

# What can I do to manage my anger?

It can be frightening when your anger overwhelms you. But there are ways you can learn to manage your anger when you find yourself in difficult situations. You can:

- [look out for warning signs](#)
- [buy yourself time to think](#)
- [try some calming techniques](#)

**Remember:** if your outbursts can be violent or abusive this can cause serious problems in your life and relationships, and can be very damaging to the people around you. In this case, it's essential to seek professional [treatment and support](#) for your anger.

## Look out for warning signs

Anger can cause a rush of adrenaline through your body, so before you recognise the emotion you're feeling you might notice:

- your heart is beating faster
- your breathing is quicker
- your body is becoming tense
- your feet are tapping
- you're clenching your jaw or fists

[Recognising these signs](#) gives you the chance to think about how you want to react to a situation before doing anything. This can be difficult in the heat of the moment, but the earlier you notice how you're feeling, the easier it can be to choose how to manage your anger.

Breathing techniques have helped me to control my anger. I know that if I take a moment to concentrate on my breathing and not my anger, I'll have something else to focus on.

## Buy yourself time to think

Sometimes when we're feeling angry, we just need to walk away from the situation for a while. This can give you time to work out what you're thinking about the situation, decide how you want to react to it and feel more in control. Some ways you can buy yourself time to think are:

- Counting to 10 before you react.
- Taking yourself out of the situation by going for a short walk – even if it's just around your block or local area.
- Talking to a trusted person who's not connected to the situation, such as a friend, family member, counsellor or peer support group. Expressing your thoughts out loud can help you understand why you're angry and help calm you down. If you don't feel comfortable talking to someone you know, you can confidentially call the [Samaritans](#) 24 hours a day

to talk about anything that's upsetting you. (For other organisations that can help please see our [useful contacts](#) page.)

What helps me is getting away from the situation to cool down.

## Try some techniques to manage your feelings

There are many ways to calm down and let go of angry feelings, depending on what suits you and what's convenient at the time you are angry.

- **Breathe slowly** – try to breathe out for longer than you breathe in and focus on each breath as you take it.
- **Relax your body** – if you can feel your body getting tense, try focusing on each part of your body in turn to tense and then relax your muscles. (See our pages on [relaxation](#) for more tips on how to relax.)
- **Try mindfulness techniques** – mindfulness can help you to be aware of when you're getting angry and can help calm your body and mind down. [Be Mindful](#) has more information on mindfulness and guidance on how to practice it. (See our information on [mindfulness](#) to learn more.)
- **Exercise** – try to work off your anger through exercise. Sports like running or boxing can be really helpful for releasing pent up energy.
- **Use up your energy safely in other ways** – this can help relieve some of your angry feelings in a way that doesn't hurt yourself or others. For example, you could try tearing up a newspaper, hitting a pillow or smashing ice cubes in a sink.
- **Do something to distract yourself mentally or physically** – anything that completely changes your situation, thoughts or patterns can help stop your anger escalating. For example, you could try:
  - putting on upbeat music and dancing
  - doing something with your hands, like fixing something or making something
  - doing something creative like colouring or drawing
  - writing in a journal
  - taking a cold shower

**Remember:** Learning new techniques to help manage your feelings can take time and practice - so try to be patient and gentle with yourself as you learn these new skills.

# How can I control my anger long term?

If you think about how to manage your anger when you're feeling calmer, you can avoid feeling overwhelmed by it in the heat of the moment. In particular, you can:

- [learn your triggers](#)
- [examine your thought patterns](#)
- [develop your communication skills](#)
- [look at your lifestyle](#)

## Learn your triggers

Understanding what sort of situations trigger your anger means you can develop strategies to cope and think about how to react before the situation happens. You might find it helpful to keep a diary or make notes about the times you have felt angry. You could record:

- What were the circumstances?
- Did someone say or do something to trigger your anger?
- How did you feel?
- How did you behave?
- How did you feel afterwards?

If you do this for a while, you might start to see patterns emerging. You could do this yourself using a mood diary (many are available online for free, see our [useful contacts page](#) for suggestions), or you could find a professional therapist to help you – see our page on [treatment and support](#).

Over time I have been able to spot certain triggers, which then enables me to look at myself and choose a healthier path.

## Examine your thought patterns

If you're feeling upset or angry, you might find yourself automatically thinking or saying things like:

- "This is all their fault."
- "They never listen."
- "This always happens to me."
- "Other people should behave better."

But often there are lots of different ways we could interpret a situation. It can make you feel worse if you think in terms of 'always', 'never' and 'should', because in reality things are rarely so black and white. Making an effort to replace these words with softer terms like 'sometimes' or 'could' when thinking about your situation might help you to break up negative thought patterns, reflect more calmly on your situation and find new ways through conflicts.

The best advice I was given was to stop briefly once I am angry to ask myself what painful emotion I am feeling in the situation where I became angry. A bit of compassion for my own pain often stops me from taking that pain out on others.

## **Develop your communication skills**

Being excessively angry and aggressive can get in the way of communicating your feelings and thoughts effectively. People may focus on your anger, and find it hard to listen to what you're saying. On the other hand, if you are able to express your anger by talking in an assertive, respectful way about what has made you angry, then you're more likely to be understood by others.

Being assertive means standing up for yourself while still respecting other people and their opinions. It can:

- make communication easier
- stop tense situations getting out of control
- benefit your relationships and self-esteem

Learning to be assertive might not feel easy to start with, but here are some things to try:

- **Think about the outcome you want to achieve.** What's making you angry, and what do you want to change? Is it enough just to explain what you are angry about?
- **Be specific.** For example, you could open your statement with, "I feel angry with you because..." Using the phrase 'I feel' avoids blaming anyone and the other person is less likely to feel attacked.
- **Really listen to the other person's response** and try to understand their point of view.
- **Be prepared for the conversation to go wrong** and try to spot when this is happening. If you feel yourself getting angry, you might want to come back to the conversation another time.

The organisation MindTools provides [tips on respectful assertiveness](#) on their website.

What helps me is acknowledging how I'm feeling and why, then taking time to address it productively.

## **Look at your lifestyle**

Looking after your wellbeing more generally could help you feel calmer and more in control when things happen that make you feel angry. You might want to:

- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Although you might feel this could help you cope in the short term, alcohol and drugs can both affect your ability to control your emotions and actions, and can be a factor in violence. For information and support to stop using drugs or alcohol you can contact [Turning Point](#) or [Alcoholics Anonymous](#). See our pages on the [mental health effects of alcohol and street drugs](#) for more information.

- **Be more active.** Being active can help let out any tension you're feeling, as well as having benefits to your self-esteem. Even gentle exercise like going for a walk can make a difference. See our pages on [exercise](#) for more information.
- **Get good sleep.** Not sleeping well can have a huge impact on how we're feeling, and how well we cope with things that happen to us. See our pages on [sleep problems](#) for more information.
- **Look at what you're eating and drinking.** See our pages on [food and mood](#) for more information.
- **Learn to deal with pressure.** We can feel pressured or stressed for lots of different reasons, but taking some time to learn how to deal with pressure can help us feel more in control of difficult situations. See our page on [dealing with pressure](#) for more information.
- **Develop your emotional resilience.** Emotional resilience helps us feel more able to handle difficult emotions. See our page on [developing resilience](#) for more information.

Exercise is the best thing to manage my anger. It transforms my mood!