



# Managing Anger

A Reflection Exercise

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Emotions are dynamic. Emotions are not bad. Rather they are powerful in how we experience the world. What often becomes the challenge is how we express our emotions. We often benefit from them as well as experience moments that we "wish" we could hit the rewind button.

Often, at the top of the list sits - **Anger**.

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### **Purpose:**

The following guide is intended to support your effort in understanding the inputs that **activate Anger** for you. (Awareness) As well as share strategies for regulating how you experience and express anger. (Skills) Finally, offer suggestions for learning how to manage all of your emotions. (Agency)

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### **What is Anger?**

Anger is a naturally occurring emotion.

Anger impacts your body. When we get angry the nervous system activates the body to respond - as needed to real and imagined threats. Neurochemicals and hormones are released, creating energy to act. Adrenaline is released. The heart pumps faster. Blood flows more quickly. Muscles tense.

Anger can manifest in more ways than "bad." Anger is equally a "productive" emotion. Anger can...

- Support efforts in reaching goals - Frustration can be a motivator.
- Assist in solving problems - Frustration can be a signal you have unmet needs.
- Identify emergencies - Anger can provide the burst of energy needed to respond.
- Protect self and others - Fear can deliver the strength to defend.
- Release tension - Participating in activities that enable a release.

With that said - Anger can manifest in unhealthy ways which may include tense muscles, tight fists, clenched jaw, increased heartbeat, faster breathing, trembling, flushed in the face, upset stomach, increase in tone, rapid speech, etc.

**Reflection:** What are the signs that Anger is building inside of you?

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### **What are the causes of Anger?**

It depends - each person and their life experiences contribute to activating Anger in life's moments.

Contributions can be triggered by external and internal factors. Externally - the environment has a tremendous impact. Internally - Stressors related to work, family, relationships, finances, etc. can lead to frustration, fear, annoyances, disappointment, and resentment. All of which can be expressed through Anger.

Anger can also sneak up and surprise you. Clues that Anger may be building include disproportionate reactions to typical situations, misdirecting Anger at unsuspecting friends, colleagues, or strangers, personalizing a comment that may normally be laughed at or ignored, or situations where you may be increasing the need for control and compliance with others and/or the environment.

An often-overlooked contributor to Anger is Self-Talk. What we say to ourselves. While external voices have an impact on us - we have the ability to walk away. Ignore it. On the other hand - a voice that can be difficult to silence is our inner voice.

Which means it is important to build awareness with both external influences and to identify the impact from our inner experience which includes the words, language, and stories that we tell ourselves. As it is often said "garbage in - garbage out."

Building a practice of healthy self-talk vs. negative criticism and blame can contribute tremendously to managing our Anger.

**Reflection:** What contributes to your Anger?

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### **What is the impact of Anger?**

When Anger is channeled and expressed unproductively - it can have a ripple effect across personal, professional, and social domains.

Anger can negatively impact one's health. When Anger lingers it can lead to poor decision making, disrupt relationships, impact self-esteem, poor performance on the job, lead to cycles of depression, and open the door to unhealthy coping choices - such as alcohol and/or drugs.

Explicit examples of the negative impact from Anger can be illustrated through verbal attacks, physical assaults, abuse, and criminal behavior. Which can be a result of not letting go - seeking retaliation, keeping it bottled up - exploding, isolation, withdrawal, lack of responsibility by blaming others, and matching others Anger with your Anger.

**Reflection:** How has Anger impacted you?

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### **How to navigate Anger.**

The first step in managing Anger is awareness.

By developing your attunement (Awareness) you can begin the practice of pro-actively noticing when the emotion may or may not be triggered. You will empower yourself to notice the warning signs and have a plan (Strategies) to navigate the circumstances.

An effective skill to begin with is practicing "the pause." Stepping away and removing yourself from the situation, person, environment, etc.

Be open to developing a diverse set of skills to support your efforts in noticing, naming, and taking action to self-soothe yourself in an effort to down regulate the expression of Anger.

Remember - it's natural to experience Anger - how we express it - is the opportunity. A series of suggestions on ways to manage Anger is provided in the appendix of this communication.

**Reflection:** What strategies help you manage and navigate Anger?

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## Sources of Support.

Building awareness, skills, and practicing how we express our emotions is a life-long effort. During particular times of life - it can be hard. Difficult. It can even feel insurmountable to manage our emotions.

Which is why it is important to build a team to support your efforts. Friends and family can be helpful - but they have their limits. They have their lives to navigate. Therefore, in addition to friends and family, we encourage you to develop support(s) through primary care physicians, mental health professionals, social workers, crisis hotlines, support groups, leverage employee assistance programs (EAP), religious or cultural leaders, etc.

Building out your team - asking for help contributes to setting yourself up for long-term success.

**Reflection:** Who's on your team? List the people, places, and things that offer additional support outside of you.

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## Appendix

Each person is unique, and our sensory systems respond differently, which is why we encourage you to be open to testing and learning what works for you - based on the environment and circumstances.

Don't forget that your **baseline activities** may need a check-in.

- How's your sleep hygiene?
- How's your nutrition?
- How's your hydration?
- How's your supplementation?

## First things first...

As often as you can, especially before/after a transition, try to pause to check-in with a **body scan** to notice how you are feeling.

## Check-in with your...

- **Mind** - What thoughts are present? What am I focusing on?
- **Emotions** - What feelings are present? How am I expressing my emotions?
- **Breath** - Am I holding or restricting my breathing? Am I chest or belly breathing?
- **Body** - What sensations am I experiencing?
- **Energy** - Do I feel fatigued? Do I feel energized?
- **Environment** - Is it a familiar place? Am I safe? Is it a new place?

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Next, take a moment to **differentiate the type of emotions** that may be occurring. Understanding this distinction helps reduce emotional reaction and can help point you towards the right tool for the right job.

**Primary Emotions:** Your first, instinctual reaction

- Felt in the body (e.g., fear, sadness, joy)
- Natural and typical responses
- Example: Feeling grief when losing someone you love.

**Secondary Emotions:** Your reaction to your reaction

- Shaped by thoughts, judgment, or social conditioning
- Example: Feeling shame about being anxious, or anger about feeling hurt.

Then, as you discover what you need, respond through one or many tactics that may support your effort to manage what you are experiencing or manage the moment.

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**Finally, be open to exploring** what you can try?

- Would taking a **breath** with a long exhale support you in the moment?
- Could some form of **movement** help you in this situation?
- Can you **shake it out** or tremor like an animal in the wild?
- Is there a **statement or mantra** that you could repeat to yourself?
- Can you find something **funny or humorous** to disrupt the emotion?
- What happens if you **pray** during this emotion?
- What happens when you **talk to yourself** in the 2nd/3rd person during the emotion?
- Can you **reframe** or **reappraise** the situation by reshaping a different story about what is happening?
- Try to press your **hands on your thighs** and push.
- What happens if you **focus on the belief** associated with emotion?
- What happens if you **visualize a balloon**? Imagine filling the balloon with your breath, and as you exhale, visualize releasing that emotion into the balloon. Watch as the balloon expands with each inhale and gently floats away with each exhale, carrying away the emotion.
- Try to **acknowledge** the moment or feeling. *"Name it to tame it..."*
- Can you extend **loving kindness** towards yourself during the emotion?
- Can you **set a timer** for how long you express the emotion?

- What happens if you take off your shoes, socks, etc. and **step or press your feet into the ground** and feel the earth beneath you?
- What happens if you **press your hands** against a wall?
- What happens if you **squeeze your hands** into a fist and release?
- What happens when you **shake your hands** back and forth?
- What happens if you **flex your leg muscles** then release?
- Is there **someone** who can support you during this emotion?
- Can you try to take a pause. **Be still.**
- Is there something you can **taste, touch, or smell** during this emotion?
- Can you **focus your gaze** on an object during this emotion?
- Is there something you can **listen** to during this emotion?
- What happens when you try to **balance on one foot** during this emotion?
- What happens if you **bounce on a ball** during the emotion?
- Can you **sip** some water during this emotion?
- Try **chewing** on a stick of gum during this emotion...
- Can you **stretch** out the tension during this emotion?
- What happens if you **walk away** during this emotion?
- What happens if you try to **clean or organize** during this emotion?
- What happens if you **write or offload** the emotion onto a dump pad?
- Can you **change the environment** and go somewhere else?
- Can you find a **space in nature** to sit and be with the emotion?
- What happens if you place **something cold** on your neck or face during this emotion?
- What happens if you can **sit on a swing and sway back and forth** during this emotion?
- Can you **distract** yourself with an object or activity during this emotion?
- Can you pull on a rubber band to **snap out of it** during this emotion?
- What happens if you practice bilateral actions such as **tapping, clapping, or drumming** on something during this emotion?
- What happens if you sit with your **palms facing up** during this emotion?
- Can you **twist side to side** or **rock back and forth** in a chair during this emotion?

- Can you find a set of stairs and **walk up a few flights** at a brisk pace?
- What happens if you **imagine a staircase** with steps leading down to a place of calmness and relaxation. With each step you take down the staircase, count backward from ten to one, visualizing yourself becoming increasingly relaxed and at ease with each step.
- Can you **push, pull, or lift** something to process the emotion?
- Can you try a **butterfly hug** - by crossing your arms over your chest and alternating by tapping your shoulders with your hands in a rhythmic pattern.