

What is Anger?

Anger is a difficult feeling. When you're angry, you might do bad things that you wouldn't do if you were happy. But did you know that it's normal to feel angry from time to time? It happens to everyone.



Draw a picture of what you look like when you're angry.

A large, empty rectangular area with rounded corners and a dashed black border, intended for a child to draw a picture of themselves when angry.

What's something you say only when you're angry?

A large, empty speech bubble shape with a solid black border and rounded corners, intended for a child to write down something they say when angry.

Anger Diary

Anger has a way of sneaking up and taking control of our thoughts and actions before we realize what's happening. Fortunately, with practice, you can get better at catching your anger long before it takes over. Keeping an *Anger Diary* will help you achieve that goal.

Instructions: Either at the end of the day, or a few hours after your anger has passed, take a moment to reflect on a situation where you felt angry, or even just a bit frustrated. By following the example, take a few notes about the event. After recording five events, complete the review.

Example	Trigger	"My husband tracked mud all over the carpet and didn't even notice. I had just mopped a few days ago, so I lost it."
	Warning Signs	"Before I got really angry, I noticed that my hands were shaking and I was argumentative. Then, as I got angrier, my face felt really hot."
	Anger Response	"I screamed at my husband. I wanted to throw something, but I didn't. I couldn't stop thinking about how selfish he is."
	Outcome	"My husband ended up getting really angry too, and we argued for hours. It was miserable. I went to bed feeling guilty and sad."

Event One	Trigger	
	Warning Signs	
	Anger Response	
	Outcome	

Event Two	Trigger	
	Warning Signs	
	Anger Response	
	Outcome	

Anger Diary

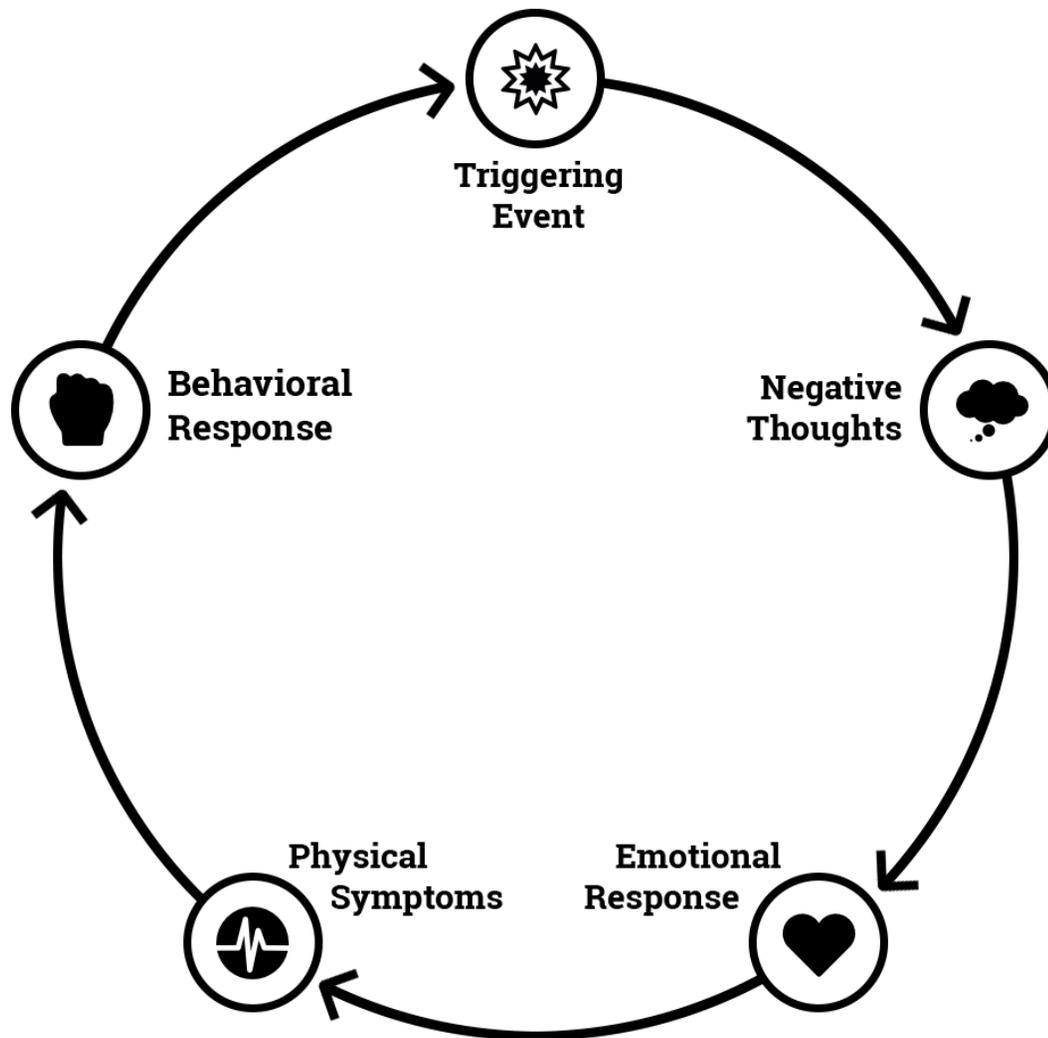
Event Three	Trigger	
	Warning Signs	
	Anger Response	
	Outcome	

Event Four	Trigger	
	Warning Signs	
	Anger Response	
	Outcome	

Event Five	Trigger	
	Warning Signs	
	Anger Response	
	Outcome	

Review	Do you notice any patterns related to your anger?	
	Generally, how would you like to react differently?	

The Cycle of Anger



Triggering Event

An event or situation “triggers” a person’s anger. Examples:

- Getting cut off while driving.
- Having a bad day at work.
- Feeling disrespected.

Negative Thoughts

Irrational and negative thoughts occur as a result of the triggering event. Examples:

- “I’m the worst parent ever.”
- “The jerk who cut me off doesn’t care about anyone but themselves.”

Emotional Response

Negative thoughts lead to negative emotions, even if the thoughts are irrational. Examples:

- Feelings of shame and guilt due to being the “worst parent ever”.
- Rage directed toward a bad driver.

Physical Symptoms

The body automatically responds to anger with several symptoms. Examples:

- Racing Heart
- Sweating
- Clenched Fists
- Shaking

Behavioral Response

The person reacts based upon thoughts, feelings, and physical symptoms. Examples:

- Fighting
- Arguing
- Yelling
- Criticizing

Weekly Mood Chart

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6 AM – 10 AM							
10 AM – 2 PM							
2 PM – 6 PM							
6 PM – 10 PM							
10 PM – 2 AM							
2 AM – 6 AM							

Daily Mood Chart

	Happy	Sad	Mad	Tired	Excited	Anxious	Other	Notes
6 AM – 8 AM								
8 AM – 10 AM								
10 AM – 12 PM								
12 PM – 2 PM								
2 PM – 4 PM								
4 PM – 6 PM								
6 PM – 8 PM								
8 PM – 10 PM								
10 PM – 12 AM								
12 AM – 2 AM								
2 AM – 4 AM								
4 AM – 6 AM								

Fair Fighting Rules

Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.

Are you angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you angry because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

Discuss one topic at a time.

Don't let "You left dishes in the sink" turn into "You watch too much TV." Discussions that get off-topic are more likely to get heated, and less likely to solve the original problem. Choose one topic and stick to it.

No degrading language.

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure your partner feels just as bad. Doing so leads to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

Express your feelings with words.

"I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." Structure your sentences as "I" statements ("I feel *emotion* when *event*") to express how you feel while taking responsibility for your emotions. However, starting with "I" does not give a license to ignore the other fair fighting rules.

Take turns speaking.

Give your full attention while your partner speaks. Avoid making corrections or thinking about what you want to say. Your only job is to understand their point of view, even if you disagree. If you find it difficult to not interrupt, try setting a timer allowing 1-2 minutes for each person to speak without interruption.

No stonewalling.

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you absolutely cannot go on, tell your partner you need to take a time-out. Agree to resume the discussion later.

No yelling.

Yelling does not help anyone see your point of view. Instead, it sends the message that only your words matter. Even if yelling intimidates your partner into giving up, the underlying problem only grows worse.

Take a time-out if things get too heated.

In a perfect world, we would all follow these rules 100% of the time... but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, take a time-out. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this means some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, simply taking the time to understand your partner's perspective can help soothe negative feelings.

Anger Discussion Questions

1 Although it might sometimes feel like your anger “explodes” and comes out of nowhere, this is almost never the case. Anger builds slowly, and if you aren’t paying attention, it can happen entirely outside of your awareness. Can you think of a time when your anger caught you by surprise? In retrospect, were there any warning signs you could’ve picked up on?

2 Some people describe anger as a “secondary emotion”. This means that anger is a response to a *primary* emotion, such as hurt, fear, or sadness. For example, someone might feel hurt, and lash out with anger in response. Do you think anger is a secondary emotion? Why or why not?

3 Many of us pick up life-long habits related to anger when we’re children, based off of the examples set by our parents. Do you notice any similarities between how you and your family members deal with anger? What are your family’s strengths and weaknesses in dealing with anger?

4 Everyone experiences anger—it’s a completely normal emotion, and it’s healthy within limits. But as we know, anger can become a problem when it gets out of control. When *is* anger healthy, and when does it become unhealthy or harmful?

5 People can express their anger through words, actions, art, or any number of other ways. Do you express your anger in any healthy ways, and if so, what are they? What do you think might happen if you *never* expressed your anger?

6 How you think about a situation can influence how you feel about it. For example, if you think that someone “has it out for you”, you will probably see all of their actions in a negative light. Can you think of a time when your thoughts affected your anger? In what ways could changing how you think help you control how you feel?

7 What would it look like if someone was really good at managing their anger? Not just hiding their anger or ignoring it, but managing it in a genuinely healthy way. Do you know anyone who manages their anger well?

The Fight-or-Flight Response

Fact Sheet

► What is the fight-or-flight response?

The **fight-or-flight response** is one of the tools your body uses to protect you from danger. When you feel threatened, the fight-or-flight response is automatically triggered, and several physiological changes prepare you to either confront or flee from the threat.

► What are the symptoms of fight-or-flight?

- Increased heart rate
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Shaking
- Racing thoughts
- Nausea / “butterflies” in stomach
- Sweating
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Tensed muscles

► How is the fight-or-flight response triggered?

Even threats to emotional well-being, such as the fear of embarrassment before giving a presentation, can trigger the fight-or-flight response. In these cases, the symptoms often do more harm than good. An increased heart rate and sweating might help you escape from a bear, but they won't do much to help you look cool and collected during a presentation.

► Is the fight-or-flight response bad?

Everyone will experience the fight-or-flight response at times, to varying degrees. Usually, it's natural, healthy, and not a problem. However, when the fight-or-flight response leads to excessive anger, anxiety, prolonged stress, or other problems, it might be time to intervene.

► How can I manage the fight-or-flight response?

In addition to the fight-or-flight response, your body can also initiate an opposing **relaxation response**. Many symptoms of the relaxation response counteract fight-or-flight, such as slower and deeper breathing, relaxed muscles, and a slower heart rate. The relaxation response can be triggered by using relaxation skills, such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.

Triggers



Trigger: A stimulus—such as a person, place, situation, or thing—that contributes to an unwanted emotional or behavioral response.

The Problem

Describe the problem your triggers are contributing to. What's the worst-case scenario, if you are exposed to your triggers?

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Trigger Categories

Just about *anything* can be a trigger. To begin exploring your own triggers, think about each of the categories listed below. Is there a specific emotion that acts as a trigger for you? How about a person or place? List your responses in the provided spaces.

Emotional State	<hr/> <hr/>
People	<hr/> <hr/>
Places	<hr/> <hr/>
Things	<hr/> <hr/>
Thoughts	<hr/> <hr/>
Activities / Situations	<hr/> <hr/>

Tips for Dealing with Triggers

- Oftentimes, the best way to deal with a trigger is to avoid it. This might mean making changes to your lifestyle, relationships, or daily routine.
- Create a strategy to deal with your triggers head on, just in case. Your strategy might include coping skills, a list of trusted people you can talk to, or rehearsed phrases to help you get out of a troublesome situation.
- Don't wait until the heat of the moment to test your coping strategy. *Practice!*

Triggers



In this section, you will develop a plan for dealing with your three biggest triggers. Review your plan regularly, and practice each of the strategies.

Describe your three biggest triggers, in detail.

Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

Describe your strategy for *avoiding or reducing exposure* to each trigger.

Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

Describe your strategy for dealing with each trigger head on, when they cannot be avoided.

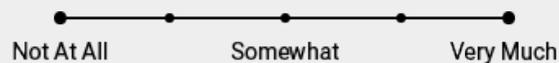
Trigger	#1	
	#2	
	#3	

When is Anger a Problem?

In small doses, anger is an appropriate, normal, and healthy emotion. Everyone experiences anger. It helps us stand up for ourselves when we've been wronged, and protect our own needs. However, in many circumstances, anger can have negative repercussions. Below are examples of how anger can be harmful, or cause unwanted consequences.

Anger is a problem when it negatively affects others. Anger drives people to act in a way that's unpleasant or harmful to those around them. This can result in straining or losing important relationships. It can be difficult to maintain healthy relationships when anger is out of control.

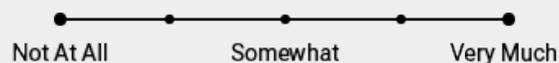
How much does this problem apply to you?



How has your anger impacted other people?

Anger is a problem when it hinders performance at work or school. Anger can lead to breakdowns in communication, making it difficult to work with others. Additionally, being preoccupied with anger harms one's ability to concentrate on work or school tasks.

How much does this problem apply to you?



How has anger negatively affected your performance at work or school?

When is Anger a Problem?

Anger is a problem when it negatively affects health or well-being. Anger affects both physical and emotional health. Physically, anger contributes to problems such as high blood pressure and heart attacks. Emotionally, anger contributes to anxiety, depression, and drug and alcohol use.

How much does this problem apply to you?



How has anger negatively affected your physical or emotional health?

Anger is a problem when it is too intense. Even when anger is justified, it can be a problem if it goes too far. For example, physical aggression can lead to severe consequences such as physical harm to one's self or others, property damage, and legal trouble. A verbal outburst that's out of proportion to a situation may lead to losing a job, permanently damaging a relationship, or other consequences.

How much does this problem apply to you?



When was a time that your anger was too intense?

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are actions we take—consciously or unconsciously—to deal with stress, problems, or uncomfortable emotions. Unhealthy coping strategies tend to feel good in the moment, but have long-term negative consequences. Healthy coping strategies may not provide instant gratification, but they lead to long-lasting positive outcomes.

Examples of <u>unhealthy</u> coping strategies:	Examples of <u>healthy</u> coping strategies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drug or alcohol use• Overeating• Procrastination• Sleeping too much or too little• Social withdrawal• Self-harm• Aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exercise• Talking about your problem• Healthy eating• Seeking professional help• Relaxation techniques (e.g. deep breathing)• Using social support• Problem-solving techniques

Example Scenarios

Noelle has a research paper due in one of her classes. Because the paper will require so much work, Noelle feels anxious every time she thinks about it. When Noelle distracts herself with other activities, she feels better. Noelle uses the coping strategy of procrastination to avoid her feelings of anxiety. This helps her feel better now, but will cause problems in the long run.

Juan feels jealous whenever his wife spends time with her friends. To control the situation, Juan uses insults to put down his wife's friends, and he demands that his wife stay home. When Juan's wife caves to his demands, he feels a sense of relief. Juan uses the coping strategy of aggression to avoid the discomfort of jealousy.

Rebecca is angry about being passed over for a promotion at work. Rather than discussing the situation with her boss and trying to improve her work performance, she holds onto her anger. Rebecca has learned to manage her anger by drinking alcohol. Drinking numbs Rebecca's anger temporarily, but the problems at work remain unresolved.

Scenario Discussion Questions

- What consequences might result from this individual's unhealthy coping strategy?
- What healthy coping strategies could be helpful for the individual?
- What barriers might be preventing the individual from using healthy coping strategies?

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Describe a problem you are currently dealing with:

--

My unhealthy coping strategies:	Consequences of unhealthy coping strategies:
1	
2	

Healthy coping strategies I use, or could use:	Expected outcomes of healthy coping strategies:	Barriers to using healthy coping strategies:
1		
2		
3		

Deep Breathing



Deep Breathing: a relaxation technique performed by purposefully taking slow, deep breaths. When practiced regularly, deep breathing provides both immediate and long-term relief from stress and anxiety.

How Deep Breathing Works

During periods of anxiety, the body triggers a set of symptoms called the **stress response**. Breathing becomes shallow and rapid, heart rate increases, and muscles become tense. In opposition to the stress response is the **relaxation response**. Breathing becomes deeper and slower, and the symptoms of anxiety fade away. Deep breathing triggers this response.

Instructions

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, if you would like to do so. When you're learning, try placing a hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, you should notice it rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.



- 1 Inhale.** Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.
- 2 Pause.** Hold the air in your lungs for 4 seconds.
- 3 Exhale.** Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.
Tip: Pucker your lips, as if you are blowing through a straw, to slow your exhalation.
- 4 Repeat.** Practice for at least 2 minutes, but preferably 5 to 10 minutes.

Tips

- If it isn't working, *slow down!* The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do so.
- Counting out your breaths serves a second purpose. It takes your mind off the source of your anxiety. Whenever you catch your mind wandering, simply return your focus to counting.
- The times we use for each step are suggestions, and can be lengthened or decreased. Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so, or decrease the time if you feel discomfort.

Anger Stop Signs



Anger starts out small, and slowly grows. When your anger is small, you might not even notice it. This is when you are just starting to feel upset about something, but it still doesn't seem like a big deal. Someone at this point might say they are "annoyed".

Draw what you look like when your anger is *small*. This is when you're just a little bit angry.



If your anger has the chance to grow too big, it becomes hard to control. It's like a car without brakes, crashing through everything in its path. It's very hard to stop. Someone who's this angry might yell, hit, cry, or try to break things.

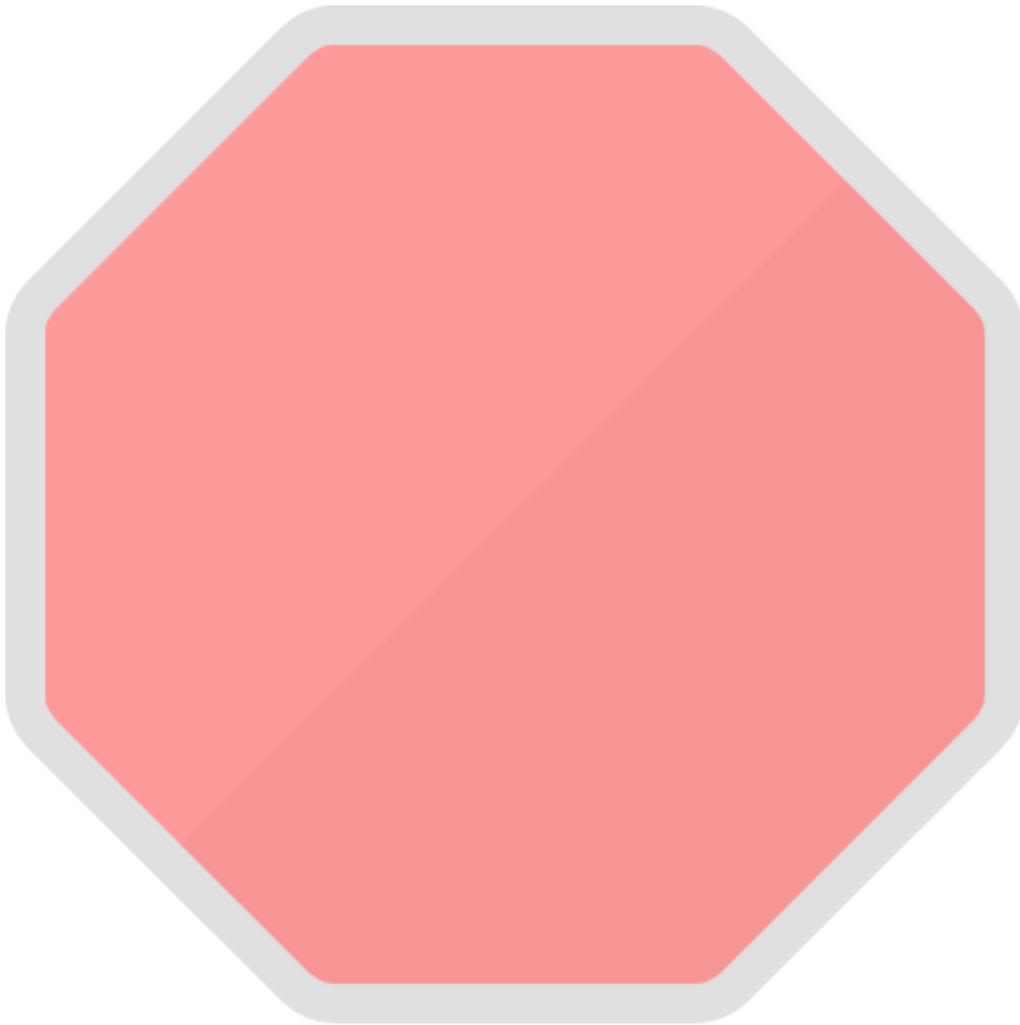
Draw what you look like when your anger is *big*. This is when you're very angry.

Anger Stop Signs



Anger stop signs are clues that your body uses to let you know your anger is growing. These clues start to appear while your anger is still small. If you notice them in time, you can hit the brakes, and take control of your anger before it grows too big.

Everyone has their own anger stop signs. It's important to learn what yours are, so you can spot them in the future. Write your anger stop signs in the space below.



Common Anger Stop Signs

My face feels hot.

I start to shake.

I raise my voice.

I go quiet.

My eyes get watery.

I try to bother people.

I can't think straight.

I feel annoyed.

I want to hit something.

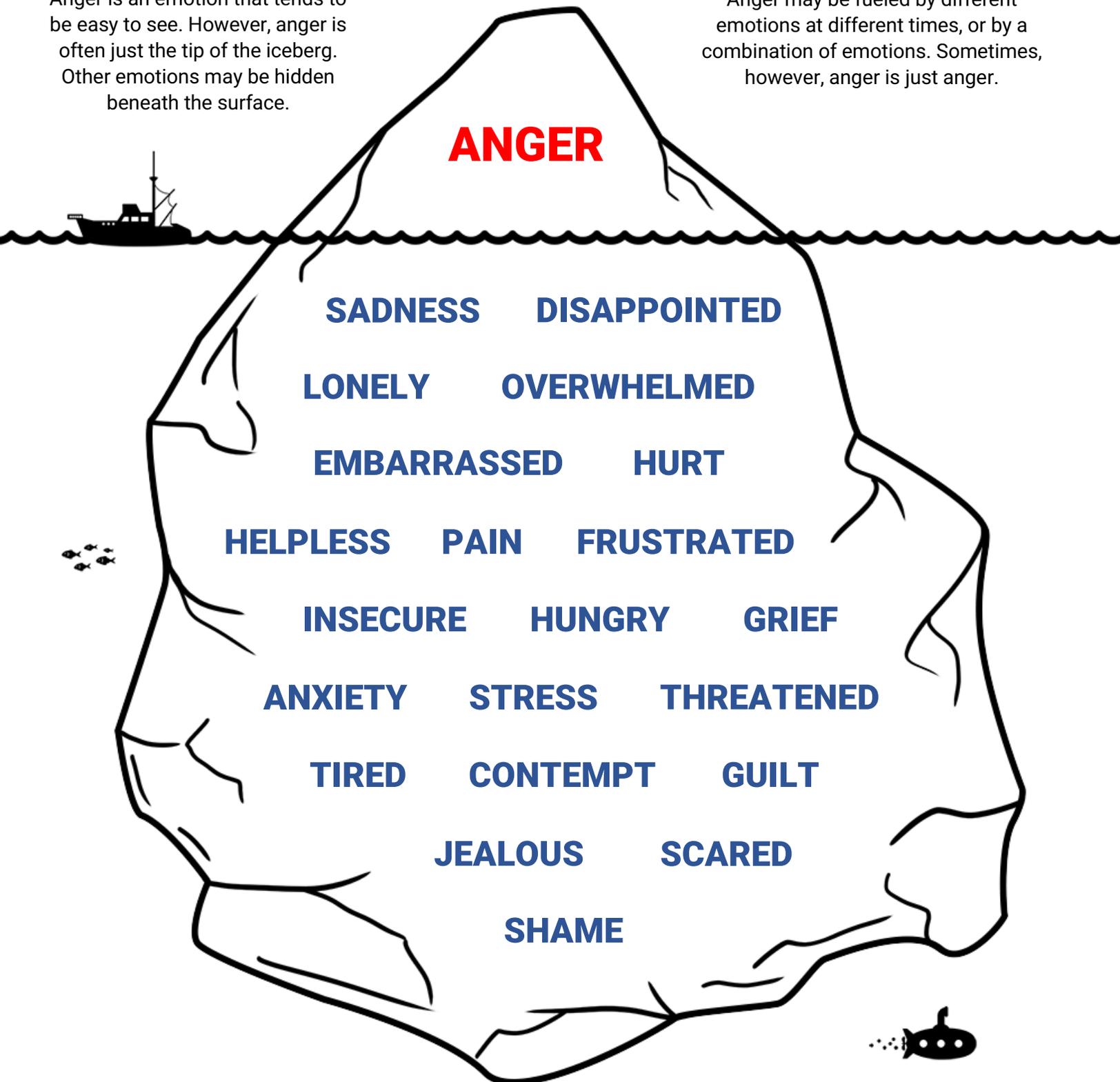
Anger Iceberg

In some families, anger is seen as more acceptable than other emotions. A person might express anger in order to mask emotions that cause them to feel vulnerable, such as hurt or shame.

Anger triggers are people, places, situations, and things that set off anger. Your triggers can provide clues about the emotions behind your anger.

Anger is an emotion that tends to be easy to see. However, anger is often just the tip of the iceberg. Other emotions may be hidden beneath the surface.

Anger may be fueled by different emotions at different times, or by a combination of emotions. Sometimes, however, anger is just anger.



Coping Skills

Anger

Be Aware of Triggers

Anger triggers are the things that set you off. Knowing your triggers, and being cautious around them, will reduce the likelihood of your anger getting out of control.

How to use triggers to your advantage:

- ✔ Create a list of your triggers and review them daily. Reviewing your triggers will keep them fresh in your mind, increasing the likelihood you notice them before they become a problem.
- ✔ Oftentimes, the best way to deal with a trigger is to avoid it. This might mean making changes to your lifestyle, relationships, or daily routine.
- ✔ Because it isn't always possible to avoid triggers, have a plan when you must face them. For example, avoid touchy conversations when you are tired, hungry, or upset.

Practice Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it's also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.



Keep an Anger Log

Following an episode of anger, take a few moments to record your experience. This practice will help you identify patterns, warning signs, and triggers, while also helping you organize thoughts and work through problems.

- ✔ What was happening *before* the anger episode? Describe how you were feeling, and what was on your mind. Were you hungry, tired, or stressed?
- ✔ Describe the facts of what happened. What events triggered your anger? How did you react, and did your reaction change as the event continued to unfold?
- ✔ What were your thoughts and feelings *during* the anger episode? Looking back, do you see anything differently than when you were in the heat of the moment?

Coping Skills

Anger

Use Diversions

The goal of diversions is to buy yourself time. If you can distract yourself for just 30 minutes, you'll have a better chance of dealing with your anger in a healthy way. Remember, you can always return to the source of your anger later—you're just setting the problem aside for now.

go for a walk	read a book	play a sport	listen to music
watch a movie	practice a hobby	go for a run	clean or organize
do yard work	draw or paint	do a craft	cook or bake
play a game	go for a bicycle ride	write or journal	take a long bath
play an instrument	call a friend	lift weights	go swimming
go hiking in nature	take photographs	play with a pet	rearrange a room

Take a Time-out

Time-outs are a powerful tool for relationships where anger-fueled disagreements are causing problems. When someone calls a time-out, both individuals agree to walk away from the problem, and return once you have both had an opportunity to cool down.

How to use time-outs effectively:

- ✓ With your partner, plan exactly how time-outs will work. Everyone should understand the rationale behind time-outs (an opportunity to cool down—not to avoid a problem).
- ✓ What will you both do during time-outs? Plan activities that are in different rooms or different places. The list of diversions from above is a good place to begin.
- ✓ Plan to return to the problem in 30 minutes to an hour. Important problems shouldn't be ignored forever, but nothing good will come from an explosive argument.

Know Your Warning Signs

Anger warning signs are the clues your body gives you that your anger is starting to grow. When you learn to spot your warning signs, you can begin to address your anger while it's still weak.

sweating	can't get past problem	feel hot / turn red	clenched fists
headaches	becoming argumentative	raised voice	using verbal insults
pacing	aggressive body language	feel sick to stomach	go quiet / "shut down"

What is Anger?

All sorts of things can make a person feel angry. Some people get mad when they have to follow a rule they don't like, or when another person is mean to them.



List some things that cause you to feel angry.

①

②

③

④

⑤

What is Anger?

Even though it's normal to feel angry from time to time, it's never ok to be mean, break things, hurt others, or hurt yourself. Learning to control your anger is about learning new ways to act when you're upset.



Here's a list of healthy things you can do when you feel angry. Circle the ones that you might like to try.

Take deep breaths.

Draw your anger.

Do jumping jacks.

Write about your anger.

Count to 100.

Walk away.

Talk to someone.

Squeeze a stress ball.

Play outside

Listen to music.

Practice a hobby.