

# Coping Skills for 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 tool that can be great for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it's also *discreet* and easy to use at any time or place. The toughest part about deep breathing is the commitment to it in the moment.

### *537 (Breathing Exercise)*

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in deeply enough that your hand begins to rise and fall. Imagine you are trying to completely fill your lungs with air. Time the inhalation (5s), pause (3s), and exhalation (7s) during *every* breath. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes at a time.

Inhale for FIVE seconds → Hold for THREE seconds → exhale for SEVEN seconds

## Use Diversions

Cravings are ruthless. They grow and grow, eating away at your willpower, seemingly forcing that you relapse. In the middle of a craving, it might seem as if there's no escape but to use again. However, if you resist, the craving starts to fade. Eventually, it disappears. Most cravings end within one hour of starting.

The goal of diversions is to buy yourself time during a craving. If you can shift your focus for just *one hour*, you will have a much better chance of avoiding relapse. Come up with a list of activities you genuinely enjoy that will keep you at a distance from your temptation.

### Diversion Ideas

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. Take time away from the situation as a favor for yourself and others involved. While you are taking your time out, you can utilize deep breathing exercises, mindfulness or some of the items listed below.

### 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.



## Discover Underlying Emotions

Anger is often described as a secondary emotion. This is because when one experiences anger, they also experience other emotions along with anger. 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. Noticing what other emotions one is experiencing can provide better insight to the root of our anger. If we can address the underlying emotion, then the anger should cease to exist in a particular situation.

At first, this can be hard to notice and label. Give yourself time and sit with your feeling of anger; explore it. What other emotions can you identify?

Sadness	Lonely	Overwhelmed	Anxiety
Disappointed	Embarrassed	Frustrated	Stress
Grief	Threatened	Guilt	Scared
Jealous	Tired	Shame	Insecure

## Keep an Anger Log

Following an episode of anger or burst of rage, 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. The first step to bettering behavior is noticing the behavior and all that encompasses it. You cannot change what you don't notice. If you notice more about what you want to change, the better chance you have at success.

- 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?

## Know Your Warning Signs

In addition to your anger log and recognizing patterns and triggers is also the power to notice 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"