

Factsheet 11: How to cope with strong emotions - anger

Know your warning signs

Feelings of anger often grow in intensity. Knowing your body's cues that your anger is increasing can help you to stay in control. Common warning signs include:



Feeling hot in the face



Raised voice



Clenched fists



Clenched jaw



Spitting



Sweating



**Going quiet
Feeling irritated or annoyed**



Using aggressive body language

When people have experienced violence or trauma, a common reaction is to experience sudden and intense feelings of anger, rage or to desire revenge. People may feel frightened by these feelings or confused about how to express them. Anger can be triggered by people, places or situations that remind you in some ways of the past, or it may seem to come out of nowhere at all.

Anger is a normal feeling that all people experience at times. However, many people view feelings of anger, rage and hatred as 'bad' or believe they should not be felt. Other people believe anger may be more acceptable to express than emotions like hurt or sadness. A person might show anger to hide other more painful or vulnerable emotions such as hurt, shame or fear.

Anger is not the same as violence or aggression. These are unhelpful ways to express strong feelings of anger that can lead to even further distress and problems. There are many ways to express anger that are not dangerous or hurtful to oneself or others.

Finding safe ways to express your anger

The first step in dealing with strong emotions is learning ways to express them safely. The following strategies have been helpful for survivors to cope with their feelings of anger.

EXERCISE: Shifting attention

If your feelings of anger are very strong and it is difficult to think or deal with the situation calmly, **try to shift your attention to the present moment and engage in a gentle, enjoyable activity for at least 30 minutes to give yourself time to calm down.** You will have a better chance of coping with your anger in a healthy way when you are calmer, and you can come back to deal with the source of your anger later.



Taking 10 deep breaths
(see Relaxed Breathing Method over the page)



Talk to a trusted person who you know helps calm you down



Take a cold shower or splash cold water on your face



Leave the situation



Watch a movie



Play a sport



Play an instrument or listen to music



Pray or engage in a faith-based activity



Engage in physical exercise for at least 20 minutes
(run, fast-paced walk, throw a ball)



Play with a pet



Cook or bake

EXERCISE: Relaxed Breathing Method

Often when people are frightened or upset, they start to breathe faster. This is a natural survival response to prepare the body to fight or run away.

Sometimes our body can remain stuck on high alert and fast breathing can continue over a long period of time causing unpleasant physical sensations. Relaxed breathing is a simple technique that helps you slow down the body's survival response and is helpful in reducing our feelings of fear and panic.



Practice the exercise below for at least 5-10 minutes each day.

It may be difficult at first, but the more you practice the easier it will become. Practicing during times of ease will help your body more easily remember a sense of safety. This can help to reduce feelings of fear when they happen and can help you recover from an experience of panic more quickly.

Step 1



Lie on your back or sit comfortably upright with both feet on the floor.

Step 2



Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.

Step 3



- Breathe in for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds

Step 4



Say the word 'relax' (or another calming word) every time you breath out for 6 seconds.

Step 5



Continue breathing like this until all signs of fear, tension and panic have gone.



Sometimes the symptoms will return after a short while – that's normal. Just continue the Relaxed Breathing Method again for as long as is needed.

EXERCISE: Keep a diary



Keep a record of the times you feel anger.

This will help you identify the patterns, warning signs and triggers to anger so you can better understand and manage these feelings when they occur.



Turn over the page.

Tips for using a diary:

- Write in your diary when you are feeling angry or shortly after
- Describe what was happening before you felt anger
- Describe the situation that triggered the anger. Keep it factual. Describe only the events of what happened
- Describe the sensations you noticed in your body (e.g. my jaw is clenched, my heart is pounding)
- Describe what thoughts and feelings you experienced during the anger. What thoughts were going through your mind exactly? What were you saying to yourself?
- Reflect on the situation now that you have calmed down. Do you think differently than how you felt in the moment?



Writing down your thoughts and feelings can give you time to calm down and provide you with valuable information to cope with these feelings in the future.



Lifeline (24 hours):
13 11 14

Kids Help Line (24 hours):
1800 55 1800

Queensland Mental Health Access Line:
1300 642 255

When feelings of anger feel difficult to control

If your feelings of anger feel difficult to control and if you feel you are unable to keep yourself safe or fear hurting someone else, it is vital to seek help. Reach out to a counsellor, trusted friend or community member, or support person.

Below are some phone numbers of services in Australia that are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week where there are people trained to understand these thoughts and help you in this situation. Interpreters are available if needed – just ask.



To speak with QPASTT or find out more about our services, please call 07 3391 6677 or visit qpastt.org.au.

QPASTT is the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. It is a community organisation which provides a variety of flexible and culturally sensitive support services to people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma. QPASTT has offices across Queensland.