

## Responses to anger

Just as it is important to have a radar for the signs of anger in your life, it is equally important for all of us to have ways of managing anger. The goal is to keep you on track and make sure anger does not overwhelm you. This next section will offer some practical ideas.

### Time out

Sometimes you just need to take time out to remove yourself from stressful and escalating situations, especially if other people are also struggling with anger, or feeling overwhelmed or unsafe. In taking time out, the idea is not to avoid having an important conversation—it is to make sure you are in a safe, helpful, and respectful place to have that conversation.

Typically, the degree of anger you are experiencing will influence the amount of time you need to return to a good space, and what the most appropriate strategy is for becoming calmer. The higher the levels of anger you are experiencing, then the longer the time out, and the more physically active you want to become. Some people find going for a long walk, run, or bike ride helpful. Some people find just getting outside, going to a park or walking around the block, is enough.

When you are away from the situation, actively work to calm yourself and get back on track. You might listen to relaxing or distracting music, talk to a trusted friend, have a tea or coffee, read, or even watch some television. Drinking alcohol when angry is not going to be helpful.

**Remember:** If you're taking time out from a charged situation, it is important to let other people know you are taking a break, to give them an indicator of when you'll be back, and your intention to resolve any difficulties in a respectful way.

### Remember to breathe

If you notice yourself becoming angry, take time to breathe. Insufficient air in your lungs will impact on your ability to process thoughts and make informed decisions. Slow your breathing, and follow breath travelling all the way down into your lungs. Consciously taking control of your breathing, and reducing the amount you breathe into your chest, lowers blood pressure and provides a better perspective to experience intense thoughts and feelings. You can check whether you are breathing with your diaphragm by placing a hand on your chest and on your stomach—you should aim to have only the hand on your stomach move.

### Note to self

When anger is around, a reminder to yourself about what is important for you can be helpful in keeping you on track. Make a note on your phone, or on a piece of paper that you keep in your wallet, detailing a few pointers about how you want to treat people and the kind of person you want to be seen as. The next time you are in a situation where you experience anger, take the time to read this note to yourself, and remember why you wrote these down in the first place.

### **Become an observer of anger**

If we think of anger and a collection of thoughts and feelings, one way to take control is to try and unhook yourself from these expressions of anger by becoming a curious observer. Try to notice whether the thought is in the form of a voice, or of an image in your mind. If the most obvious thing about anger is the feeling of tension, or a sensation in your body, then see if you can describe it—its size, mass, weight, colour, form—as if you are curious scientist studying something. The trick is to observe anger as it appears in the present, without setting up a struggle with anger where you become frustrated at being angry. This observing approach to anger will reduce the possibility of becoming aggressive, finding yourself stewing over and over something, and becoming overwhelmed to the point where anger seems to take hold of you. Note that becoming an observer of anger takes some practice, and becomes easier to do when you develop an observing approach to other emotions.

### **Note the way that anger is a product of the interplay between thoughts, feelings, and actions**

On a day where you notice anger is around, take time out to record what happened in the lead up to feeling anger. Pay extra attention to any thoughts, even if they don't immediately seem relevant to the event. Note how those thoughts might have influenced your emotions and actions. Mapping out these thoughts, feelings, and how you chose to act can be helpful for you to see what was going on, and how some of your expectations or beliefs can influence feelings of anger, and either escalate or de-escalate the feelings of tension, frustration, or anger in different situations. People are often surprised to learn that anger doesn't just explode out of nowhere.

Developing a more comprehensive understanding of how thoughts, feelings, and actions work to influence anger will help you to identify your personal triggers for anger. Some people find it useful to reflect on the different ways that their parents or those close to them express anger, and how this has influenced or shaped their own experience.