

# How Anger links to other emotions and needs:

## Worksheet: Understanding Anger, Emotions, and Needs

### Purpose

This worksheet is designed to help you understand that **anger is not a “bad” emotion**. Anger often shows up to **protect us** or to signal that **something important is happening underneath**—such as an unmet need, a boundary being crossed, or another difficult emotion that feels harder to notice or express.

By exploring anger in this way, you can learn to respond to it more skillfully rather than feeling controlled by it.

### 1. What Is Anger Trying to Do for Me?

Anger is often a **protective emotion**. It may be trying to:

- Protect your boundaries
- Signal unfairness or injustice
- Push back against feeling powerless
- Give you energy to act or speak up

#### **Reflection:**

When I feel angry, what do I think it is trying to protect me from?

### 2. Anger as a “Secondary” Emotion

Anger frequently sits **on top of other emotions** that may feel more vulnerable or uncomfortable.

Common emotions that can sit underneath anger include:

- Hurt or emotional pain
- Fear or anxiety
- Sadness or grief
- Shame or embarrassment
- Disappointment
- Feeling ignored, rejected, or invalidated

#### **Reflection:**

Before or underneath my anger, I might also be feeling:

### 3. Anger and Unmet Needs

Anger often arises when an **important need is not being met**.

Examples of needs linked to anger:

- Safety or security
- Respect
- Fairness
- Being heard or understood
- Autonomy or control
- Connection or closeness
- Rest or relief from overload

**Reflection:**

When I notice anger, the need that may not be met is:

### 4. How Anger Shows Up in My Body

Anger is not just a thought—it is a **body response**.

Common physical signs of anger include:

- Tight jaw or clenched fists
- Heat in the chest or face
- Shallow or fast breathing
- Restlessness or tension
- Feeling “charged,” agitated, or ready to act

**Reflection:**

In my body, anger usually feels like:

## 5. Responding to Anger with Curiosity (Not Judgment)

Anger is a signal, not a problem to eliminate. Instead of asking “*Why am I like this?*”, try asking:

- *What is my anger telling me right now?*
- *What emotion or need might be underneath?*
- *What would help me feel safer, heard, or more balanced?*

### **Reflection:**

A more helpful response to my anger could be:

### Key Reminder

Anger itself is **not harmful**. What matters is **how we understand it and how we respond to it**. When anger is listened to with curiosity and care, it can guide us toward healthier boundaries, clearer communication, and unmet needs that deserve attention.

# The Anger Iceberg

## Above the Surface (What Others See)

- Anger
- Irritability
- Frustration
- Rage or Outbursts
- Sarcasm / Withdrawal

## Below the Surface (What Is Often Hidden)

### Emotions:

- Hurt
- Fear / Anxiety
- Sadness / Grief
- Shame / Embarrassment
- Loneliness
- Disappointment

### Needs:

- Safety
- Respect
- Fairness
- Being Heard
- Boundaries
- Rest / Relief
- Connection / Reassurance

My Anger Iceberg:

Hidden emotions: \_\_\_\_\_

Unmet needs: \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Message:** Anger is not the problem—it's the signal.  
Look below the surface to understand what your anger is protecting  
and what you need. \_\_\_\_\_

## Baseline Care Matters

Sensitive nervous systems are more vulnerable without basics.

- This will pass.
- Focus only on calming your body right now.
- Avoid big decisions or problem-solving until you feel more settled.

Check-in:

- Have I eaten recently?
- Have I slept enough?
- Have I moved my body?
- Have I had any positive or soothing experiences?

## What Is My Baseline?

My baseline is how okay my body and brain feel on a normal day, before stress happens.

It's my starting level.

## Why Baseline Matters

- A higher baseline = stress feels easier to handle
- A lower baseline = small things can feel big very fast

If I'm struggling, it doesn't mean I'm weak. It often means my baseline is low.

## What Raises My Baseline

(Check what helps you)

- Eating regular meals
- Enough sleep
- Moving my body
- Breaks and rest
- Fun or calm activities
- Feeling safe and supported

## What Lowers My Baseline

- Skipping meals
- Poor sleep
- Too much stress or pressure
- No downtime
- Too much screen time
- Feeling alone or unsafe
- Substances

## Quick Baseline Scale

Right now, my baseline is:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
Very low                      Okay                      Strong

## Important Reminder

Big feelings don't always mean something is wrong. Sometimes my baseline just needs support.

First help the body — then deal with the problem.

# Managing Anger when it overwhelms you

Purpose: Use these tools when you notice sensations in your body such as heat, tingling and pressure. Your body is in a threat response and you may be feeling frustrated, annoyed, irritated, angry or furious.

Anger isn't a bad emotion, and learning how to calm ourselves down when we feel angry can help us learn what the anger is telling us, and once we feel safe enough, also give us access to other important feelings that help tell us what we need.

The goal is not to analyse or make decisions when you feel angry, but to help your nervous system settle.

## First Reminder (Read This First)

These sensations are a sign that your heart is beating faster to pump blood to our arms and legs to get you ready to fight or protect yourself - they do not mean you are in danger - but since you are experiencing the moment might feel very urgent.

- This will pass, just because it feels urgent it doesn't need to be acted on immediately.
- Focus only on calming your body right now, that will help you to make choices from a calm, wise place.
- Avoid big decisions or problem-solving until you feel more settled.

## What Anger Can Feel Like (And Why It Makes Sense)

Anger can feel like:

- Shaking, trembling, or a rush of adrenaline
- Fast heartbeat, chest tightness, hot/cold flashes
- Dizziness, nausea, or feeling "floaty"
- Tingling, numbness, or feeling unreal / detached
- A strong urge to escape, fix, confront, or get reassurance

**Why it makes sense:** Anger is a protective emotion. Your body may be preparing to defend you (fight response), especially if you have been hurt in the past.

**Key point:** Anger is not "bad" — but when your body is in alarm, it helps to **regulate first**, then decide what to do.

## Temperature Reset (Fast-Acting)

Changing temperature can interrupt the body's false alarm system.

Choose ONE option:

- Splash very cold water on your face
- Submerge your face in cold water for 30 seconds
- Hold a cold pack or ice (wrapped in cloth)
- Take a warm shower
- Wrap up in a blanket or use a hot water bottle

Why this helps: Temperature changes help signal safety to the nervous system.

► Optional video: <https://youtu.be/8nVady7A3Qo>

## Soothing Rhythm Breathing

It is important to practice this often, so you can teach your brain that it can help itself when it feeling angry because it is used to feeling a little safer, and calmer, when you breathe slowly and steadily.

**Set up (10s):** Sit somewhere quiet. Feet flat and shoulder-width. Spine tall, shoulders back a touch, chest open.

**Face + focus (10s):** Head upright. Make a gentle, friendly expression. Bring attention to your breathing.

**Notice + return:** Feel the in-breath and out-breath. When your mind drifts, label it ("just thoughts") and kindly return to breath.

**Find the soothing rhythm (20s +):** Experiment until it feels calming usually a bit slower/deeper but still comfortable. Aim for smooth, even breaths.

**Stay with it (5 min):** Each exhale: imagine your body **slowing down** and getting **heavier**, supported by the chair and grounded feet. Keep returning gently. Then open your eyes and reorient to the room.

Goal: Reconnect with a felt sense of safety, not perfect calm.

Optional recording: [soothing rhythm breathing](#)

## Tense and Release

**Set up (10s):** Sit or stand with feet grounded. Take one slow breath in and out. Tell yourself: *"I'm releasing anger from my body."*

**Tense (5s):** Clench your fists, tighten your arms, jaw, shoulders, and stomach. Tense firmly but safely.

**Notice:** While holding the tension, notice where anger shows up in your body (heat, pressure, tightness).

**Release (8–10s):** Let everything go at once. Exhale slowly. Imagine anger draining downward into the floor.

**Repeat 3–5 times:** Each round, tense slightly less. End by noticing any softness, space, or steadiness in your body.

► Optional video: <https://youtu.be/OVpOn4pqN8o>

## Self Compassion (Step by Step)

1. **Stop and notice** (I am angry, it's OKAY to feel this way).
2. **Settle** - breathe deeply and use a gentle, non judgemental tone with yourself.
3. **It makes sense** that I feel this way (validate without looking for the reason).
4. **Encourage** yourself gently, kindly and firmly toward a helpful behaviour or response.

Notice: You may need to combine a physical settling (breathing, temperature, releasing tension) with a supportive, gentle inner tone in order to help yourself feel safer and calmer.

# Important

When you are distressed, your brain temporarily loses access to clear thinking.

This is **not** the time to:

- Analyse what's happening
- Make decisions
- Judge yourself
- Make relationship choices or communicate about important issues

Your **only task** right now is regulation.

Regulation takes time. You can expect this to take **at least 15 minutes**. If you need to take some space to calm down, you can say “

Speak to yourself **gently and reassuringly**. You can say “I am feeling angry right now, this is a sign I am not feeling safe, and need to settle my nervous system before I act.”

Harsh or self-critical thoughts can re-trigger the alarm system, because the nervous system is very sensitive to attacks — **even internal ones**.

Supportive encouragement helps your body feel safe enough to settle.

**This is an alarm and it does not make you an angry person, you are learning how to calm your alarm so you can learn what your anger is telling you about what you need.**

# Emergency Grounding Step by Step for emotional flashbacks (anger and rage).

Use this when you feel flooded, angry, rageful or disconnected — like you are not safe, even though your logical mind can see that you are safe.

This can be an **emotional flashback**: your body is reacting to old danger signals in the present. You may feel like you are back in a situation where violence or fighting is the only way to stay safe. **If you can, say “I need a minute” and take some space. If this is not possible, e.g. you are in a situation that makes you feel trapped (even a safe one) then focus on the grounding techniques that help calm down your adrenaline.**

Your goal is to **return to the present moment** and help your nervous system recognise safety again.

If you know the time that the flashback relates to, pay attention to what is different **now. Notice detailed differences and use a sense of smell like a strong essential oil or a sense of taste like a sour sweet to help your body switch attention to the NOW.**



## ORIENT TO NOW

- Look around and name 3 things you can see
- Say your name and today's date or notice other things about now that help you feel present
- Say: “I am safe right now. This is a false alarm, not danger.”

## Sensory Regulation

Use sensation to remind yourself you don't need to fight.



- Weighted blanket, firm pressure, tight hoodie
- Rocking, pacing, or repetitive safe movement
- Strong but neutral input (mint, sour candy, textured object)
- Low lighting or eyes closed (only if grounding, not dissociative)
- Noise-cancelling headphones, brown or white noise

**If dissociation increases, switch to movement or temperature.**

## SOOTHING BREATHING

(No forcing. Gentle only.)

breathe

- In through nose (count 3–4)
- Out through mouth (count 5–6)
- Pause if dizzy
- 3–5 rounds only

## RELEASE THE ADRENALINE (Stay in the Present)



- Stomp feet or press heels into floor
- Clench fists → release
- Push palms into wall or thighs

Do not revisit memories or try understand why you feel this way. Focus only on sensation.

## TEMPERATURE RESET



Trauma responses are stored in the body.

Choose:

- Cold water on face or ice in hands
- Warm shower, blanket, or hot water bottle

## CONTAIN THE BODY



Choose what feels least overwhelming.

- Sit with feet firmly on the floor
- Lean back into a chair or wall
- Wrap arms around torso or use a weighted item

## WAIT & ALLOW



- Give your nervous system 15–30 minutes
- No decisions. No self-judgement.
- Waves rise and fall.

## Gentle reminder

A lot of people who experience emotional flashbacks describe that it takes them back to feeling very vulnerable, or as if though they are a small furious child inside. This is a very common and human experience and **it is not your fault**. This happens because the human brain is very tricky and it can store overwhelming painful emotional memories separate to regular ones. The part of the brain that is signalling to you that you aren't safe is signalling false alarms and that is not your fault.

Many people who have this experience are self critical, they may turn the anger inward and they may say cruel things to themselves, that they feel ashamed of because they wouldn't speak that way to another person. Sometimes they may even think they deserve this criticism because they blame themselves or feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed. Experiencing with these thoughts can feel very overwhelming when you are having an emotional flashback. These thoughts can also make emotional flashbacks more intense and commonly lead to urges to cope in ways that can have harmful unintended consequences. In that sense, they are **not helpful**.



Instead of engaging with self-critical thoughts, you can choose to shift your intention and attention to being **helpful** to yourself. You can do this by making a commitment to be helpful and to focus on soothing and settling, and letting yourself feel a little bit safer by using the techniques provided. You can also use [soothing rhythm breathing](#) and **safe place exercises**

🌐 **Mindful relaxation exercises: safe place imagery** .

Remember, this is a journey, not of blaming but of taking responsibility to be helpful to yourself and to be supportive and encouraging to that part of yourself that had to fight to survive. With time things can change and your therapist is here to help you.

**You are already being very helpful to yourself by seeking support, and learning these new ways of coping. So that is a great step in the right direction.**