Anger: What It Is,

What It Wants, and What to Do

UNDERSTAND • PAUSE • CHOOSE

Anger is a feeling. Your next action is a choice.

A practical workbook for recognizing anger, understanding what matters underneath, calming the body, communicating needs, and planning safer next steps.

FOR ADULTS AND OLDER ADOLESCENTS

For independent practice or use with a mental health professional. You may pause, skip questions, or ask staff to work with you.

Your safety comes first

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook offers education and coping exercises. It does not replace clinical assessment, diagnosis, therapy, medical care, or an individualized crisis or safety plan.

WHEN FEELINGS BECOME OVERWHELMING

Stop the exercise and ask clinic staff or a trusted support person for help. You do not need to finish a worksheet while distressed.

988 - CRISIS SUPPORT

In the United States, call or text 988 for 24/7 emotional distress, mental health, or suicide crisis support. You can also chat at 988lifeline.org.

911 - IMMEDIATE DANGER

If someone is in immediate danger or there is a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or seek emergency medical assistance. If you feel you might hurt someone, put distance between yourself and the person and seek immediate help.

If you are not safe, prioritize help over self-guided coping. A workbook cannot determine whether an emergency exists.

How to use these pages

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO IT ALL

Start with a page that fits your moment. Use one-word answers when you need to. You may complete a worksheet silently, with a counselor, or later when you feel steadier.

01 Understand

Learn what anger can signal and how the reaction builds.

02 Steady yourself

Use a safe pause, choose one grounding action, and step away when necessary.

03 Reflect and respond

Find the underlying need, communicate clearly, and make a plan.

Privacy: These pages may contain sensitive information. Keep completed copies secure, and ask staff how your clinic stores or handles worksheets.

What is anger?

A HUMAN EMOTION

Anger can appear when something feels unfair, unsafe, disrespectful, frustrating, or blocked. It may help you notice a concern or boundary. Anger itself is not wrongdoing; threats, intimidation, violence, or other harmful actions need a safer response.

ANGER CAN SHOW UP IN DIFFERENT WAYS

BODY

Fast heartbeat, tight jaw, clenched hands, hot face, muscle tension, quick breathing.

THOUGHTS

“This is unfair.” “I cannot handle this.” “They do not respect me.” These are thoughts, not necessarily facts.

BEHAVIOR

Raised voice, silence, pacing, leaving suddenly, arguing, or wanting to act immediately.

Key idea: Anger is information, not an instruction. You can take it seriously without acting on every urge.

What might anger be asking for?

Anger sometimes points toward an unmet need, a boundary, a fear, or a problem to solve. It does not always have one hidden meaning.

RESPECT	“Please let me finish before responding.”
SPACE	“I need a break. I can return to this later.”
SAFETY	“I need to move somewhere I feel safer.”
FAIRNESS	“I would like to explain what feels unfair.”
CHOICE	“What part of this situation can I influence?”
TO BE HEARD	“Can we talk when we are both ready to listen?”

Try: “I notice anger, and I may need _____. My next safe step is _____.”

Is there another feeling underneath?

THE ICEBERG IS A METAPHOR

Sometimes anger comes alongside hurt, fear, shame, grief, rejection, exhaustion, or helplessness. Other times anger is simply anger. You do not need to force an underlying feeling.

FEELINGS THAT MAY COEXIST WITH ANGER

- ☐ Hurt
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Grief
- ☐ Powerlessness
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Embarrassment
- ☐ Exhaustion
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Not sure

What may matter to me in this moment?

What would I want someone to understand?

How the anger cycle can build

01 Trigger	Something happens, or you remember something.
02 Body	Your system may become tense or activated.
03 Interpretation	A thought gives the situation meaning.
04 Urge	You may want to yell, withdraw, leave, or confront.
05 Action	You respond in a way that can help or hurt.
06 Result	The result can settle or restart the cycle.

You can interrupt this cycle at many points. Noticing it after the event still helps you learn.

Assertive anger vs harmful behavior

ANGER DOES NOT EXCUSE HARM

You can set limits, object to injustice, or leave an unsafe situation without threatening, coercing, humiliating, or hurting someone.

SPEAK UP

Name the problem; avoid insults or threats.

SET A BOUNDARY

Explain what you will do to protect your safety and dignity.

TAKE TIME

Pause or leave safely; do not drive while too upset to focus.

REPAIR

When safe and appropriate, acknowledge harm and make changes.

When anger is intense

FIRST: MAKE THE SPACE SAFER

Stop arguing if you can. Step away from confrontation. Keep a safe distance, and ask staff for support. Avoid driving, sending heated messages, or using substances as a coping strategy.

STOP	Pause movement or speech for a moment if it is safe.
NOTICE	Name one body sign, one thought, and one urge.
SETTLE	Try comfortable breathing, feet on the floor, a quiet space, or walking safely.
CHOOSE	Pick the next action that protects safety and dignity.

Breathing is optional. If counting or body-focused attention feels worse, use visual grounding or support from another person.

Worksheet 1 | My warning signs

Early signs can give me more options.

My first body warning sign is...

My thoughts tend to sound like...

My tone, face, or hands may change by...

Others might notice...

A sign I should pause or get help is...

Worksheet 2 | What happened?

Try describing a moment without judging yourself or others.

What happened? (Just the observable facts)

What did I think the situation meant?

What felt important, unsafe, or unfair?

What did I feel urged to do?

What did I actually choose to do?

Worksheet 3 | What do I need?

Anger can give clues. I can decide which clues fit.

NEEDS I MIGHT BE NOTICING

- ☐ Respect
- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Choice
- ☐ Reassurance
- ☐ Space
- ☐ Fairness
- ☐ To be heard
- ☐ Help or rest

My anger may be connected to...

The need I want to address is...

A safe, respectful way to ask for it is...

Worksheet 4 | Under the anger

There may be other emotions, or there may not.

WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE PRESENT?

- ☐ Hurt
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Rejection
- ☐ Grief
- ☐ Nothing else
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Tiredness
- ☐ Unsure

What am I feeling, as best I can tell?

What may have made this situation harder?

Something compassionate I can tell myself is...

Worksheet 5 | My anger cycle

Notice where you had a choice, even if it was small.

1. Trigger: What started it?

2. Body: What signs appeared?

3. Thought: What did I tell myself?

4. Urge: What did I want to do?

5. Action: What did I do?

6. Result: What happened next?

Worksheet 6 | Pause first

A pause can create room for a safer choice.

A FLEXIBLE STOP SKILL

Stop if it is safe. Take a comfortable breath or notice your surroundings. Observe what you feel and want to do. Proceed with the least harmful next step.

The reaction I want to avoid is...

My pause sentence can be...

A safe place or person I can turn to is...

The next useful action could be...

Worksheet 7 | Calm my body

Choose one option. Stop if it makes you feel worse.

SKILLS I MAY TRY

- ☐ Comfortable breathing
- ☐ Relax jaw or hands
- ☐ Name 5 things I see
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Feet supported on floor
- ☐ Slow safe walk
- ☐ Quiet space
- ☐ Talk with staff

Anger level before (0-10) and what it feels like

What I tried and how it felt

Anger level afterward (0-10), or “not sure”

No change? That is okay. You can try another option or ask for help.

Worksheet 8 | Say it clearly

Tell the truth without threats or humiliation.

A SIMPLE SCRIPT

“I feel _____ when _____. I need _____. I can _____.” If direct communication is unsafe, prioritize distance and support instead.

The angry words I want to say are...

What I am hoping the other person understands is...

A clearer and respectful sentence would be...

If speaking is unsafe or not possible, I can...

Worksheet 9 | Repair when safe

Repair is optional when contact is unsafe or coercive.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS NOT SELF-BLAME

Repair can mean naming a harmful behavior, listening when safe, apologizing without excuses, and making a specific change. You do not have to reconcile with someone who is unsafe.

What happened, and who may have been affected?

Which behavior is mine to take responsibility for?

What would meaningful repair look like?

What will I try differently, and what support will help?

Worksheet 10 | My safety plan

Make this plan with a clinician if safety is a concern.

My early warning signs are...

At moderate anger, I will...

If I fear I may hurt someone or myself, I will...

A safe person, clinic, or crisis service I can contact is...

What I should step away from until safer is...

call or text 988. Ask clinic staff for immediate support if you are onsite.

Quick check after a hard moment

Something I learned about my anger...

A warning sign I can notice sooner...

A calming skill I can practice...

One need I can express more clearly...

Someone I can approach for support...

My pocket pause plan

Cut out a card if useful, or take a picture of the page. Keep it somewhere easy to reach.

WHEN ANGER RISES

1 Notice the first warning sign.

2 Step away from conflict if safe.

3 Slow down: breathe comfortably or ground.

4 Ask for support when needed.

5 Choose one safe next step.

CRISIS SUPPORT 988 | IMMEDIATE DANGER 911

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Credits and additional resources

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FIND ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WORKBOOKS

https://bodhilifebalance.com/mental-health-workbooks

This workbook is an educational support resource for behavioral health services. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by any county or government agency.

Completed worksheets may include sensitive information. Follow your clinic’s privacy, record-handling, and retention requirements.

Not a diagnostic instrument or a substitute for individualized crisis care.

Sources and notes

SAMHSA, Crisis Help (988/911)

https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/in-crisis

SAMHSA, 988 Key Messages

https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/988/988-key-messages

NHS, Get help with anger

https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anger/

NHS inform, Problems with anger self-help guide

https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/problems-with-anger-self-help-guide/

Editorial note: This workbook is a psychoeducational adaptation of the 19-page source. The model of anger as a “signal” and the anger-cycle approach are explanatory tools, not diagnostic tests.