

PRRT – DEALING WITH ANGER

What is it?

Do you feel quick-tempered, short fused or easily irritated? Anger is a physical and emotional response which motivates us to act when under threat. The trick is to manage our response to anger in a positive and controlled way. Anger can be an energy used to motivate as a force for good. Anger can happen in the moment, activated by a trigger or thought. Anger can come to the surface years later, as its roots are linked to unresolved events in the past.

Anger becomes a problem when we ignore it, bury it, or respond impulsively to it. Problems with understanding and responding to anger are as common as depression and anxiety. Many people don't get help because they don't recognise that how they respond to their anger is a problem. Often friends or family might notice the change before you do. Anger can be a problem when:

- You frequently over-react.
- You're angry a lot.
- It lasts a long time, and you feel upset for a long time afterwards.
- You feel that your anger is uncontrollable.

You may struggle with anger due to your job, for example those who are very alert to hidden dangers, exposure to highly stressful events and traumatic experiences, meaning you may be more easily triggered to anger. Certain life experiences such as childhood neglect or abuse, bullying through school years may have led to increased angry feelings prior to employment.

How Does Anger Affect You?

Being angry can change the way you **think**, for example you might lose perspective and find it hard to think clearly, you might think others are being unfair, you might think more about the events that led you to be angry.

Being angry can change how we **do** things, lead us to act out of character, for example you may be more irritable, say things you don't mean, shout and argue more, bottle up your emotions.

Being angry can change you **feel** as it can be intense and your body will respond physically, for example clench your fists or jaw, tension in the forearms and shoulders, feeling rising heat, an urge to shout or lash out, feel guilty about feeling angry, fear of losing control.

What Can You Do About Anger?

You will find below some helpful strategies to get you started. The most important thing is to give each one of these a try and remain open to testing new things out.

The Thinking Part

Do you have unhelpful thoughts that make you feel angry? Try to get your thinking straight by trying some of these techniques:

- Press 'pause'.
- Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 technique (see below)
- Tell yourself "I need to think this through".
- Count to 10.
- Think of something other than the thing that's made or is keeping you angry.
- Use imagery to calm you, for example think of your safe/happy place.
- When people feel guilty about getting angry or the thought of what might happen if they were to lose control, the anger is turned on themselves in the form of self-criticism. Remember, you do not choose to be angry, your anger is partly an instinctive and partly a learned automatic response. Be kind to yourself, take some space to cool off and then think about what you need to do.

- **GROUNDING: THE 5-4-3-2-1 TECHNIQUE**
 - 5 things you can see? Tune into your surroundings and try to notice the small details such as patterns, shapes, texture and colours.
 - 4 things you can touch? Or feel, such as the sun on your face, the warmth of your socks.
 - 3 things you can hear? Focus on the subtle sounds we often don't notice, such as the clock ticking, the wind outside or distant traffic.
 - 2 things you can smell? Pay attention to any smells in the air or look around for something with a smell, like a flower, food or perfume.
 - 1 thing you can taste? It can be handy to carry some gum, strong mints or sweets with you for this one. Or try thinking about one thing you are thankful for.

The Doing Part

Do you find you just 'explode'? Use some 'in the heat of the moment' strategies to calm your body:

- Cool yourself down physically with cold water or a wet flannel.

- Distraction - count backwards from 100 in 7s (100, 93, 86 etc).
- Walk away from the trigger and change your environment eg step outside.
- Go for a brisk walk or other form of exercise.
- Do some heavy work such as lifting weights, cleaning or gardening.

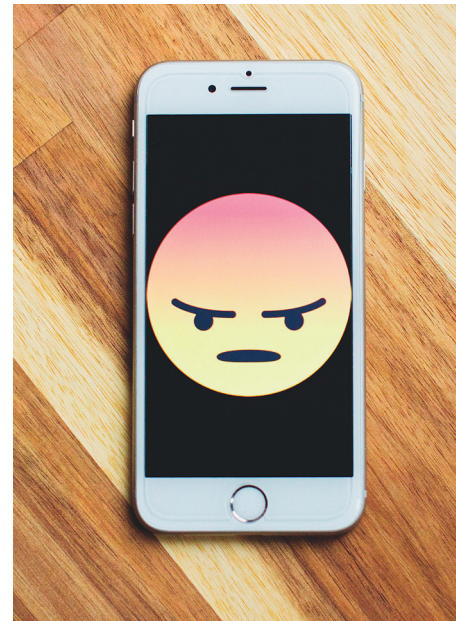
The Feeling Part

Listen to your body, do you notice changes in how your body feels, eg increased heart rate, changes in your breathing, getting hot, do you find it hard to calm your body down? Do what your body needs by trying to focus on the differences between 'then' and 'now':

- Slow your breathing.
- Relax the body by focussing on your jaw and shoulders.
- Wear a calming smell eg your partner's aftershave/perfume, lavender, lemon.
- Have a warm bath or shower.
- Listen to some music.

Other Resources

www.prrt.org
www.cci.health.wa.gov.au
www.getselfhelp.uk/anger.htm
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/problems-with-anger-self-help-guide>



PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychology, physiotherapy, coaching development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our physiotherapy service via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access coaching and development directly with us. For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788.

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