

# Managing anger to contain abusive behaviour

This factsheet is for people who struggle to manage feelings of anger appropriately, and/or who have behaved violently and abusively towards their partner.

## About anger

Anger is a feeling/emotion which can be good, bad, or neutral. It is different for everyone, but it can arise when we feel we can't control things that are happening around us, or we have been wronged by someone close to us.

What really matters is how we express our anger, what impact it's having on others and on our wellbeing, and whether it blocks our ability to experience and express other emotions.

Anger is usually an uncomfortable emotion, which hides other emotions.

## Anger and domestic abuse

Anger is not the cause of domestic abuse.

Everyone feels angry sometimes, but the key with any feeling is how we express it and how our feelings affect people around us negatively, particularly our partner and children.

When you feel that you have been wronged by your partner, or are angry at something they have (or haven't) done, you need to be able to stop yourself from using abusive and violent behaviours. Up until the moment you are violent and abusive, you always have the choice to act differently.

Putting strategies in place to manage your anger in a healthy way, is the first step in a process that can help you stop the anger from escalating in violent or abusive behaviour.

## Spot the warning signs!

This section will help you become more aware of when you may be starting to feel angry and you're getting into a situation when you may become abusive towards your partner.

The more you become aware of your 'warning signs', the easier it will be to stop becoming abusive. Think of 'warning signs' as the symptoms of your anger. When you notice the 'warning signs' of anger and could become violent or abusive, do something about it.

## Sore points

Sore points are typical situations when you've felt angry and then been abusive in the past. Sore points make people feel uncomfortable and they prefer to avoid talking about them or remembering what happened.

Examples might include conflicts over money, relatives, friends, sex, children, or who is right about something that happened in the past.

**Think:** what are your sore points?

## Physical warning signs

**Think:** what happens in your body when you begin to feel angry?

Some people feel tension in their stomach/shoulders/neck/jaw, changes in their breathing and heart rate. Other people may feel angry but not show any physical signs of anger.

**Think:** how do you behave when you're angry?

Physical sensations provide us with vital warning signs (or 'alarm bells') that we're building up towards abuse. Body language can send messages that you are angry in a range of ways: it could be in the way you sit, the tone of your voice, how you move, your facial expressions, going quiet, sighing, tapping your foot.

**Think:** if you looked at yourself in a mirror what would you see?

## Mental warning signs

**Think:** what do you think when you feel angry?

Some people wind themselves up, thinking negative things about their partner or trying to justify their abusive behaviour. This is negative self-talk.

You might be thinking 'they're doing this deliberately to wind me up', 'they are so stupid', 'they never listen to me'.

It may be helpful to make a note of the negative thoughts/typical thoughts you have as you build towards being violent and abusive.

Also note the things you don't think about, such as how your partner might be feeling, reflecting on your partner's good points, and listening to what they say. These thoughts combat your negative thoughts.

Remember, it's never too late to make a different choice. You can make a positive choice and walk away. Right up to the moment you are violent or abusive, you can choose to do otherwise.

### What's hiding underneath your anger?

**Think:** what are you *really* feeling?

When we express our anger, we often forget that there may be a whole range of feelings that we experience on the inside – the feelings that fuel our anger.

These may be vulnerable feelings about ourselves that are difficult to cope with, such as sadness, powerlessness or guilt. We tend to direct rage and anger towards other people. That is why anger is easier to feel and tempting to act on: it makes us feel powerful in the moment, but it's also more destructive.

When you are feeling angry, ask yourself what you are feeling angry about and try to identify the hidden feelings that fuel your anger. You may be feeling hurt, inadequate, embarrassed or something else.

Think about times in the past when you felt angry and became abusive. Try to identify what hidden feelings you were experiencing. This process can help you stop being abusive in the future.

Remember that these feelings are unpleasant, but they do not cause violence. You will have dealt with those feelings many times in your life and chosen not to be violent or abusive.

### Other ways to manage your feelings of anger

–Get some distance from the feeling: notice its physical effects on you, so that it starts to loosen its grip on you.

- Use cool-down tactics and try to relax: focus on your breathing, drop your shoulders, loosen your face, hands and limbs.
- Exercise.
- Distract yourself: when you notice angry thoughts, stop them before they continue by switching to a new thought or a completely different activity. Count to 10, 50 or 100. Play relaxing music, read a book, or watch some tv.
- Create a list of things you could say to yourself before, during and after situations where your behaviour might potentially escalate to violence.
- Call someone you know will be supportive in helping you to manage your angry feelings. You need people who will help you in choosing non-abusive behaviour, will have the safety of your partner and children at the forefront of their mind and will hold you accountable for your abusive behaviour
- Slow your behaviour from escalating to violence or abuse by getting out of your environment. Take a few minutes to get away and take a short walk or go to a different room where you can separate yourself from your angry feelings and you can cool off.

### **Take a time-out**

Time-out is a technique to help you stop being violent towards your partner. It has specific steps and you should use it with care and thought, and in collaboration with your partner.

To learn how to use a guided time-out, visit the [Respect Phonenumber website](#) or ask a Respect Phonenumber Advisor to help you understand what to do.

### **If you are finding it hard to change**

If you don't feel able to stop your violence and abuse you should think about moving out the house and not seeing your partner for a while. It's the only way to keep your partner and children safe.

### **Call the Respect Phonenumber – freephone 0808 8024040**

We will listen to you in a non-judgemental way, discuss your situation and help you think about how to change. We can give you contact details for a domestic abuse prevention programme, if there is one in your area. Our helpline is confidential.