

**STEPS primary care mental health team, Glasgow**

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# **Coping with Anger**

**Dr Simon Petrie**

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# **COPING WITH ANGER**

This booklet will tell you about anger. It is for people who feel that this can be a problem for them.

It aims to do 3 things

- help you to learn more about anger
- look at things that may cause you to feel anger
- give you ideas on how to control your anger

## **PART ONE: FINDING OUT ABOUT ANGER**

- A. Anger quotes - Alec's story
- B. What is anger?
- C. When does anger become a problem?
- D. What causes you to feel anger?

## **PART TWO: ANGER CONTROL**

- A. Control your angry thoughts
- B. Control your angry feelings and angry body
- C. Control the things you do when you are angry

## **PHONE NUMBERS, WEBSITES, BOOKS**

# **PART ONE**

## **Finding out about anger**

## **A. ANGER QUOTES**

*“I’ve got a really bad temper on me. The slightest little thing can set me off. The other day my wife forgot to put the milk in the fridge over night. Next day I went crazy. I threw the milk at the wall and stormed out of the house.”*

**Ahmed, age 32**

*“When I’ve got a drink in me I always get in fights. Somebody just needs to look at me the wrong way, and that’s it. Red mist. I just don’t care. Hit first and hit hard.”*

**Hugh, age 24**

*“Sometimes I get so angry, I just don’t know what to do. I’ll end up thinking about what’s upset me for days. I end up doing nothing about it – I’m such a coward. I get really angry with myself for being so weak”.*

**Susan, age 50**

## **ALEC'S STORY**

**This is the story of Alec. You can read parts of Alec's story through this booklet. Alec is 39 and has a problem with anger. This is a true story, and it is written the way Alec told it.**

*"I've got a problem with my temper. I can get totally raging over just about anything. It doesn't matter what it is half the time. It could be somebody just looking at me the wrong way. Or if someone cuts me up when I'm out in my car. I just feel like people are trying to get at me, and when I feel like that, I just lose it"*

*"I've done loads of mad stuff when I've been in a rage. I've been in loads of fights. I've trashed my kitchen in the house a couple of times. I've smashed in a car one time – I used a baseball bat and did the windows in. I've been in bother from the police a few times. The last time I got a big fine, and told I would be in jail the next time"*

*"Being angry all the time wasn't doing me much good. I'd lost about four jobs over the years. I'd been married twice, and split up both times because my temper was causing problems."*

**You can read more about Alec later on in the booklet**

## B. WHAT IS ANGER?

Like other feelings anger is part of your make up as a human being. It is as normal as feelings like happy, sad, love, joy or disgust. Anger is something that we all feel.

Anger can be a good thing. It can give you energy, and prepare you for tough times. It can help you to say things which you might bottle up if you didn't get angry. But anger can also be a big problem. It can be very harmful in the way that it can affect you and other people.

**Here are some ...**

<b>ANGRY THOUGHTS</b>	<b>ANGRY FEELINGS</b>
"I'm going to kill him"	Tension
"How dare she do that to me"	The red mist
I can't take this anymore"	
<b>THINGS PEOPLE DO WHEN ANGRY</b>	<b>ANGRY BODY</b>
Fighting	Racing heart
Shouting	Sweating
Swearing	Pumped up muscles

## WHEN DOES ANGER BECOME A PROBLEM?

When it comes down to it, only you will know whether your anger is a problem for you or not. Of course other people you know may not agree! These are some ways of thinking about whether anger is a problem or not for you. Try to answer these questions. Be as honest as you can. Tick the boxes that most apply to you :-

- Do you often get angry and lose your temper?
- Does this happen weekly, daily, or more often?
- Does your temper cause problems at home or at work?
- Does your level of anger feel very, very strong?
- Does your anger last a long time?
- Do little things that don't annoy others get you really wound up?
- Do you feel unable to do other things because you get so angry?
- Does your anger often lead to violence?
- Do you cause harm to yourself or others when angry?
- Do others complain about your temper?
- Do others sometimes seem scared of you?

If you have ticked some or all of the boxes, then anger could be a problem for you. Can you ask someone close to you if they feel the same way about you?

## ALEC'S STORY

**Here is more about Alec :-**

*“It got to a point where I just couldn't go on the way I was. I was hitting the self destruct button. Every weekend I was in bother. I lost my job because I was off work with a bust hand. My wife left me because she couldn't handle my temper and my moods. My family wouldn't speak to me. I even pushed all my pals away. Ended up pretty much on my own.”*

*“Every time I got angry, it would just simmer away for days. I couldn't let things lie. I could hardly concentrate because all I could think about was whatever little thing had got me angry in the first place. Life was just totally crap. I knew it was me that to blame for that, but I couldn't seem to stop it or change it.”*

*“I couldn't seem to stop myself. I've always been a bit like that. Even when I was a kid, I couldn't control myself. I think it was to do with my old man. He was real angry too. Used to take it out on me because I was the oldest. I was beat about a fair bit....”*

**Read more of Alec's story later on**

## **D. WHAT CAUSES YOU TO FEEL ANGER?**

Anger is the result how you react to the things that happen around you (*events*). *Your nature* and what you *think* and *feel* affects how you react or *behave* when you feel angry.

### **Events**

Here are some events that can trigger angry feelings. Do any of these happen to you?

### ***Hassles***

Hassles are the things that annoy you or get on your nerves, like loud noises or someone bugging you, or even breaking things by mistake. Other hassles might be things that get in the way of you doing stuff. Or when you are in a hurry to get somewhere and you are held up. Or when you want something good to happen and then it doesn't.

### ***Abuse***

Abuse can be things that are said – like name calling, being put down or other unkind remarks made to you. Abuse can also be things that are done – like being pushed, grabbed, punched, kicked or spat at.

### ***Not being treated fairly***

Feeling that you or someone else is not being treated fairly or as an equal can lead to anger.

## **How you react inside**

### ***Your nature***

People deal with events that happen in their own way. You will get wound up by things that may not get to others. Your nature is whether you are more hot headed or have a quick temper, or are more laid back or calm. Your nature tends to be a stable thing through your life. If you are hot headed now, it is likely that you always have been. Although it is often hard to change your nature, with time and effort you can learn to do this.

### ***Thoughts***

***How you view things.*** What things mean to you can affect whether you get angry or not. If you care more about something it is more likely that you could become angry about it.

***Taking things to heart.*** When some things happen you may think that people are trying to get at you, when perhaps they are not really. Maybe you jump to conclusions too quickly. Maybe you have not seen the bigger picture. Taking things to heart like this can make you more angry.

***Self-talk.*** Self-talk means the things that you say to yourself inside. This plays a big part in whether you get angry or not.

*“I’m going to tell him where he can stick it!”*

*“I’m not taking this any more – next time that guy gets it!”*

*“Why doesn’t she just get off my back!”*

This kind of self-talk will add fuel to the fire. It can make you more angry, and make your anger last longer.

## ***Feelings in your body***

***Adrenaline rush.*** We have all felt this before. It's that feeling of tension before something big, exciting or risky happens. Adrenaline causes that feeling of red mist when you lose your temper. You become pumped up and ready for action. Your heart beats faster. Blood pressure goes up. Muscles become more tense. Breathing becomes faster. You may become hot, sweaty and flushed.

***Feeling tense.*** Angry feelings often result from tension that builds up over time. When you feel strung-out and tense, there is more chance you will get angry. Being tensed up makes you more likely to over react.

## ***Moods***

Being moody, cross or crabbit can set you up for anger. Being depressed can also have a big say in how angry you feel. People who are depressed are more likely to feel bad tempered or be stressed. Maybe you – or others – think you have lost your sense of humour. Maybe you take things too serious. These things can make it more likely that anger will become a problem.

## *The things you do*

**Getting aggressive.** Some deal with their angry feelings by getting aggressive. They might scream or shout, kick or punch people or objects, or threaten others. When you get aggressive with someone, this can lead to them getting aggressive with you. The whole process can quickly spiral. Anger fuels anger. *It takes two to tango.* A fight needs two people to fuel it! If you can just walk away things will often calm down.

**Doing nothing at all.** When some people get angry, they do nothing at all. They don't express their anger. This can cause anger to lurk around and simmer away. It can pop out another time. You might even start to get down on yourself or think that you are weak or a failure for not having dealt with what made you angry. This can lead to low mood.

**Blocking it out.** Some people try to block out angry thoughts and feelings. They do this by drinking more, or by taking drugs. Some people get so angry with themselves that they give up caring what happens to them, and they start to take big risks. Others may feel that they deserve to be punished, and may choose to harm themselves. Angry feelings that are not expressed can be harmful long term.

## **PART TWO**

### **Learning to deal with anger**

## **A. CONTROL YOUR ANGRY THOUGHTS**

### **Know yourself**

Tune into yourself, and to the way you think when you are angry. Think about what has made you angry, and why. Often we just react without giving it any thought. Part of anger control is knowing yourself and what makes you tick. Ask those close to you what they think.

### **Know others**

Think about things from someone else's view. Put yourself in their shoes. How do they see it? Anger is often caused by crossed wires. If you can learn to see things from someone else's view, it will help you not to get so wound up.

### **Change your own views**

Anger can be caused by the way you view things. Try to see things from a new angle. 'Step back' in yourself and look at things from a distance, as though you were on the outside.

- is your view of things the right one? How do you know this is true?

What would a friend think of the same event?

- try to think about what there is to support your view of the event being the right one. Now try to think about what there is to support your friend's view of the event being the right one. On balance, which is more likely to be true? Can you now see things from a new angle?

Trying to see things from a new angle can take practice. But with time you will get better at it, and be able to not take things to heart so much.

## **Change your self talk**

Changing your self talk can help you to control your anger better. Try to change the way you talk to yourself inside **before**, **during** and **after** you get angry. Below are listed some things that you can try saying to yourself inside. These are just ideas. Try to add some of your own.

### **Before**

*I can handle this! I'm not going to take this to heart. I know how to control my anger. I'm not going to argue. I don't need to. It won't do any good. Inside I'm stronger. I can stay in control. Stay chilled. Just laugh off this crap. No point in getting upset.*

### **During**

*Keep the head. No use in going mad. Walk away. Rise above this. Don't make too much out of this. He's got no self-control, I do. What's the point in fighting? Being angry will just get others angry too. I'm not going to get pushed around, but I'm not going nuts either.*

### **After**

#### **1. when it was a bad outcome**

*Forget it. It's over. Who cares? Did it mean that much anyway? It'll take me time to get better at handling stuff like that*

#### **2. when it was a good outcome**

*I handled that one pretty well. It could have been a lot worse. I could have got a lot more angry there. It's better for me not to get so raging.*

## **B. CONTROL YOUR ANGRY FEELINGS AND ANGRY BODY**

### **Relax**

It's not possible for you to be angry and relaxed at the same time. As we have seen, anger is linked with being tense. When you get angry, your body gets tense and wound up. That makes your heart beat faster. You breathe quicker, your blood pressure goes up and your muscles get tight. When you are uptight, it is easy for you to get angry. Little things seem like big things.

Try to relax, stay chilled and in control of the tension that goes hand in hand with anger. See the 'how to relax' leaflet or CD that goes with this series, for ideas on how to relax better.

Here are two reasons for learning to relax :

- You reduce how tense you are. When you have had a rough day, relaxing can help settle your nerves.
- You know you can control your feelings when you want to. Knowing how to take a deep breath and calm down can buy you a bit of extra time. You can think about what you are doing. This can change things a lot.

## **Use humour**

Using humour can help with anger. Humour and anger do not fit. Laughter can be a great release. Anger can come from taking things too serious.

Using humour does not mean that life is a joke. But sometimes we all take things too serious. Humour is about standing back from life's more serious side, to look at the funny things. Think about the last time you had a good laugh. You may have felt good – really alive and at ease– and not angry at all.

Billy Connolly is one example of someone who has been able to use humour. Billy was an angry man, who had a lot of bad things happen to him in his life. Yet he can make fun out of himself, and see the lighter side. This has helped him to move on and to feel happy. Could you learn from this?

How could you go about using your sense of humour? What things have made you laugh in the past? Go back over these things and think about them. Are there fun things you don't do any more that you could start again? Are there old friends who you used to have a laugh with who you could look up again now?

Stepping back and having a laugh at things that really don't matter can be a big help.

## Other things

Are there other things that you could try to help control angry feelings? Here are some ideas. Add in ideas of your own below.

- Some people find things like yoga helpful. There are lots of places in Glasgow that run groups. Maybe you could try some of these out.
- Use art, or channel your anger to create something. You could try painting or sculpting, or use music or writing to express anger.
- You could take up a sport. Try football, rugby, running, cycling, swimming, or a martial art. These things can help you channel anger.

## C. CONTROL THE THINGS YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY

### Change aggression

Aggression causes harm and pushes others away. Anger control is about being calm and firm in solving problems. Being able to let people know about your angry feelings is a key skill. The first part of anger control will help you slow down the whole process of getting angry. You can now think more about the best thing to do if you get angry.

- *Ask yourself if you do this how will this help you? Will it do you any good? If so, how?*
- *What about the costs? Will doing this be bad for you at all? How?*

Practice makes perfect here. Practice trying to keep calm and in control when you are angry. Soon you will be good at taking the best course of action for you, and not just steaming in. Choose to do things in a new way. People will respect you more if you don't lose the plot every time you get angry. Being angry all the time pushes people away and can make it hard for others to like you. Most people will be impressed if you deal with things in a calm way and don't use violence to get your own way. If you do this most people will see you as a bully and will want to avoid you like the plague.

## **Don't avoid**

If you get angry and then do nothing, this can have a bad effect on you too. Over time, you may start to get angry with yourself. This could lead you to feel low and depressed. Try to express how you feel there and then. Be calm and direct when you do this. Don't shy away from being angry. You feel anger for a reason. Expressing how you feel and not bottling it up will help you feel better in the long run.

## **Use common sense**

Here are some simple steps which will help you to relax more and feel less stress.

## ***Drugs, fags, booze, caffeine***

These are short term fixes. They may block things out for a time, but they make anger or stress worse long term. When you have any of these in your system you are also more likely to lose your temper. It will help you to try to keep to only small levels of any of these things.

## ***Diet & how active you are***

Keep active, drink more water, and try to stick to a healthy diet. This can help your body cope better with stress, and make you less likely to get angry.

## ***Dealing with stresses at home and work etc.***

If stress is a problem for you, try to find a way of making changes. You can find out more about dealing with stress in other leaflets in this series.

## **Change the things you do!**

Think about the times when you are more likely to get angry. Think about where you are. Who you are with. When it is. What you are doing. Try to write some of these things down in the box below. There is an example below to help.

**where** – *in the pub*

**who** – *I see someone I don't get on with*

**when** – *I have had a bad day and I have drunk too much*

**what** – *I get into an argument*

**Now** - could you change some of these things? Would this maybe stop you from getting angry in the first place? Write some ideas in the box below which might help.

**where** – *go to a different pub*

**who** – *steer clear of people you don't like*

**when** – *when you've had a bad day, don't drink too much*

**what** – *avoid arguments*

## PHONE NUMBERS, WEBSITES, BOOKS

### **British Association of Anger Management.**

Phone 0845 1300 286. Run different courses for dealing with anger. Based in England. Lots of info on their website - [www.angermanage.co.uk](http://www.angermanage.co.uk)

### **Other websites**

[www.angermanagementonline.com](http://www.angermanagementonline.com). Some free info. Online anger management courses are available.

[www.bbc.co.uk/health](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health)

[www.bupa.co.uk/fact sheets](http://www.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

### **Books**

**“Overcoming Anger”** by W. Dryden.

Published by Sheldon. *ISBN 0859697134*

**“Managing Anger”** by G. Lindenfield.

Published by HarperCollins. *ISBN 0007100345*

**“The Angry Self”** by M.M. Gottlieb.

Published by Zeig, Tucker & Theisen. *ISBN 189194407X*

## **Tackling other problems**

Many people find that having a problem with anger is only one problem among others. If you feel you would like to tackle problems such as stress, depression, alcohol, anxiety, poor sleep, panic, low self-confidence, etc., then STEPS might be able to help.

Ask at your GP practice for more information or take a look at our web site ([www.glasgowsteps.com](http://www.glasgowsteps.com)) to find out more.