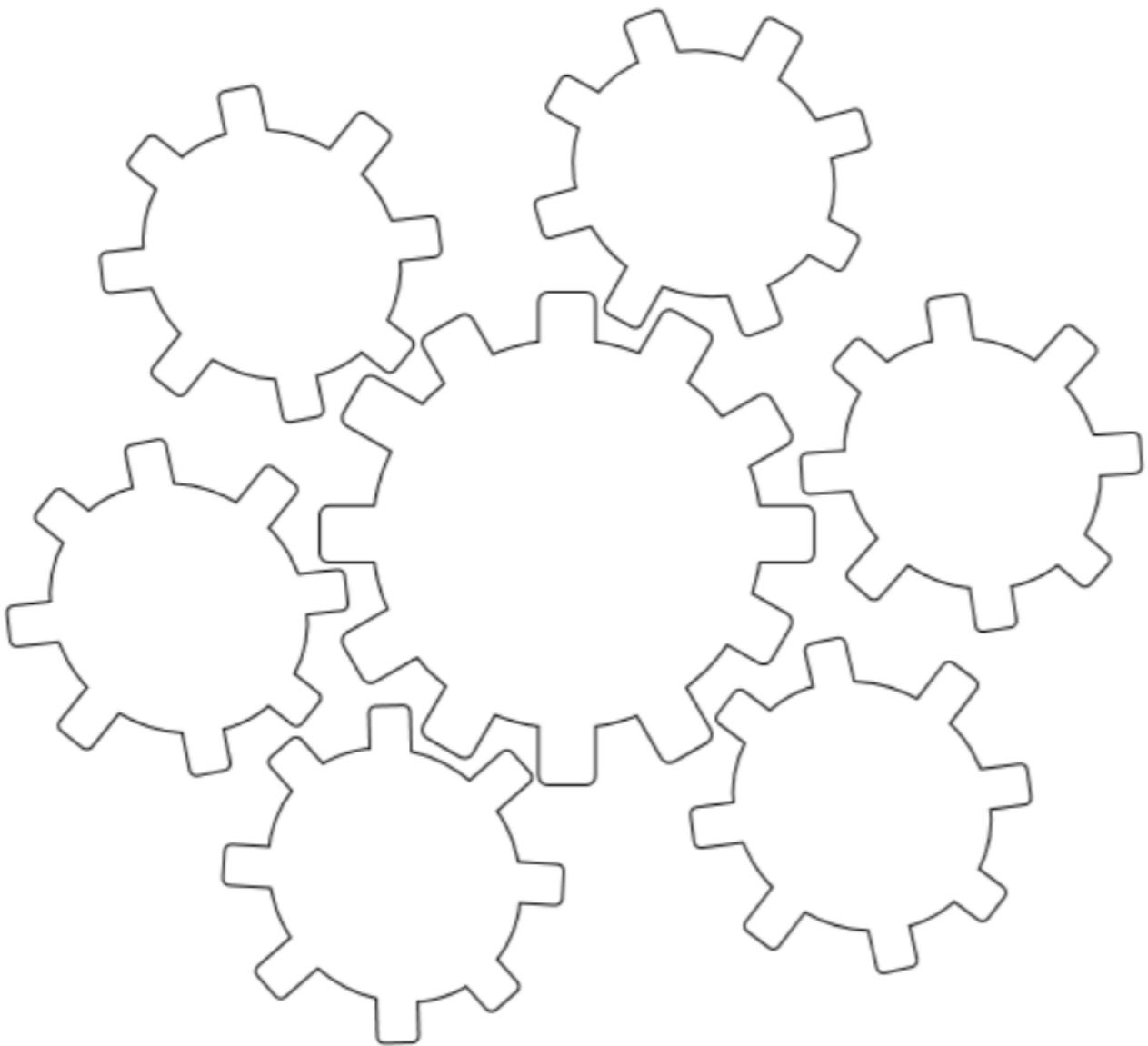
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As you can see, many factors feed into anger. By making some positive changes in each of the cogs, we can work to slow down the central problem.

The cogs that keep anger going

Now think about your own anger cogs and fill in the diagram below. You may not yet know exactly what fits into each cog for you and that's fine. You can revisit this page later as you work through the workbook.



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Just by looking at your own diagram, can you see any positive changes you could make to slow some of the cogs down?

The fight or flight response

When there is a real or perceived threat, as can be in the case when we are angry or anxious, our bodies' automatic survival mechanisms or the "fight or flight" response kicks in. The diagram on page 14 shows some of the effects of this automatic response.

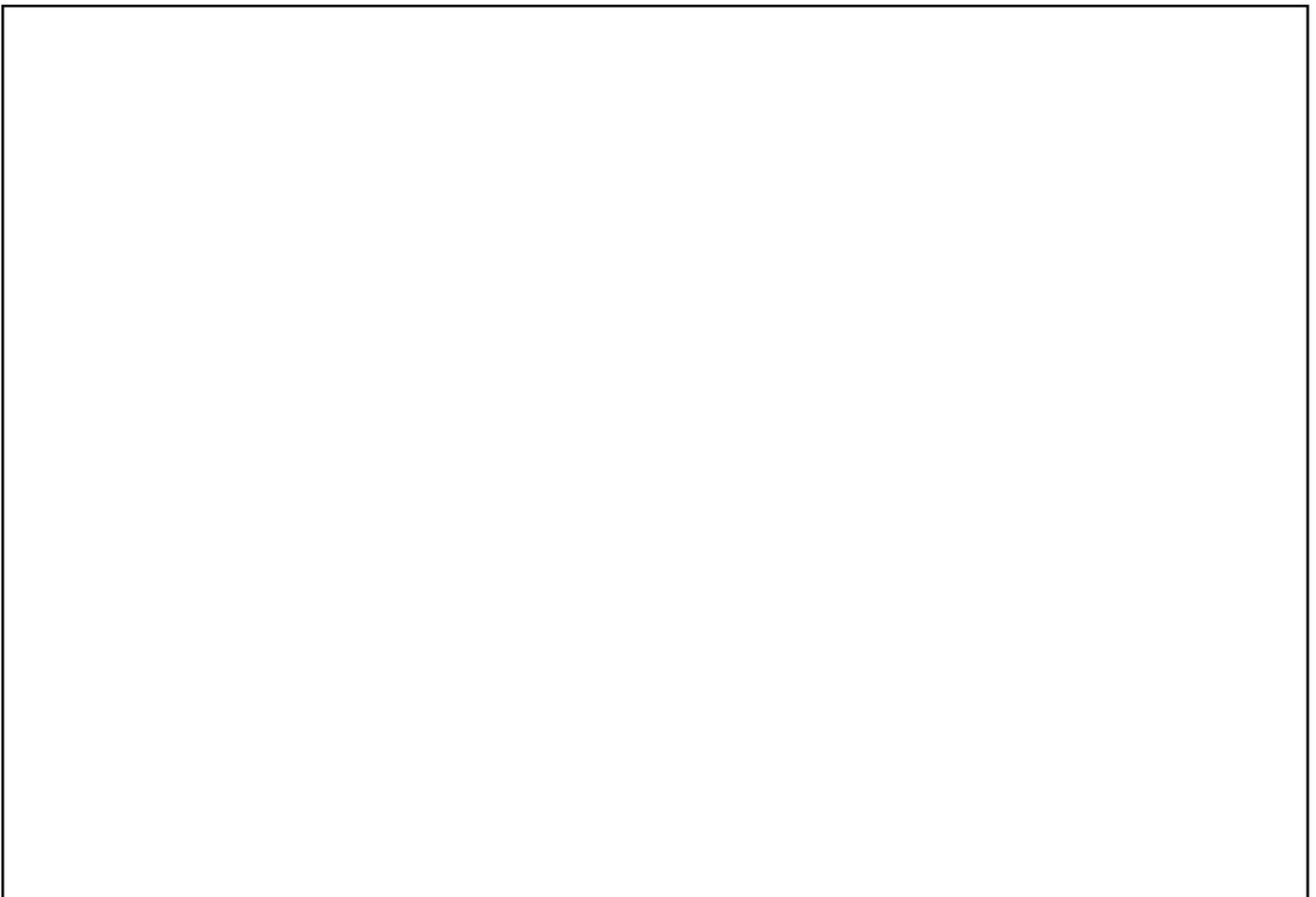


Adrenaline is released into the bloodstream and causes lots of effects to help us to prepare for the real or perceived threat. This can be useful if there is a real threat, like needing to run away from something (flight) or needing to fight a bear in the cave people days (fight), as blood is sent to the muscles or it can energise us to change things. However, it can also be not useful when these responses are triggered when they are of no use in the current situation or might make the situation worse. This is a response that has stayed with us since the cave people days, however in modern life sometimes these responses are not needed or are needed in a different way.

The fight or flight response

Sometimes anger can be good for you, if it's addressed quickly and expressed in a healthy way. In fact, anger may help some people think more rationally. However, unhealthy episodes of anger — when you hold it in for long periods of time, turn it inward, or explode in rage — can wreak havoc on your body and/or life!

Now take a look at the diagram on the next page. Have a think about which symptoms you might experience when you are angry and circle them. Are there any that are not mentioned on the diagram? If so, write them down below. Remember, our responses are all individual.

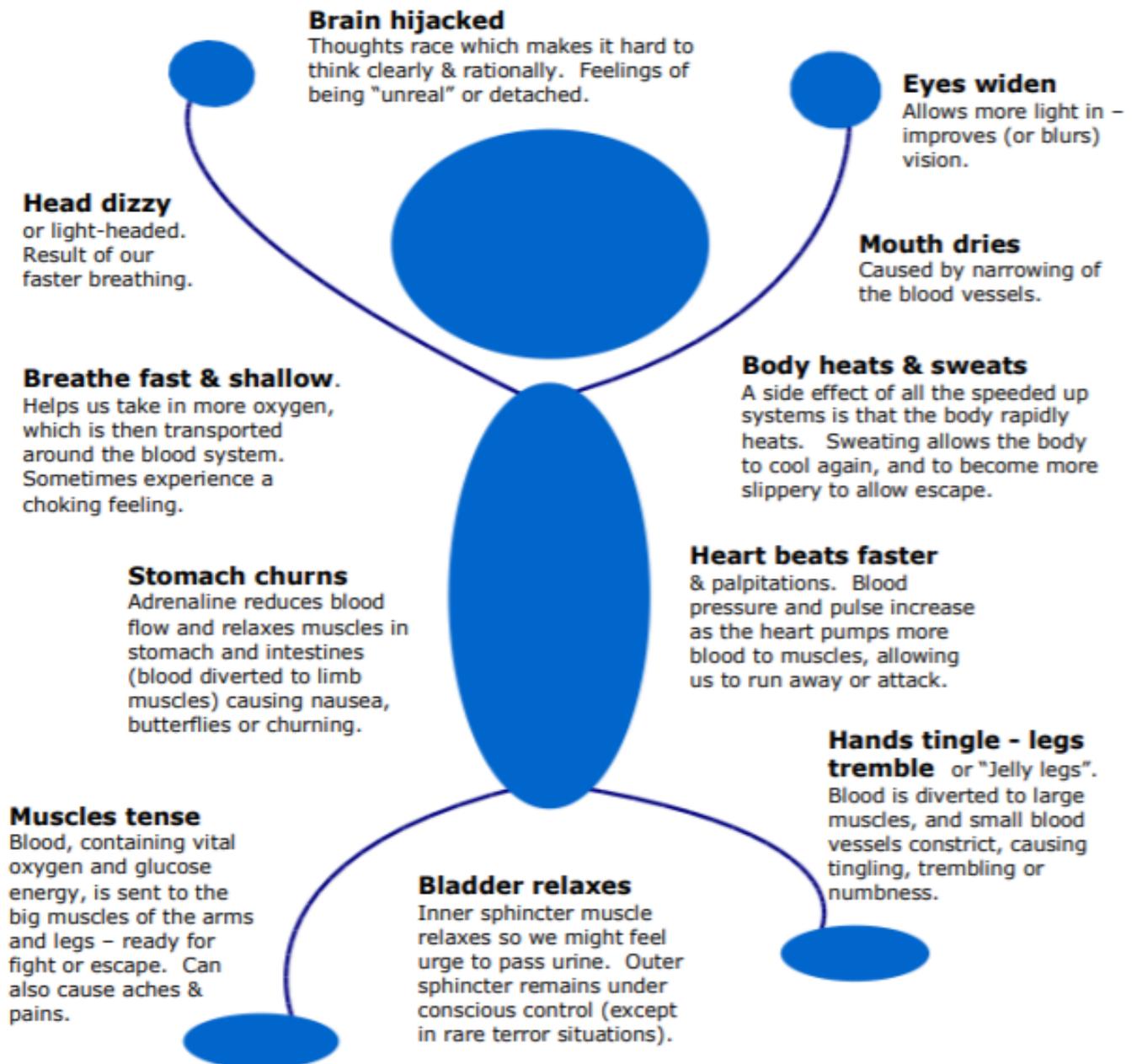


The fight or flight response

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).

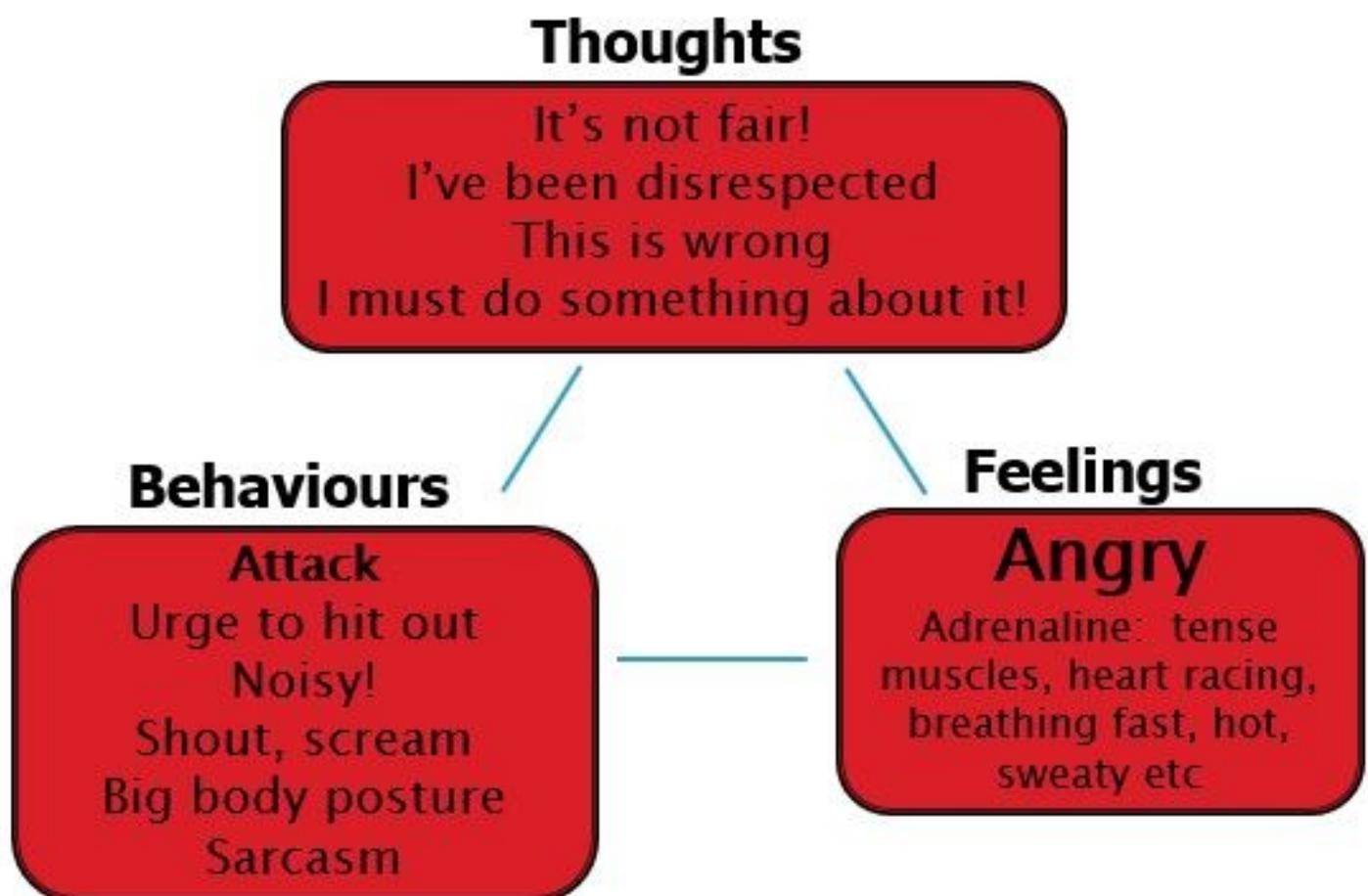


After the adrenaline has died down, we can feel exhausted, shaky and weak.

Thoughts, feelings and behaviour

Not only do we have physical responses when we are angry, we also all have unique thoughts and behaviour when we are angry. These thoughts, physical feelings and behaviour all interact and can worsen each other, making us more angry. However, they also work to influence each other the other way too—so if you can soothe your feelings, balance your thoughts or change your behaviour, this can make us feel better.

Have a look at the diagram below and see how each area influences each other.

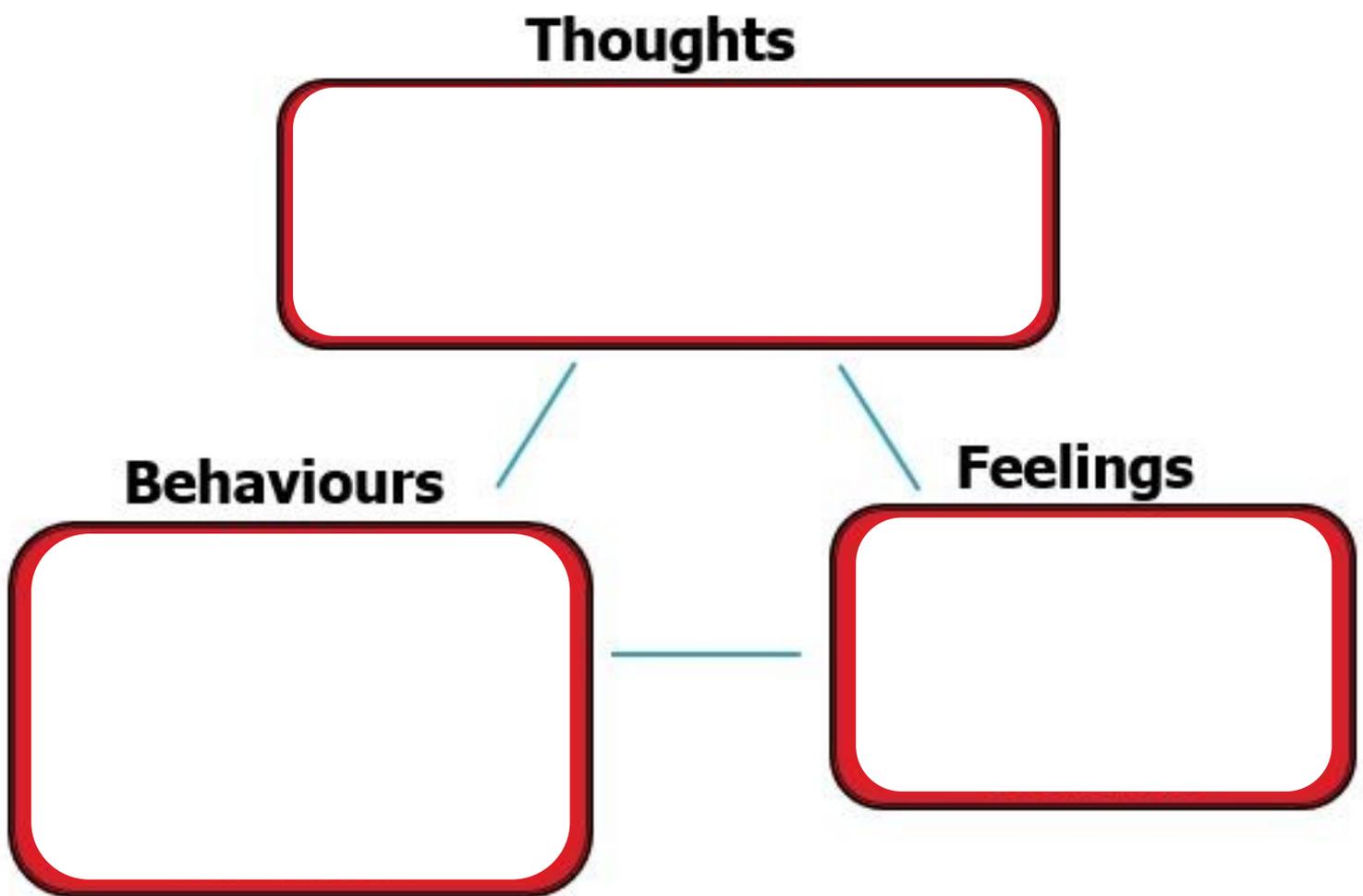


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Thoughts, feelings and behaviour

Now can you think of some examples of your own thoughts, feelings and behaviour when you are angry? These may be different in different situations, so choose one situation for now and write down how these areas influence each other.



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Life factors

How you interpret and react to a situation can depend on lots of factors in your life, including:

- your childhood and upbringing

- past experiences, including traumatic experiences

- current circumstances

Can you think of any factors for each bullet point above? Write them down in the boxes.

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 productive strategies to handle our anger.

Keeping an anger diary

A good way of finding out the baseline of how our anger affects us can be to keep a diary for a few weeks to become more aware of this and see whether there are any patterns. An example of a diary like this can be found on the next page. When you complete the diary, take a look at what thoughts, feelings and behaviour are common for you when you are angry. Write down any patterns that you can spot. Building awareness of how anger can affect us is a great starting point to learning to deal with in healthier ways and feel better.



Date and time	Trigger	Anger warning signs	How angry I felt 0% - 100%	What I did in response	How I felt afterwards
Monday 12th March 12:45pm	Someone cut me off in traffic	Jaw clenched, breathing faster, thinking of how to get them back	80%	Followed them and swore at them	Angry, but ashamed about what I did

Hot thoughts

A “hot thought” is a thought that brings about a surge of negative feelings. A hot thought increases your anger. People tend to have the same hot thoughts happen again and again.



Some common “hot” thoughts we might have when angry could be:

“He is so stupid”

“She’s making a fool out of me!”

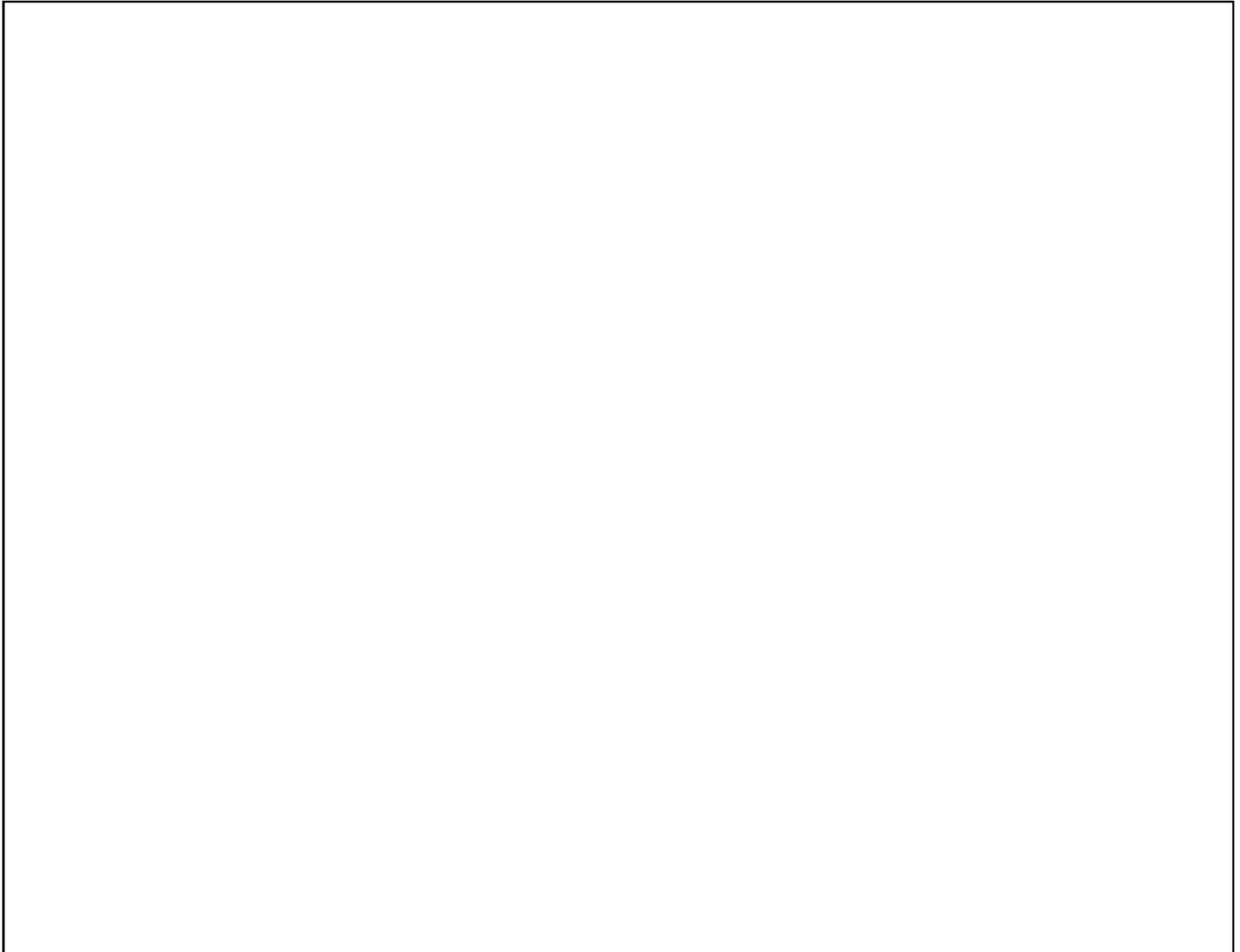
“You’re selfish”

“I want to hurt you”

“I hate this place”

Hot thoughts

Do you have any similar thoughts that you have when you are angry?
Do any of them come up time and again? Make a note of them here.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write down their thoughts or notes.

Sometimes the common thoughts we might have also fall into the unhelpful thinking habits on the next page. Can you identify whether any of the unhelpful thinking habits occur for you? Sometimes it can be difficult to identify them in the heat of the moment, but in hindsight it can be easier to see that maybe some unhelpful thinking habits were there.

Unhelpful thinking habits

Unhelpful Thinking Habits

Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits such as those described below. We might favour some over others, and there might be some that seem far too familiar. Once you can identify your unhelpful thinking styles, you can start to notice them – they very often occur just before and during distressing situations. Once you can notice them, then that can help you to challenge or distance yourself from those thoughts, and see the situation in a different and more helpful way.

 <p>Mental Filter When we notice only what the filter wants or allows us to notice, and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs', or only catching the negative stuff in our 'kitchen strainers' whilst anything more positive or realistic is dismissed</p>	 <p>Judgements Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for</p>
<p>Mind-Reading Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)</p> 	<p>Emotional Reasoning I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger</p> 
 <p>Prediction Believing we know what's going to happen in the future</p>	 <p>Mountains and Molehills Exaggerating the risk of danger, or the negatives. Minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives</p>
<p>Compare and despair Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them</p> 	<p>Catastrophising Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen</p> 
 <p>Critical self Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility</p>	 <p>Black and white thinking Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'</p>
<p>Shoulds and musts Thinking or saying 'I should' (or shouldn't) and 'I must' puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations</p> 	<p>Memories Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now</p> 

Challenging hot thoughts

If you have identified that you have some hot thoughts that feed your anger and that you would like to try to balance them, it can be useful to “take them to court” and think of evidence for and against them.

Have a look at the example below. Here, the situation is that someone is late to an appointment and gets cut up in traffic by someone who also makes a rude gesture at them. Their hot thought is:

“what an idiot, I’ll show them!”

Evidence Supporting the Hot Thoughts	Evidence Against the Hot Thoughts
The other driver was rude and disrespectful.	I am stressed and rushed so my fight or flight response is switched on.
Bad drivers should be more considerate of other road users.	I am late — I needed to leave earlier and then I wouldn’t be so frazzled.
He was in the wrong	I might have been in the wrong and not noticed. My behaviour made me a bad driver and could have caused bad consequences.
Is the initial reaction correct based on your evidence? To a degree yes but based on the possible consequences — no!	New conclusion: Taking a few deep breaths and calming myself might have been a better idea—the driver has probably forgotten about me altogether.

Challenging hot thoughts

Can you think of a recent situation where you had a hot thought?
Write down the hot thought below and use the table to look at
evidence for and against this.

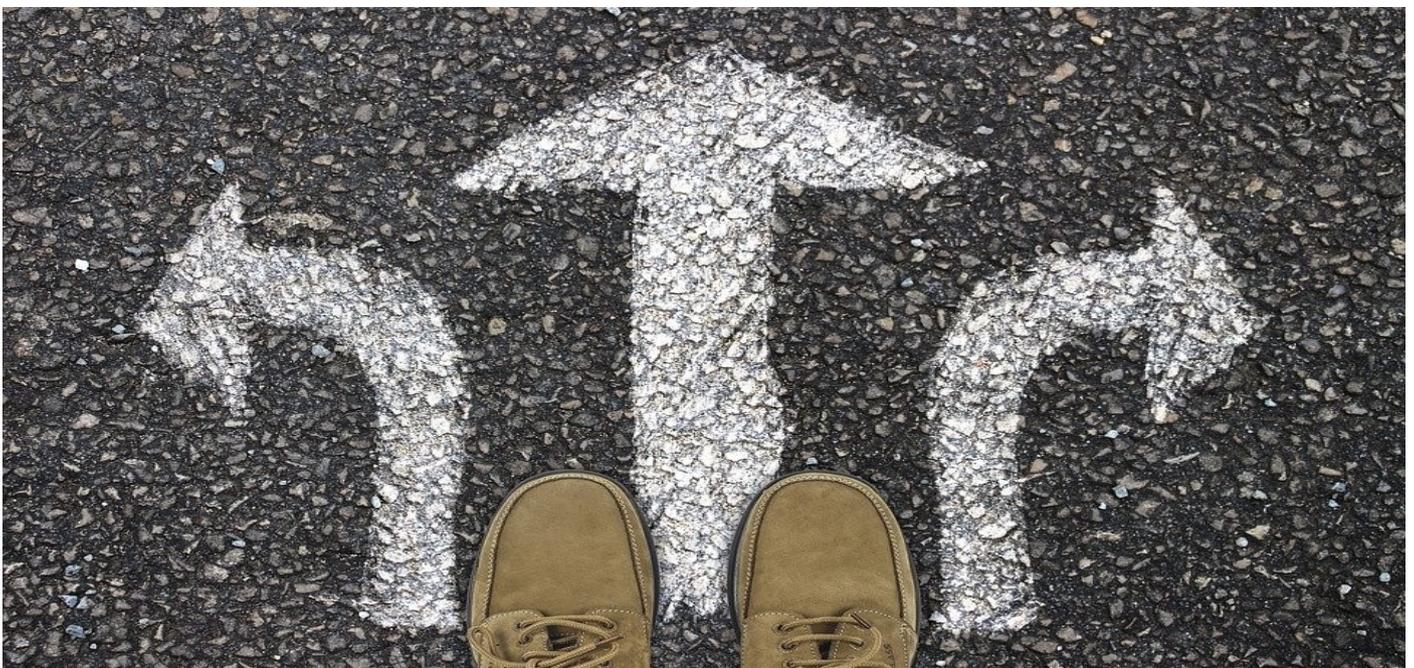
My hot thought was/is:

Evidence Supporting the Hot Thoughts	Evidence Against the Hot Thoughts
Is the initial reaction correct based on your evidence?	New conclusion:

Managing anger short and long term

There are several immediate options we can take when managing anger, if we realise that in a certain situation it is not helpful for us.

- **Expressing** your angry feelings. This is in an assertive, not aggressive, way. This means getting your needs met without hurting others. It means respecting both yourself and others. This is not the same as blowing up straight away—it is taking time to think about what response you would like to have to the situation, stepping away if needed.
- **Redirecting** anger, such as using the energy it gives you into something constructive. Be careful, as sometimes if you can't express anger, it can be turned inwards onto yourself and make you feel worse.
- **Calming** and soothing your anger. This means not just controlling your behaviour outwardly, but also soothing your internal responses or the “fight or flight” system, to give yourself time for the angry feelings to subside.



Managing anger in the moment

Here are some ideas of managing anger in the moment. They are ideas we can try when we are feeling overwhelmed in the moment. Please note however, that some of these techniques work better if we are familiar with them already before we get angry, so give them a go when you are feeling steady and calm first.

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 or wallet. Phrases that some people have found useful are “it’s okay, this is just my fight or flight response” and “this too shall pass”.

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

Lying down in a starfish can trick your body into thinking you are calmer than you are—changing your behaviour to the opposite action that you are being pulled to do by your anger.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness comes in many forms and focuses on being aware of your thoughts, feelings and sensations without passing judgement on them. For example, not beating ourselves up for feeling angry or making ourselves feel worse, but instead just noticing how anger is making us feel, feeling our cheeks get red and the adrenaline pumping around our bodies. Please see our mindfulness workbook for further information.

Managing anger in the moment

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. There are many free visualisation exercises you can try online.



Punch a pillow/cushion

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

Have a good Cry

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

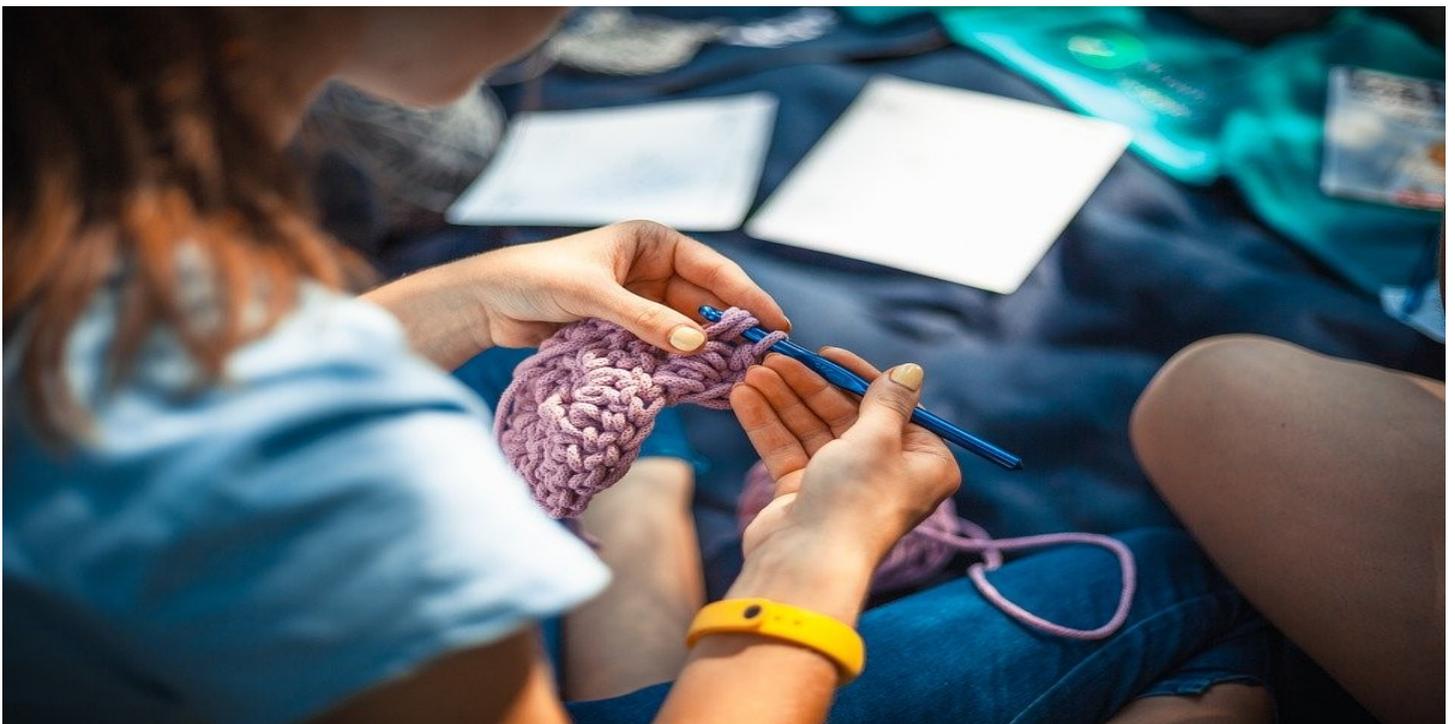
Managing anger in the moment

Opposite Action

Anger can be a very activating emotion and can drive us to behave in ways to address “fight” or run away “flight” from the problem. One way of dealing with these impulses is to actually show your brain that you can do what you choose to do and choose a behaviour for the opposite for how you might be feeling. This sends signals back to your body that you are not as angry as it thinks it is, soothing the angry feelings. One example for an opposite action for anger could be watching a video of cute animals.

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.



Managing anger in the moment

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.

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. Usually when our “fight or flight” system is activated, our breathing can become shallow and quick, almost panting. Take a minute now to notice how you are breathing.

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

There are some different breathing techniques you can try too. These are colour breathing and 7/11 breathing.



7/11 breathing

This breathing technique involves breathing in for a count of 7 and breathing out for a count of 11. Please note this is not for 7 and 11 seconds—just for the count.

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 mentally picturing or meditating on a colour that represents how you want to feel and/or what you want to let go of in your life.

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

Some more examples of colours for colour breathing:

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.

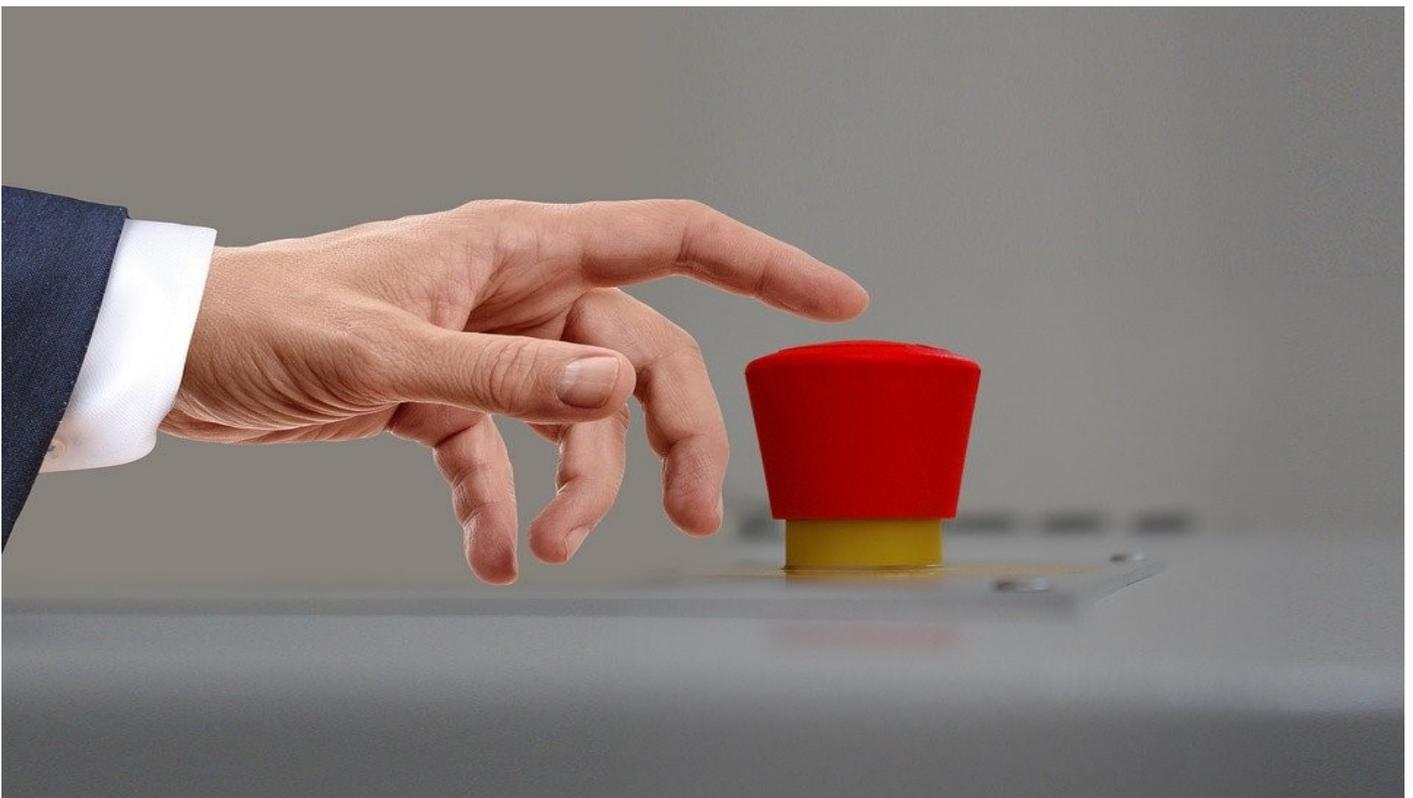
Pick a colour which means something to you.

Managing anger long term

Short term techniques are great when we are feeling angry in the moment to diffuse the anger and give us some headspace. However, there are also long term ways to manage anger, which involve understanding more about your own patterns of anger and which techniques are most effective for you.

Recognise Triggers

What types of situations and thoughts set off anger for you? Is it one big thing or lots of little things?



Look out for Warning Signs

The quicker we act to diffuse anger and find a better response of dealing with it, the less time and energy it is given to grow and explode!

Managing anger long term

Reduce the stress in your life

Is anything unnecessary adding to your anger? It is not always possible to reduce all stress in your life, and stress can be positive or necessary, but take a look if any life situations are adding to your anger.

Look after yourself holistically

Looking after your whole self can help hugely, as there are proven connections between your physical and mental health.

Learn to communicate assertively

Assertiveness is a valuable life skill that is helpful for everyone. This involves getting both your needs and the needs of others met, respecting your own views and the views of others.

Take the time and practice to cool down

These techniques work best when you have time to practise them and your brain is used to rehearsing these techniques.

Use an Anger Journal

As you may have tried earlier in the workbook, an anger journal can be very useful for finding out more about exactly how your anger works, the different thoughts and feelings you might have. Another way of journaling is just writing down anything that comes into your mind when you are angry and then binning this or scrunching it up.

Managing anger long term

Have a support group

Talking to other who are learning to deal with their anger can be useful.

Self awareness

Ask yourself regularly what you are feeling, what thoughts are going through your mind, what you are saying to yourself, what emotions are around and what you are wanting to do as a consequence of that. Self awareness takes great courage and you might not always like what you find, but that is the point, to accept yourself as you are and change the things that would make life better for you and others.



Triggers

Triggers are events or circumstances that may produce very uncomfortable emotional or psychiatric symptoms, such as anxiety, panic, discouragement, despair, anger or negative self-talk.

They can be external, such as something happening around you, or internal, such as something you think about someone.

Do you recognise any of your own triggers in the examples below? Are there any triggers that you have that are not mentioned?

- Bullying
- Being physically threatened
- Misinformation
- Abusive language
- Violation of personal space
- Disrespect
- Labelling
- Discrimination
- Change in plans
- People being late
- Traffic
- Not being listened to/heard
- Hearing people eating
- Bad manners
- Incompetence
- Injustice

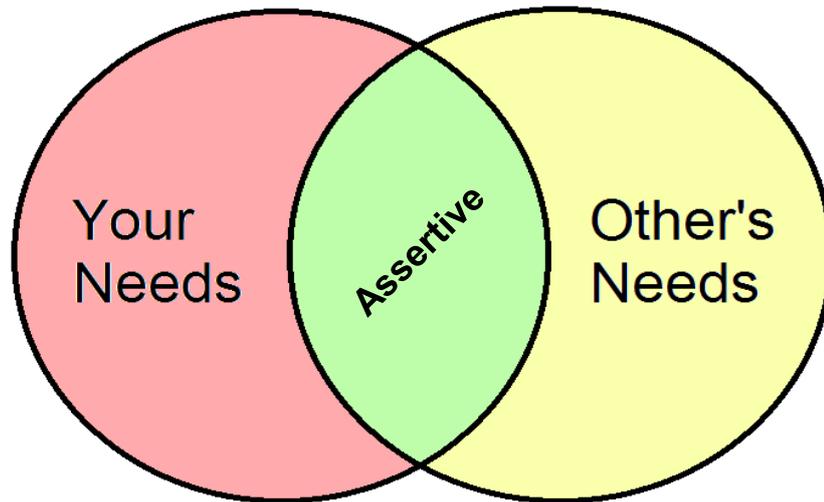
Early warning signs

Early warning signs can be noticed by you or others around you when you are beginning to get angry. What early warning signs do you have in the list below? Are there any others that you can think of?

- Tense muscles
- Red face/flushed
- Heart thumping
- Clenched fists
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Shaking/trembling
- sweating, especially your palms.
- clenching your jaws or grinding your teeth.
- stomach ache.
- increased and rapid heart rate.
- feeling hot in the neck/face.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness means communicating your needs directly, without violating your own rights or the rights of others.



Assertiveness means finding a balance in how you communicate. If we are very passive, not expressing our needs and thoughts, we can become resentful, frustrated and anxious. This can lower our self esteem. On the other hand if we are very aggressive, others can lose respect for us and we can lose relationships. Again, this can lower our self esteem. There is another communication style which is not mentioned in the table on the next page. This is called being passive aggressive, which is being aggressive but in an indirect way, such as slamming a door or sighing.

If you struggle with assertiveness, remember this is not your fault—it is just a vicious cycle you may be in at the moment, but you can make a responsible choice to try and be more assertive which will help you with your anger.

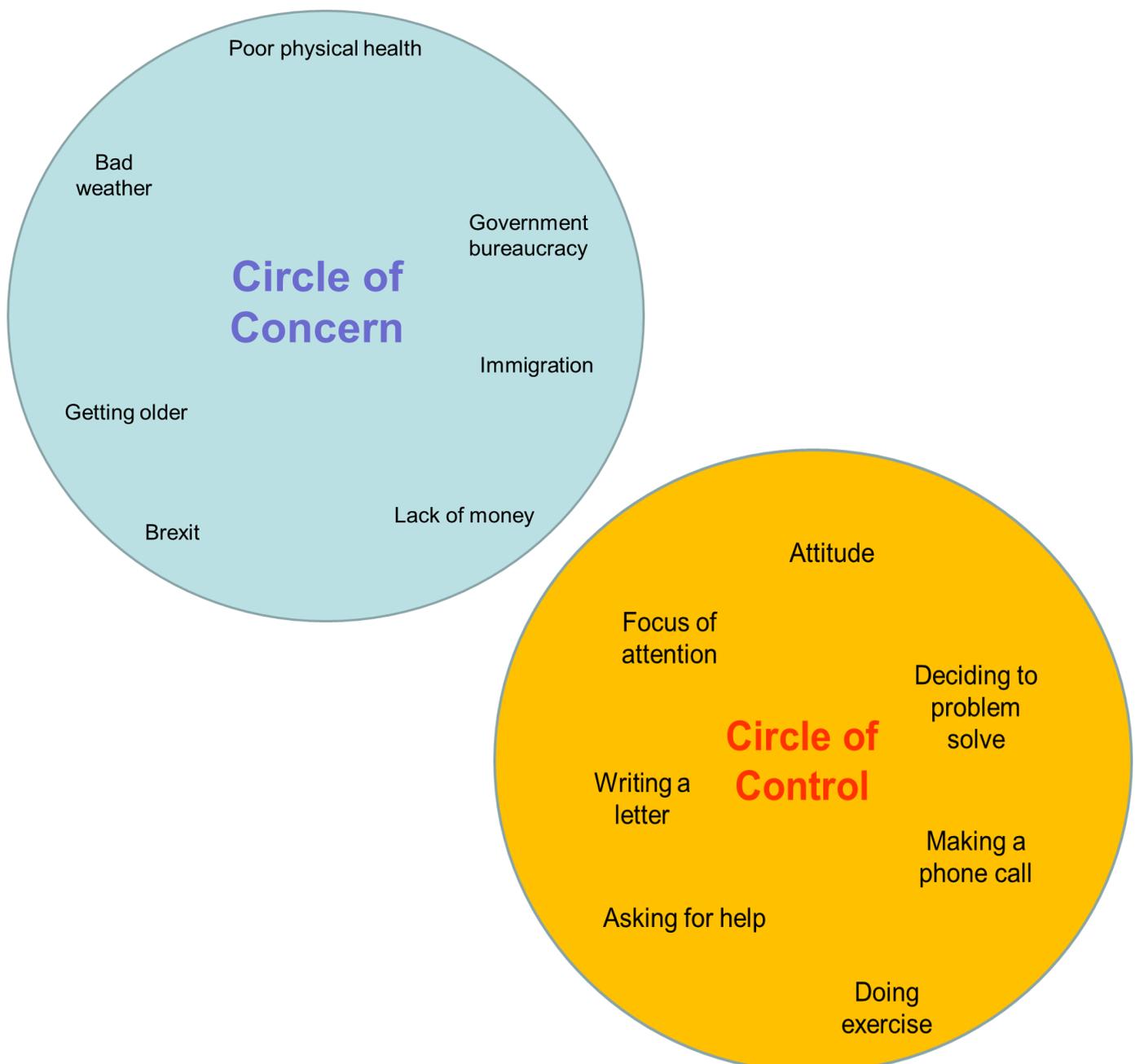
Assertiveness

The Aggressive Person	The Assertive Person	The Passive Person
Interrupts and 'talks over' others	Speaks openly	Is afraid to speak up
Speaks loudly	Uses a conversational tone	Speaks softly
Glares and stares at others	Makes good eye contact	Avoids looking at people
Intimidates by using expression	Shows expression which matches the message	Shows little or no expression
Stands rigidly, crosses arms, invades the personal space of others	Relaxes and adopts an open stance and expressions	Slouches and withdraws
Controls groups	Participates in groups	Isolates self from groups
Only considers own feelings and/or makes demands of others	Keeps to the point	Agrees with others despite personal feelings
Values self more than others	Values self equal to others	Values self less than others
Hurts others to avoid being hurt	Tries not to hurt anyone (including self)	Hurts self to avoid hurting others
Reaches goals but hurts others in the process	Usually reaches goals without hurting others	Does not reach goals and may not even know goals
I'm okay, you're not	I'm okay, you're okay	You're okay, I'm not

What is within our control?

Understandably, some causes of our anger could be problems that we are facing in life at the moment. It is important to be aware which of these problems are within our control, and are therefore useful to spend time on to solve, and which are not in our control.

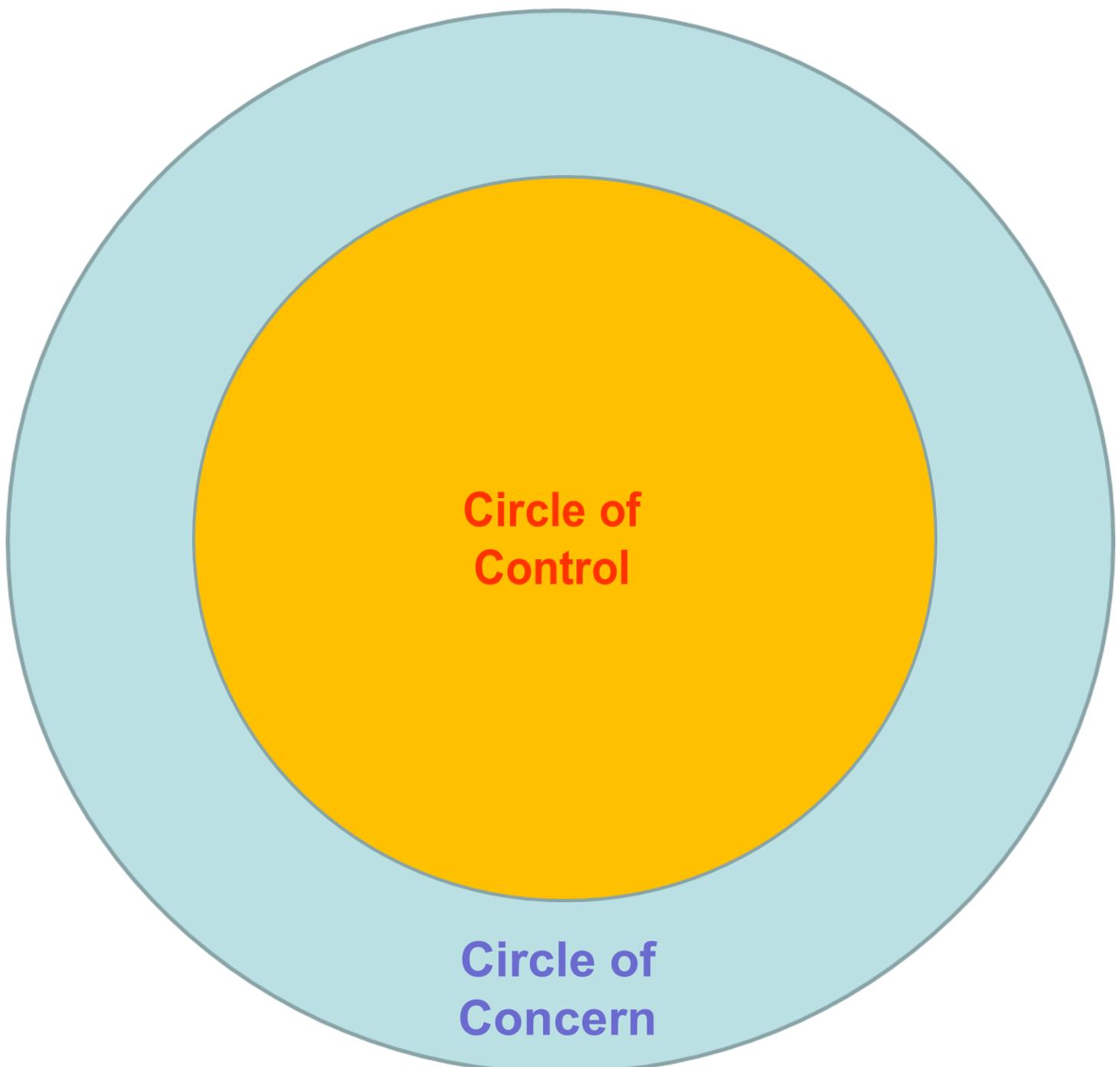
We could therefore use two circles to group these issues:



What is within our control?

We could also notice that if we spend more time worrying about things that are out of our control, we have less time to be proactive about things that are within our control and that could help make our lives better.

Try filling in the circles below with your own worries.



What is within our control?

The idea with this tool is to focus our energy on what is within our control. Adding something to your circle of control doesn't mean you have to control everything that you have written there—it is your choice what action you would like to take.

Another thing to remember is that sometimes issues seem too big to tackle, or may seem completely out of your control. For example, if animal welfare is something that you are concerned about, this can be broken down into different parts, instead of just being put in your circle of concern. You cannot choose how others behave, but you can choose your own actions. You cannot solve some issues on your own, but you can choose which parts you yourself can influence if you would like to.



Problem solving

Another tool you can use to manage issues causing anger is problem solving. This is particularly useful if you have just completed your circle of control and have identified some issues you would like to solve, but aren't sure where to start.

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

2. Next, take some time to list all possible solutions, even if they sound silly or not “like you”. Here we are just generating as many ideas as possible.

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. Review your results.

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 use other sources of help such as family, friends and 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. At this stage, you can try another self-management strategy to soothe yourself and return to the problem when your circumstances have changed.

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.

Remember, we can't eliminate anger—and it wouldn't be a good idea if we could.

In spite of all our efforts, things will happen that will cause us anger; and sometimes it will be justifiable anger.

Life will be filled with frustration, pain, loss, and the unpredictable actions of others. We can't change that; but we can change the way we let such events affect us.

Places where you can find more Anger Resources

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

A variety of resources and easy to understand CBT tools

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

Workbooks for a variety of subjects including anger, panic and assertiveness

www.selfhelpguides.nhs.uk

Self help guides for a variety of subjects including depression, substance misuse and grief

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/cool-down

The Mental Health Foundation's anger management booklet

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/2962/anger-2018.pdf>

Mind's anger management booklet. Mind's website is also a huge resource for information about mental health including conditions, treatment and support.