Understanding anger

What anger is, when it becomes a problem and what helps.

Anger is the feeling that comes up when something seems unfair, threatening or in the way. It gives you energy to protect yourself, set a limit or put something right. Everyone feels it.

Anger is a feeling. Aggression is a behaviour. You can feel very angry and still choose what you do.

What happens

Body
Heart speeds up, muscles tense, face gets hot, jaw and fists clench. The same alarm system as fear, pointed towards fight.

Thoughts
"How dare they." "This is not fair." "They did that on purpose." Blame, demands and snap judgements.

Urges
To shout, hit out, slam, argue, or go cold and withdraw.

When anger becomes a problem

- [ ] It comes up very often, or very fast
- [ ] It is much bigger than the situation
- [ ] It lasts a long time
- [ ] It leads to shouting, threats or violence
- [ ] It damages relationships or work
- [ ] I regret what I said or did
- [ ] I bottle it up until I explode
- [ ] I turn it on myself

What is often underneath

Anger often covers another feeling. Underneath there may be hurt, fear, shame, tiredness or feeling powerless. Anger can feel safer than those.

What helps

1. Learning your triggers and early warning signs.
2. Stepping back before the point of no return.
3. Cooling the body down.
4. Checking how you are reading the situation.
5. Saying what you need, firmly and without attack.

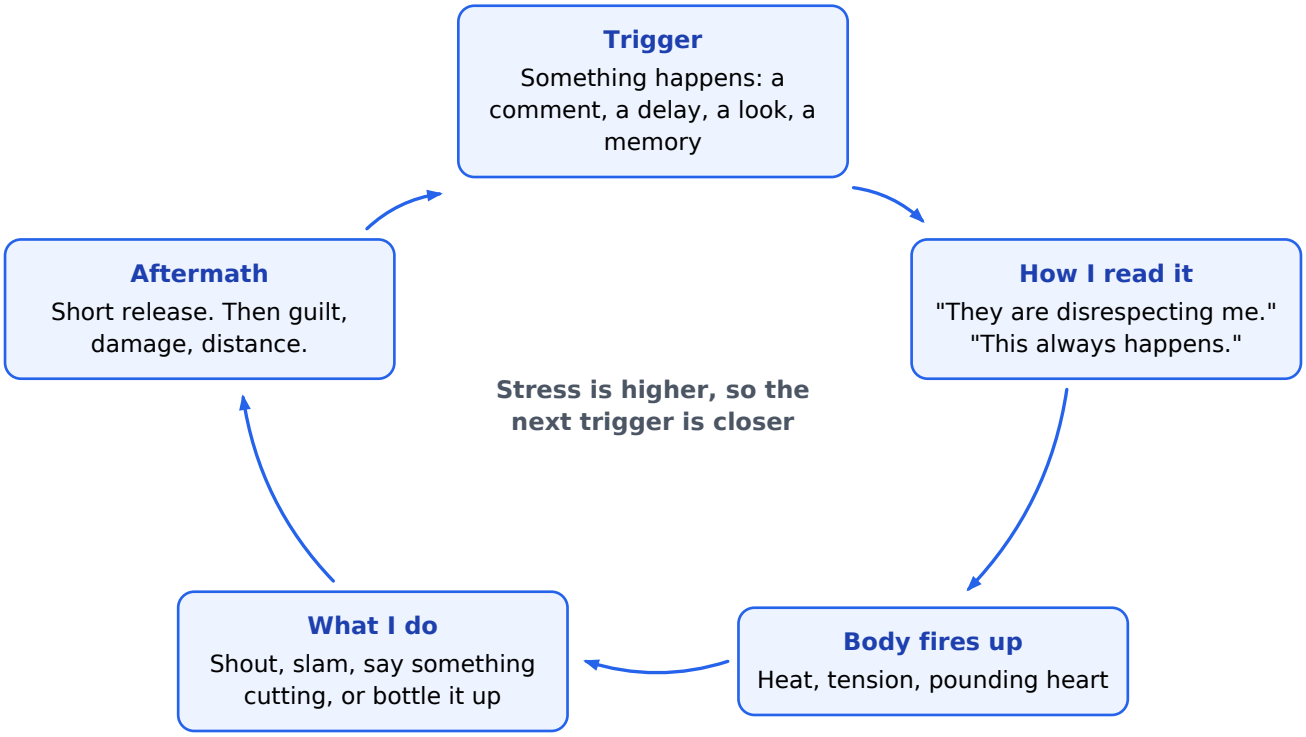
The aim
To notice anger sooner, understand what it is about, and stay in control of what you do. The aim is not to get rid of it.

My notes and questions

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The anger cycle

How anger builds from trigger to outburst, and where you can interrupt it.



Three things that speed it up

- **Being run down.** Tiredness, hunger, pain, stress and alcohol all lower the threshold.
- **How you read it.** Your reading of the trigger decides how angry you get. "He is an idiot" and "He did not see me" lead to different reactions.
- **Rehearsing.** Going over the wrong again and again keeps the body fired up for hours.

Where you can interrupt it

1. **Before:** look after the basics, and know your triggers.
2. **At the first signs:** notice the heat rising and name it. "I am getting angry."
3. **At how you read it:** ask what else might be going on.
4. **At the peak:** take a time out. Nothing useful is said above a 7 out of 10.
5. **Afterwards:** repair, and work out what you would do differently.

> **The gap**
> There is a gap between the trigger and what you do, even if it is only a second. The work is to make that gap longer.

My notes and questions

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My anger thermometer

What each level of anger looks like for you, and what helps at that level.

Name _____ Date _____

For each level, write what you notice in your body, what you tend to think and do, and what helps at that point. The earlier you catch it, the easier it is to turn around.

9 to 10 Rage

What it is like, and what I need to do

7 to 8 Furious

What it is like, and what helps

5 to 6 Angry

What it is like, and what helps

3 to 4 Irritated

What it is like, and what helps

1 to 2 Calm

What I am like when I am steady

The level at which I need to step away

How I will know I have reached it

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My anger warning signs

The first signs that you are getting angry.

Name _____ Date _____

Situations that set me off

People, places, topics, times of day

Things that shorten my fuse

- [ ] Tired
- [ ] Hungry
- [ ] Stressed
- [ ] In pain
- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Rushed

The first signs

In my body

- [ ] Heat
- [ ] Tight jaw
- [ ] Fists
- [ ] Shoulders
- [ ] Breathing
- [ ] Shaking

In my thoughts

What do I start telling myself?

In what I do

- [ ] Loud voice
- [ ] Pacing
- [ ] Going quiet
- [ ] Sarcasm
- [ ] Glaring
- [ ] Swearing

What other people notice before I do

My "point of no return". What does it feel like just before?

What I will do the moment I notice the first signs

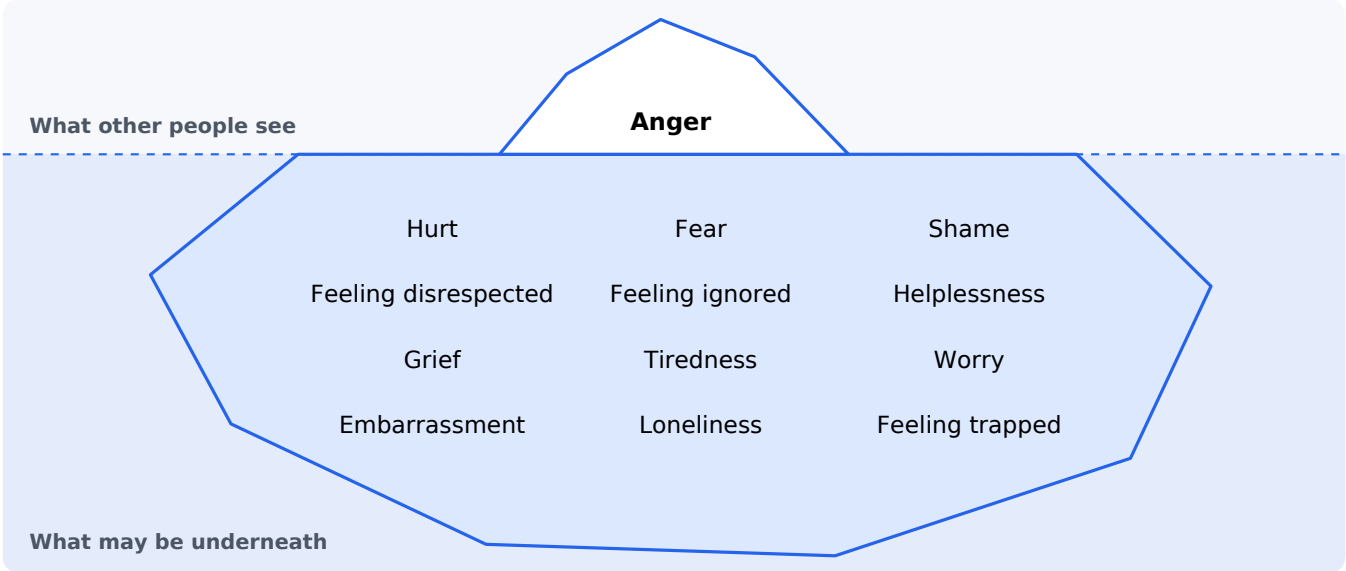
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The anger iceberg

Look at the feelings that are underneath your anger.

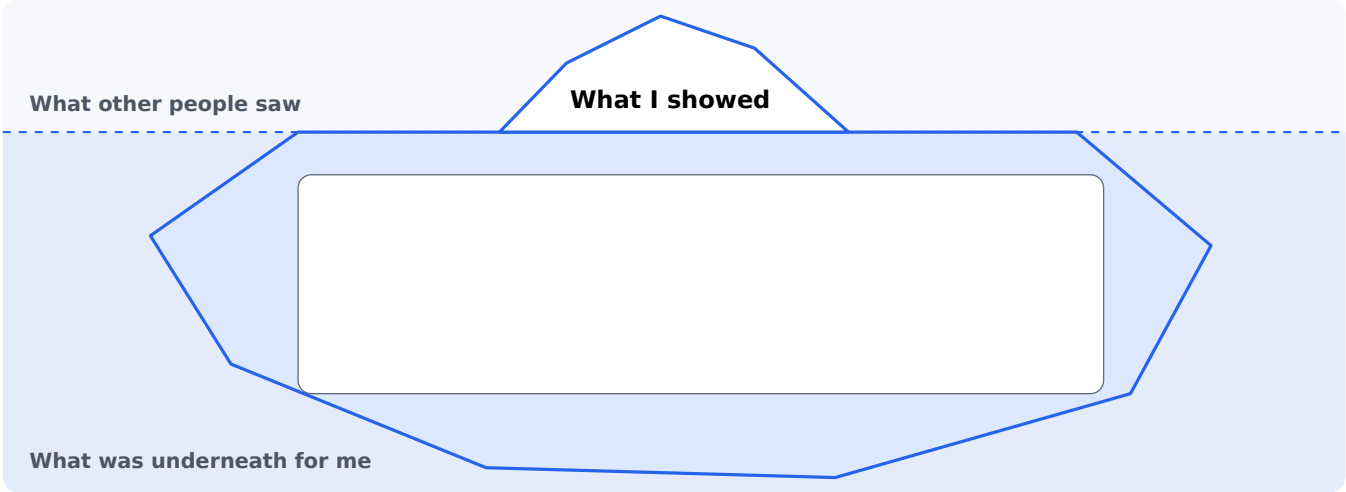
Name _____ Date _____

Anger is often a secondary emotion. It rises fast to cover something more vulnerable. Other people see the anger. They do not see what is driving it.



My iceberg

A recent time I was angry



If I had been able to say what was underneath, what would I have said?

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Time out plan

Stepping away before things are said or done that cannot be taken back.

Name _____ Date _____

A time out is not storming off, and it is not avoiding the issue. It is a planned pause to let your body calm down so the conversation can go better. It works best when the people close to you know about it in advance.

The steps

1. **Notice.** I am at my step-away level.
2. **Say it.** Use the agreed words, calmly. No parting shot.
3. **Leave.** Go somewhere else for the agreed time. At least 20 minutes: the body needs that long to settle.
4. **Cool down.** Walk, breathe, stretch, splash cold water. Do not rehearse the argument. Do not drink or drive.
5. **Come back.** Return when I said I would. If I am not ready, say so and name a new time.
6. **Talk, or agree when to talk.**

My step-away level (0 to 10) and how I know I am there

The words I will use. For example: "I am getting too angry to talk well. I am taking 30 minutes and I will come back."

Where I will go

What I will do to cool down

How long, and how I will come back

Agreed with the people I live with

What they will do when I call a time out

☐ Let me go ☐ Not follow me ☐ Not have the last word

When we will come back to what the row was about

If there is any risk of violence, safety comes first. Talk to me, your GP or a support service.

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Hot thoughts and cool thoughts

Spot the thoughts that make anger worse and write calmer versions.

Name _____ Date _____

The same event can leave you mildly annoyed or raging, depending on how you read it.

Mind reading
"She did that on purpose to wind me up."

Should and must
"People should not behave like that. He must apologise."

Labelling
"What an idiot." "They are useless."

Always and never
"You never listen. This always happens."

Taking it personally
"They are disrespecting me."

"I cannot stand it"
"This is unbearable. I will not put up with it."

Hot thought	Cool thought
"He cut me up on purpose."	"He probably did not see me. It is not about me."
"She never helps."	"She did not help today. I can ask clearly for what I need."
"I cannot stand this queue."	"It is annoying, and I can cope with ten minutes."

Situation	My hot thought	Anger (0 to 10)	A cooler thought	Anger now

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Anger diary

A record of when you got angry, what you did and what happened next.

Name _____ Date _____

Date and time	What happened	Anger (0 to 10)	What I told myself	What I did	What happened next

Patterns I notice (who, where, when, what state I was in)

A time this week I handled it well. What did I do?

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Repairing after an outburst

Steps for putting things right once you have calmed down.

Name _____ Date _____

Everyone loses it sometimes. Putting it right afterwards protects the relationship. Use this once you have calmed down.

What happened, in a few plain sentences

What was going on for me

Trigger, state I was in, what was underneath

How it may have been for the other person

What I am responsible for (my words and actions, not theirs)

A good apology

- [ ] Says exactly what I did
- [ ] Shows I understand the effect
- [ ] Has no "but"
- [ ] Says what I will do differently
- [ ] Does not ask them to be over it straight away

What I want to say

What still needs to be talked about, calmly, and when

What I will do differently next time I feel that anger rising

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