

Anger

Moodjuice Self-help Guide



Learn more about anger
and skills to cope with it.

Self Help for Anger

- Do you get frustrated and annoyed by the slightest thing?
- Do you find yourself saying hurtful things when someone has annoyed you?
- Have you damaged or thrown things because you were so furious?
- Have you been physically aggressive towards someone?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes,' you may be experiencing problems relating to anger and you may find this workbook helpful.

This workbook aims to help you to:

- Recognise whether you may be experiencing anger problems.
- Understand what anger is, what causes it and what keeps it going.
- Find ways to understand, manage or overcome your anger.

Contents of this self help guide

Strategies that you could use to overcome your anger problems:

1. Understanding more about anger.
2. Learning how to challenge your unhelpful thoughts and see things in a more realistic light.
3. Learning how you can feel more relaxed, both physically and mentally.
4. Improving your problem solving skills.
5. Consider making positive changes to your lifestyle.
6. Improving your communication skills.

When going through this booklet it might be helpful to try out each strategy one at a time, rather than trying to learn them all at once. However, simply take things at your own pace.

Do I have an anger problem?

If you experience problems with anger, then it is likely that you will recognise many of the feelings, physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviour patterns described below.

Please tick the boxes which regularly apply to you.



Feelings

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Furious / Raging | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tense | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Irritable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stressed | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Physical Symptoms

- Chest feels tight
- Tense muscles
- Feel hot
- Sweating
- Light headed
- Heart races
- Raised blood pressure



Thoughts

- I've been made a fool of
- Everything is ruined
- I have to do something about this
- This is so unfair
- They deserve it
- I've been let down



Behaviour Patterns

- Easily irritated
- Arguing
- Say hurtful things
- Shouting and swearing
- Physical violence towards things or people
- Storming out of a situation

If you have ticked a number of these boxes it is possible that you are experiencing problems with your anger. However don't be alarmed, this is a common issue that can be overcome.

By following the steps in this workbook, you may be able to learn how to improve your situation.

What is anger?



Anger is an emotion that we all feel at times. It can become a problem if it is too extreme, occurs at inappropriate times, or lasts too long. Anger can be just a simple irritation with something. At the other extreme, it can result in hysterical shouting, screaming and lashing out. Anger can often have a negative impact on our relationships and our work. It can also change the way that we feel about ourselves. We might tend to blame other people or a particular situation for our anger. Often we feel angry when we feel let down in some way or denied of something that we feel entitled to.

Physical feelings are experienced when your body reacts to stress, fear or anxiety. These symptoms are often referred to as the 'fight or flight' response. This reaction quickly and helpfully prepares the body for action. It prepares us to either protect against or escape danger.

- Making our heart beat faster - to supply more blood to our muscles.
- Producing more sweat - to cool us down.
- Tensing our muscles - getting them ready for action.
- Taking deeper and quicker breaths - to supply oxygen to our muscles.
- Shutting down body functions that aren't needed at the time e.g. digestion.
- Racing thoughts - quickly narrowing the available options to make a quick response.

In the past such a reaction would have offered us some protection. Preparing us to react quickly in case of predators, and aiding survival as we hunted and gathered food. These days we do not depend so much upon running or fighting as we negotiate difficult circumstances. The symptoms described above are therefore less helpful. They may even end up being quite confusing. Threats like money problems, difficulties at work, unhelpful staff or rude drivers do not require such an extreme physical reaction. These symptoms are not dangerous in themselves. In many ways it is a useful response, but at the wrong time. We need not fear the fight or flight reaction. It is our body's healthy protection system. Understanding this can help you to manage the physical symptoms. You need not worry about them or feel that you need to respond or react. You can allow them to pass, as they will do quite quickly.

What causes anger problems?

Life Events:

There may be certain situations which are more likely to trigger an angry reaction from you. Being exposed to a particular scenario or environment might put you on high alert. For example, some people find that they are much more likely to become angry whilst driving.

Thinking Styles:

Our interpretation and thoughts about a situation can result in an angry outburst. Especially how we perceive the intentions of other people and the potential consequences to ourselves. Situations in which we feel wronged in some way can be particularly difficult. Also where an injustice has been done that we feel is unacceptable. Our understanding of anger may also influence our reaction. Our beliefs about anger can change the way that we express or control our anger. For example, if we consider that anger must be expressed and not 'bottled up'. We may not have considered making attempts to manage emotions in a more appropriate and sensitive way.

Behavioural Explanations:

You might find it difficult to sit with and tolerate frustration. This may be due to your social experiences. Also, what you have come to consider as being normal and acceptable behaviour. You may not have had opportunities to learn effective ways of managing and expressing emotions. A pattern of angry behaviour can build up. This can become more and more difficult to overcome.

In reality it is likely that a combination of all these factors influence someone's anger. However, in some ways it is less important to know what causes anger, and more important to know what stops us moving past it.

What keeps an anger problem going?

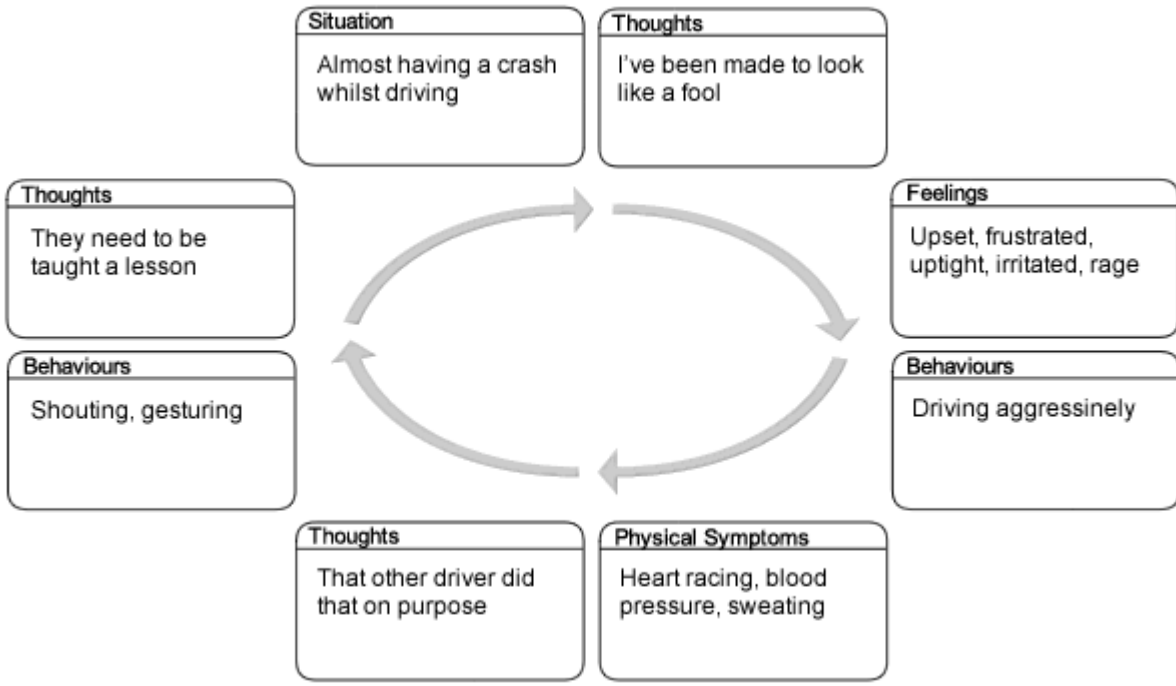
There may be a noticeable pattern to what happens before and after an angry episode. For example, whilst driving, looking after the children or whenever you're talking about money. It might be that we are getting into the habit of getting angry in such contexts. This might be difficult to break.

There may be consequences to angry behaviour; both costs and benefits. Many people recognise that angry behaviour can achieve short-term gain. For example, getting your own way, or having others respect your status. It can also be associated with significant long-term costs, such as damaged relationships. Considering these for yourself might encourage a change or convince you that you need to take action.

When looking more closely at what prevents us from overcoming anger problems, it becomes clear that our behaviour, thoughts, feelings and physical sensations all interact and combine to keep our problems with anger going.

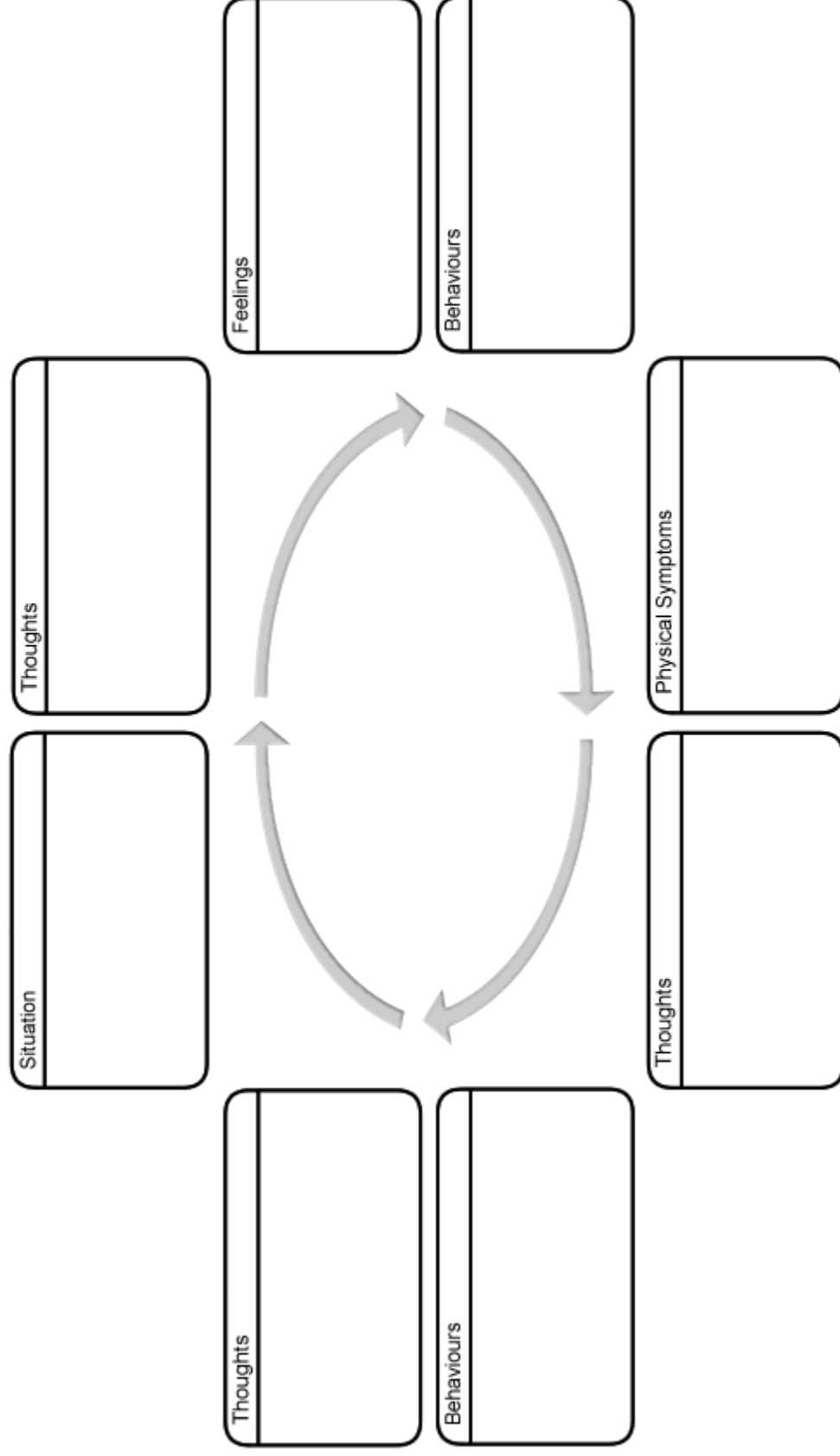
Understanding your anger

Have a look at some of the examples and try to fill in something of your experience. See if you can recognise a similar pattern occurring within yourself.



Understanding Your Problem

Try to fill in something of your own experience. You may begin to understand your difficulties a little better. Particularly what patterns may exist and how things interact.



How have you been coping so far?

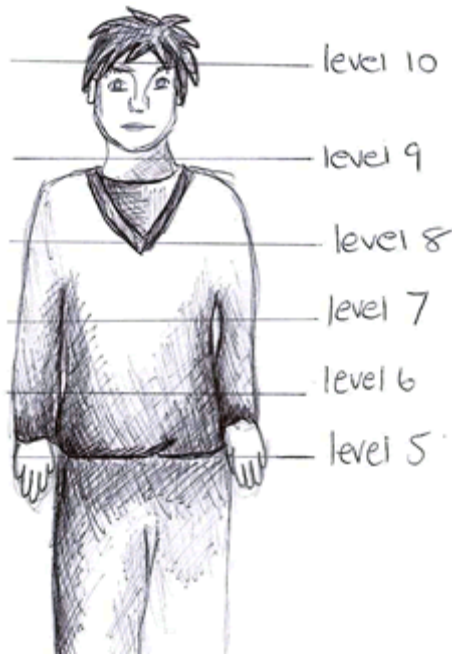
You may have been dealing with at least some of these difficulties for a while already. Think about what you've done so far to cope, and how effective these strategies have been.

- Will it be helpful in the long-term, or is it possible that they might be keeping your difficulties going? For example:
 - Avoiding speaking to your best friend in case you get angry with them again.
- Think about how you might have coped well with difficulties in the past.
- What is going well currently and what you are doing to achieve that?
- What coping strategies and support do you have available to you? Could you be making better use of these?
 - Social support - speaking to people; family, friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.
 - Confidence ♦ being sure of your own ability to cope.
 - Problem solving - being able to work out solutions to problems.
 - Self-awareness - knowing how this problem effects you; your body, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
 - Looking after yourself - making sure that you have some time to yourself. For example going for walks, having a relaxing bath, etc.

Challenging unhelpful thoughts

The way that we think about things has an impact on our stress levels and mood. Many of these thoughts occur outside of our control, and can be negative or unhelpful. It is therefore important to remember that they are just thoughts, without any real basis, and are not necessarily facts. Even though we may believe a lot of our unhelpful thoughts when we are feeling angry, it is good to remember that they should be questioned as they are often based on wrong assumptions.

The following section will help you begin to recognise if you are thinking about things in an unhelpful or unrealistic way, and discuss how you can start to make changes to this. By doing so, you can learn to see things in a more realistic light which can help to improve your mood and help you to manage your angry feelings. You might have unhelpful thoughts about all kinds of things. Here are some examples:



About Yourself / Your Actions and Thoughts:

- I am entitled to certain things
- I must stand up for myself
- I cannot tolerate frustration

About Others:

- Everyone's out to get me
- No one else is on my side
- Someone else is always to blame

About Anger:

- I have to express my frustration
- It's not good to hold back this strong emotion

It is clear to see how this kind of thinking might lead to you feeling more angry. Do you ever think in any of the ways outlined above? Fill in your examples below:

You might find it difficult to identify an unhelpful thought. Try thinking about a time when you felt angry. Consider what was running through your mind at that time.

Patterns of unhelpful thinking

First you need to be able to recognise an unhelpful thought. Then you can challenge it. Being aware of the common patterns that unhelpful thoughts follow can help you to recognise when you have them. Here are some of the common patterns that our unhelpful thoughts follow:

Predicting the future

Catastrophising

What if?

When people are worried about something it is common for them to spend a lot of time ruminating. You can end up thinking about the future and predicting what might go wrong. This is instead of just letting things be. You might blow things out of proportion, or come to expect a catastrophe. For example:

- What if they laugh at me?
- What if I lose all respect?

Jumping to conclusions

Taking things personally

Mind reading

When people are feeling emotionally vulnerable, it is likely that they take things to heart and become more sensitive to what people say. They can often make assumptions about why someone said something, beign overly quick to draw conclusions, and thinking that they are the focus of what has been said. For example:

- They did that on purpose.
- They must think I'm stupid.

Focusing on the negative

Ignoring the positive

Filtering

Often people can ignore the positive aspects of life or their situation. Instead you may focus on negative elements. This style of thinking stops us feeling good about ourselves. It can lower your confidence. For example:

- Despite that person letting me out he is now right at my bumper.
- My kids are a nightmare, nevermind how nicely they played with each other earlier.

Black & white thinking

All or nothing

Perfectionism

"Should" thinking

Sometimes people only see things as black or white, with no grey area or in-between. Having this polarised view can lead some people into setting themselves impossibly high standards, being overly critical and struggling to recognise any achievement due to their perfectionism.

- That was a complete waste of time.
- They must hate me.
- I should always get full marks.

Over-generalising

Labelling

Based on one isolated incident you might assume that other events will follow a similar pattern in the future. You might find it hard to see a negative event as a one-off. This can also mean that you label yourself, often unkindly, which can lower your mood and confidence, perhaps even leading to feelings of hopelessness. For example:

- Failing my driving test means I'll fail at everything.
- The neighbour's dog snarled at me, all dogs are vicious!
- I'm useless

Do any of your unhelpful thoughts follow some of these patterns? Jot down any examples you can think of into the box below:

Unhelpful Thought	Category
e.g. "I'm such a loser"	Labelling

We can learn techniques to challenge these unhelpful thoughts. This can help to improve your mood and help you to manage your angry feelings. The next part of this handout will discuss how we can go about challenging our unhelpful thoughts. You may come up with a more balanced thought that is accurate and based on evidence.

How to challenge unhelpful thoughts

Once you have recognised an unhelpful thought the next stage is to challenge it. To do this, you can ask yourself a series of questions. See the example below:

Situation: Someone looks over at you when your out with friends.



How you feel: Anxious, angry, frustrated, upset.

Unhelpful thought: They think that I'm stupid!



Challenges to an unhelpful thought

Now you can challenge your unhelpful thoughts by asking these questions.

Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?

- He's never talked to me before.
- I've never met him.

Can you identify any of the patterns of unhelpful thinking described earlier?

- I'm jumping to conclusions.
- Mind-reading.
- Labelling myself.

What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?

- I would say ♦ you don't know what he's thinking or why he looked over.

What are the costs and benefits of thinking in this way?

- Costs: I am likely to be on edge a lot and suspicious of other people.
- Benefits: I can't think of any.

How will you feel about this in 6 months time?

- I'll probably look back and laugh about how silly I was being.

Is there another way of looking at this situation?

- I don't actually know why he looked over here, but perhaps he was looking for someone.

Once you have asked yourself these questions, you should read through your answers. Try to come up with a more balanced or rational view. For example:

There's no point in predicting why that person looked over. There is no reason to think that it means that they were judging me.

Try to apply these questions to the unhelpful thoughts that you notice. It can help to improve your mood and help you to manage your angry feelings. You can use this technique to test your thoughts are realistic and balanced.

Identifying Unhelpful Thoughts

Whenever your mood changes, try to write down what you were doing, how you felt and what you were thinking at the time. You might find that patterns begin to emerge.

Situation	Feelings	Thoughts

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

Taking a particular unhelpful thought, see if you can test it.
Ask questions to test whether your belief has any real basis.

Unhelpful Thought



Challenges

Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?

Can you identify any patterns of unhelpful thinking?

What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?

What are the costs and benefits of thinking in this way?

Benefits:

Costs:

How will you feel about this in 6 months time?

Is there another way of looking at this situation?



Balanced Thought

Relaxation

It is important to make time to relax and do activities that are enjoyable. This can help to improve your mood and help you to manage your angry feelings by calming the body and mind. It can also help you to sleep. Without taking the time to unwind, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Relaxation can involve doing something that you enjoy, or just being by yourself. Good examples might be reading a book or having a bath. Exercise is also particularly effective at helping us to relax. What you do does not really matter. Try to choose something that you will look forward to and that gives you a break. Doing an activity that you enjoy will also give you less time to spend worrying. Here are a list of activities that might help you to relax.



Suggestions:

- Do some exercise (e.g. swim, cycle)
- Read a book
- Watch your favourite TV show
- Go to the cinema
- Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)
- Visit a friend or family member
- Have a bath

Try to add some of your own ideas into the box below. You will know what works best for you.

Try to find time to relax every day. This might seem difficult, but it is worth making time for. It can help you to feel a lot better. There are audio relaxation guides available that you might find a helpful support.

There are also some exercises described in the next few pages. They are specifically designed to help you to relax. However, you should stop the exercise if at any time you begin to experience discomfort or pain.

Controlled breathing

This simple technique involves focusing on and slowing down our breathing patterns. Many people find this simple exercise very relaxing. It can be particularly helpful for those who feel dizzy or light headed when they feel worried or stressed. This sometimes happens because people's breathing changes and gets quicker when they feel distressed.



This can be an uncomfortable and unpleasant experience. It can make people even more on edge, and a vicious cycle can occur. Learning controlled breathing exercises can help you to manage these feelings more effectively. It can also help to give your mind and body a chance to calm down.

Remember, you can use this exercise to help you relax at any time. You could even use it to help you get off to sleep. However, it is particularly useful if you ever feel light-headed, dizzy or faint.



Beginning

Get into a comfortable position.



Middle

Work out a stable breathing rhythm. Perhaps try to breathe in for three seconds, hold this breathe for two seconds, and then breathe out for three seconds. It can be helpful to count as you do this (e.g. IN: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2, OUT: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2).



Ending

Repeat this action for a few minutes. You should soon begin to feel more relaxed. If you were feeling dizzy then this should also get better after a few minutes.

Muscular relaxation

Tension often builds up when we feel upset or stressed. These symptoms can be painful and

can cause anxiety in themselves. Muscular relaxation exercises can help you to control such unpleasant symptoms. They can reduce physical tension and help you to relax in general.

During this exercise you have to tense and then relax different muscles in your body. You should focus on the feelings that you experience whilst doing this. With practice you will then be more able to recognise and respond to the onset of tension.

You can work through as many muscle groups as you like. Don't feel that you have to cover every muscle in your whole body. It can be helpful to stick to the same muscle groups each time you practice. That way you can get into a routine which you can easily remember. If you practice this nearly every day you will probably notice an improvement after a couple of weeks.



Beginning

Find somewhere comfortable and quiet where you won't be interrupted. You can either sit or lie down to practice this exercise. Begin by focusing on your breathing. Try to have a slow and comfortable pace. You could use the controlled breathing technique described earlier. Do this for a few minutes to prepare for the muscular relaxation exercise.



Middle

Try to tense each muscle group for around five seconds. Don't tense the muscle too tight. Focus on the sensations that this brings. Then relax your muscles for a similar length of time, and again, focus on how this feels. Then move onto the next muscle group. Try to remember to keep your breathing at a comfortable pace throughout. Below are some suggestions of muscle groups that you may wish to work through:

- Legs - point your toes and tense your muscles as if you were trying to stand up.
- Stomach - tense your stomach muscles.
- Arms - make fists and tense your muscles as if you were trying to lift something.
- Shoulders - shrug your shoulders. Lift them up towards your ears.
- Face - make a frowning expression. Squeeze your eyes shut and screw up your nose. Clench your teeth.



Ending

It can be helpful to spend a few minutes just lying quietly in a relaxed state. See if you can notice any tension in your body and try to relax it. Otherwise, just let the tension be. If your mind wanders, try to bring your concentration back to your breathing.

Finally, count down silently and slowly: 5-4-3-2-1-0, and come out of the relaxation in your own time. See if it's possible to carry that relaxed feeling into whatever you do next.

Distraction

Distraction is a good technique to fend off symptoms of anxiety and stress when they feel overwhelming. This can also give you space to deal with a situation in a more considered and positive manner. It is also helpful when you don't have the space or time to use a more proactive approach, such as a relaxation exercise.

Distraction simply involves trying to take your mind off uncomfortable symptoms or thoughts. You can do this by trying to focus on something unrelated. Often this helps them to pass. It is still important to remember that the symptoms of anxiety are not harmful or dangerous. Even if you didn't use distraction or relaxation techniques, nothing terrible would happen.

Ideas to help distract you from your troubling thoughts or anxiety include:

- Try to appreciate small details in your surroundings.
- Count backwards from 1000 in multiples of 7.
- Focus on your breathing, for example, how it feels to breathe in and out.
- Count things that you can see that begin with a particular letter.
- Visualise being in a pleasant, safe and comfortable environment (e.g. being on a beach).
- Listen to your favourite music. Try to pick out all the different instruments and sounds that you can hear.

As with any relaxation exercise, it may take a few minutes before you begin to feel like it's working.

Problem Solving

You might find it more difficult to cope if you have lots of problems that you can't seem to get on top of. This can have a clear impact on our stress levels and mood. Struggling with unresolved problems can often make us feel worse. We can end up worrying or ruminating over our problems without finding a way to resolve them. This can make us feel even more upset, and can end up interfering with our sleep.

It can help to develop a structured way of working through a problem. Beginning to overcome some of your problems might help you to feel better. You can improve your problem solving skills by learning to apply the steps outlined here.



Identify your problem

The first thing to ask yourself is **◆** "what is the problem?" Try to be as specific as possible. For example:

- "I owe **◆**400 to my friend."
- "I am going to miss this deadline."



Come up with possible solutions

Try to list every way that you can think to overcome your problem. Don't worry about how unrealistic an idea seems. Write down anything and everything. The best solutions are likely to be the ones you think of yourself. This is because nobody really knows your situation as well as you do. It may help to consider:

- How you might have solved similar problems in the past.
- What your friends or family would advise.
- How you would like to see yourself tackling the problem.



Choose a solution

Next you need to select the best solution from your list. Think carefully about each option. It is useful to go through all the reasons 'for' and 'against' each idea. This will help you to make a good decision and select the best solution.

After this you may find that you are still unsure. Perhaps a couple of approaches seem equally good. Try to pick one to begin with. If it doesn't work then you can always go back and try out a different one later.



Break down your solution

To help you carry out your chosen solution, it can be useful to break it down into smaller steps. This can make it easier and more manageable to follow through. The number of steps required will vary depending on the solution and how complex it is. For example: Someone with debt may have decided to try and resolve their problem by getting a part time job. This would require several steps.

1. Buying a newspaper with job adverts.
2. Choosing which jobs to apply for.
3. Creating a CV.
4. Sending out their CV.
5. Buying interview clothes.
6. Preparing answers to potential interview questions.



Try out your solution and review the outcome

Follow the steps required to carry out your solution. Simply take them one at a time. Go at your own pace and don't allow yourself to feel too rushed.

Once you have completed all the steps, you should then review the outcome. If you have successfully resolved your problem then great. If the problem still exists then don't give up.

- Is there another solution on your list that you could try?
- Is there a different solution that you have yet to consider?
- Can you ask someone else if they have any ideas or advice?
- Can you combine any of your solutions?

It is useful to remember that not all problems are within our control. This can make it really difficult if not impossible to resolve using the steps above. Perhaps you will have to wait, or ask someone else to take action instead. In such a situation, try not to worry. Nothing can be gained from worrying about something that you have no control over.



Identify Your Problem

Problem Solving

Identify a problem and try to come up with solutions to overcome it. By considering all of the options you will hopefully come up with the best solution.



Possible Solutions



For

Against



Chosen Solution

Steps Required

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Looking After Yourself

Taking steps towards a healthy lifestyle can have a real impact on our stress levels and mood. On the other hand, unhealthy habits can put your health, or the health of others, at risk. It can be a real challenge to overcome some habits or behaviours. Focusing on the benefits of positive change may boost your motivation.



Alcohol

Alcohol can impact your ability to cope and control behaviours. This can be unhelpful if you are trying to overcome problems with anger or anxiety. It can also interfere with your mood, and the quality of your sleep. You might think that consuming alcohol would help you sleep. In fact, as your body processes alcohol overnight it can wake you up. Some people use the numbing effect of alcohol to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Unfortunately, this approach can be damaging and make things worse. Drinking a lot and often can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



Drugs

Many drugs have a sedative or stimulant effect on the body which can have an impact on your sleep and mood. Some people use recreational drugs as a distraction, to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Using such substances can be damaging and make things worse. Developing a habit of regular or increasing use can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



Smoking

The content of cigarette smoke and nicotine replacements act as a stimulant. This can have an impact on your sleep and your mood. Some people say that smoking helps them to cope with stress. Smoking is known to have a negative impact on long-term physical health.



Caffeine

Caffeine can trigger a reaction that is similar to the symptoms of anxiety. It can also reduce the quality of sleep. It is best not to have anything caffeinated within four hours of bedtime. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, energy drinks, and some fizzy drinks contain caffeine.

By cutting down or stopping your consumption of potentially harmful substances, you are taking steps towards a healthier lifestyle.



Relationships / Social Network

Good relationships and support from friends and family can really help us cope better. It can also mean that we overcome problems more quickly and for longer. It can be really helpful to talk through difficulties with friends. You could discuss ways of coping, and some of them might have been through something similar.



Healthy Eating

What you eat and drink can have a significant impact on both your mood, sleep and physical health. Consider making changes towards having a balanced, nutritious diet. Try to eat regular meals and stay hydrated. Avoid unhealthy food that contain a lot of fat or sugar. Also, consider what you eat and drink close to bedtime. Caffeine, alcohol or a large meal can interfere with your sleep.



Exercise

Keeping fit and active can improve your physical health, mood and ability to cope with problems. Try to get at least some gentle exercise each week. You could try going for a walk, doing the garden or housework, playing sport or joining an exercise class. While exercise can also help us sleep, try not to be too active close to bedtime as this can keep you awake.



Routine

Having a consistent routine can help give structure to your life. Patterns can be set as we react the same way or do the same thing in certain situations. Our body can begin to expect and follow such routines. For example, taking time to relax and unwind before bed, and getting up at the same time.



Surroundings

Notice the impact of your environment on your mood. Consider the noise, temperature and light that you have to deal with. Your comfort and the tidiness of your surroundings can all have an impact on your mood. It can also effect your sleep and your overall ability to cope with problems. Try to take practical steps to resolve any particular issues.

Now you have some ideas to inspire healthy changes to your lifestyle, why not try them out? You could ask a friend for support. If you build them into your daily routine they won't seem like such a chore. Before long you might forget you ever did anything different!

Communication

Clear communication allows you to express yourself and get your message across to others. Careful and engaged listening also helps you to understand what other people have to say. Good communication can help you to feel better understood. You may also see an improvement in your relationships.



Listening to others

- Listen carefully to what others have to say. Don't get distracted.
- Try to avoid assumptions and misunderstandings. You could do this by repeating back or paraphrasing what was said. Check whether you have understood correctly.
- Don't jump to conclusions or try to mind-read. Ask questions if you are unsure.
- Try to understand the meaning and emotions expressed by the other person. It can be helpful to know why they are saying something to you.



Expressing yourself

- Think about what you mean to say before saying it. Also, consider what others might take from your comments.
- Try to be as clear as possible.
- Don't immediately get defensive or fight back. Try to understand more about what the other person feels and why they have said what they said.
- Express your own emotions in an appropriate and considered way. Avoid using an angry or confrontational style. Otherwise this may cause the other person to react in fear, hurt or frustration.

Styles of Communication

There are a range of communication styles that different people use at different times. Some are more effective and appropriate than others, depending upon the situation. The three most common are passive, aggressive and assertive communication.



Passive

- You prioritise the needs of others over your own.
- You go along with what other people want to do.
- You don't express or make known your own needs or desires.
- You may find it difficult to say **no** to someone.
- You fear people in authority.
- You cannot stand being criticised.

This style of communication can mean that you don't feel listened to by others. You might feel that you are walked over. If such a pattern builds up then people may not expect to hear your opinion. They can become used to ignoring you. You may end up accepting work or favours despite feeling that they may be unfair.



Aggressive

- You prioritise your own needs above the needs of others.
- You're always forcing your point through.
- You can't stand not getting your own way.
- You ignore other people and do not listen to their opinions and expressed needs.

This can be quite a confrontational style of communication which can lead to alienation. People may feel that they do not enjoy being with you because you do not take their opinions into consideration.



Assertive

- You try to balance your own needs against the needs of others.
- You take time to listen to other people's points of view.
- Expressing a preference before negotiating in a polite and constructive fashion.
- Believing that everyone should have an opportunity to express their needs.
- You have respect for yourself and respect for other people.

Being assertive involves being aware of your own needs. You can then express these with confidence. Your attitude and approach should be calm, confident and considerate.

Being assertive is about achieving an appropriate balance between the two extremes of aggressive and passive communication styles. It can be hard to be assertive. Especially if you feel anxious or intimidated by a situation. It may help to practice particular techniques and strategies.

Techniques and Strategies

You may find it more difficult to communicate in certain situations. For example, at work, with a member of the opposite sex, or with those in authority. It may be helpful to rehearse or role-play different scenarios. This can help you to gain confidence in difficult situations. Here are some helpful tips on being assertive:

- Communicate succinctly.
- Maintain appropriate eye-contact.
- Be polite but firm.
- Keep a calm, relaxed tone of voice and body posture.

You may feel nervous going into a difficult situation. Practising specific strategies can help you feel more prepared. You might also find the use of relaxation techniques helpful.



"I" statements

You may be unhappy about someone's behaviour. It is best to communicate to them how you feel about the situation. This tells the other person how you feel and paves the way for a helpful discussion of the situation. This is different from a "you" message which attacks or accuses the other person. Imagine this situation:

You had cooked a meal several evenings on the run. Each time, your partner or flatmate arrived late and the dinner had been spoiled.



Calmly saying:

"I get very upset when you arrive late for dinner. I put a lot of energy into making it. I feel that it's a waste if the food is cold or overdone."

Rather than:

"You're always late for dinner. You're selfish and inconsiderate. You can make your own dinner from now on."



Scratched Record

This can be useful with strangers when you have a specific task. For example, when taking something back to a shop. It consists simply of repeating your point several times no matter how the other person tries to divert you. Imagine this situation:

Taking a pair of trousers back to the shop.



Customer:

"I'd like to return these trousers because they've got a mark on them."

Sales Assistant:

"Hmm...well, it's only a small mark. It will probably wash off."

Customer:

"I'd still like them changed please."

Sales Assistant:

"We don't have any more of that size in stock."

Customer:

"I would like a replacement pair please."

Sales Assistant:

"OK. We'll re-order them. They should be in by the end of the week."



Taking Criticism

It can be difficult to listen to criticisms. It is a chance to learn about yourself as others see you. Helpful criticism can be very useful. This is very different to negative insults. Try simply listening to what is being said. Check that you understand their comments by repeating them back in your own words. You might not immediately agree with what has been said. It is important to stand your ground, but not become defensive.

Imagine this situation:

Person B is trying on a shirt and asks Person A for their opinion.



"You don't suit that shirt at all!"

Person A:

"OK...there's something you don't like about it."

Person B:

"The colour's wrong for you and the collar's too large."

Person A:

"You feel it would be better some other colour."

Person B:

Person A:
"Well, I thought that blue shirt you tried on yesterday looked great. I hope you don't think I'm being too blunt."

Two unhelpful responses to Person A's first comment could have been:

1. "Yes, I'm a terrible dresser." - This is not what Person A said. The comment was about one shirt. It was not about how Person B dresses all the time.
2. "What a cheek! You're no supermodel yourself." - This comment is more likely to lead to an argument.

Person B was instead able to simply listen to what Person A said. It was then possible for Person B to find out something useful about their appearance and the shirt. Person B may have gained the respect of Person A for being able to accept their comments.

Final Word



We hope that you found some of the ideas in this booklet useful. You can continue to use the techniques you found helpful long into the future and they should continue to benefit you.

If some of the ideas are not particularly helpful at first, it is perhaps worth sticking with them for a few weeks to give them a chance to work. If however you feel your situation remains largely unchanged or if you did not find this booklet useful, you should speak to your GP who can tell you about the other options available which you could find helpful.

Further Information and Resources

For further information and self-help resources go to Moodjuice online:

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

Moodjuice is a website designed to offer information and advice to those experiencing troublesome thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In the site you can explore various aspects of your life that may be causing you distress and obtain information that will allow you to help yourself. This includes details of organisations, services and other resources that can offer support. This self help guide comes from a series that you can access and print from Moodjuice. Other titles available include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Panic
- Sleep Problems
- Bereavement
- Anger Problems
- Social Anxiety
- Phobias
- Traumatic Stress
- Obsessions and Compulsions
- Chronic Pain

Some Useful Organisations

The following organisations or services may be able to offer support, information and advice.

Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. You don't have to be suicidal to call us. We are here for you if you're worried about something, feel upset or confused, or you just want to talk to someone.

Phone:

116123

Web Site:

<http://www.samaritans.org>

Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone line you can call when you're feeling down. You might be worried about something - money, work, relationships, exams - or maybe you're just feeling fed up and can't put your finger on why.

Phone:

0800 83 85 87

Web Site:

<http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

Living Life to the Full

Living Life to the Full is an online life skills course made up of several different modules designed to help develop key skills and tackle some of the problems we all face from time to time.

Web Site:

<http://www.lltff.com/>

Further Reading

The following books may be able to offer support, information and advice.

It's Not Personal!: A Guide to Anger Management

This is a practical guide and workbook written in simple language with no jargon. It shows how to get the anger and hurt out of relationships using charts, self-discovery questionnaires, imagery exercises, and anecdotes drawn from the author's work as a psychotherapist with hundreds of clients. It gives tips on dealing with family members, business associates, service workers, and drivers.

Author: A J Katz

Published: 1999

Managing Anger: Simple Steps to Dealing with Frustration and Threat

This book explains the effects of anger on our minds and bodies, and suggests ways of dealing both with our own anger and that of other people.

Author: Gael Lindenfield

Published: 2000

Overcoming Anger and Irritability

This book is a self-help manual for those who find that they are spoiling the lives of both themselves and those around them by constantly being irritable and angry. It has been written to explain why such bouts occur and what can be done, using cognitive behaviour therapy to overcome them. It takes a positive approach for which the long-term goal is lasting good temper and also looks at how best to handle situations which would tax even the most good natured person.

Author: William Davies

Published: 2009

Overcoming Anger: When Anger Helps and When it Hurts

A guide to anger, explaining how to take responsibility for it and cope successfully with its effects. It describes what anger is, and aims to help the reader to recognize whether it is justified and to accept and overcome different forms of anger. The issue of forgiveness is explored

Author: Dr Windy Dryden

Published: 1996