



## **Beyond Crime: Managing anger**

After being affected by crime, it is completely normal to experience many complex emotions. Anger is just one of them.

Anger is a natural response to feeling attacked or treated unfairly, but it can be difficult to deal with, particularly if it is something you're not used to feeling. It can feel explosive, or like it is simmering away in the background. Either way, it can be exhausting.

**We've put together this workbook to help you manage any anger you may be feeling after crime.**

**[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)**

# Do you recognise yourself in any of these statements?

I am not generally an angry person and I am not sure how to cope with how I feel after the incident.

I feel as though I often lose control of my anger.

I say or do things when I am angry that I feel bad about afterwards.

I have held on to my anger for a long time – I cannot let go of it.

My family and friends say I have an anger problem.

I find myself getting frustrated or angry at things that would not normally bother me.

I try to keep my anger inside – but then I have an outburst.

When I get really angry, I want to (or do) lash out.

**If any of this sounds familiar, you may find this workbook helpful.**

With the help of the different strategies and exercises in this workbook, we hope that you will:

- begin to understand any anger you're feeling after crime
- learn how to express your anger in a safe way
- be able to manage your anger long-term.

There's lots of information, but you can take things at your own pace. Many of the exercises ask you to reflect on your feelings and experiences, so you may prefer to come back to them after taking some time to think. Different things help different people, so don't worry if you find some exercises more helpful than others.

**"You need a new kind of relationship with your emotions, one where you run them instead of them running you."**

Maria Arapakis, clinical and educational psychologist



# What is anger?

Everyone gets angry sometimes. It's a natural response to feeling attacked, threatened, or treated unfairly, so is often completely justified after crime.

The problem can be what we do with this emotion. While anger can motivate us to change things or make them right, things can feel like they're beyond our control after crime, particularly if we're going through the criminal justice process. We can struggle to explain how we're feeling and can find ourselves shouting, becoming aggressive or withdrawing from others. It can feel like we're angry too often or for too long.

## Taking control

Humans have evolved to respond to threats instinctively to increase our chances of survival. You may have heard this called the 'fight, flight or freeze' response.

In dangerous or stressful situations, a series of things happen in our bodies beyond our control: our brain releases adrenaline to give us energy, our heart beats faster to pump more blood to our muscles and brain, and our lungs breathe faster and deeper to take in more oxygen for our muscles.

Our bodies are preparing us to take on the danger (fight) or to run away (flight). Sometimes our bodies are overwhelmed, and we find ourselves unable to do anything (freeze).

These involuntary reactions were vital for escaping predators. In the modern world, our sources of stress are very different, but our bodies only know how to respond to stress in one way.

We experience the same rush of adrenaline, which can bring about lots of uncomfortable feelings across our body. This can feel overwhelming, but spotting these **early warning signs** can help us recognise that we're becoming angry, so we can pause, take control and consider the best thing to do next.



## You're not alone...

'Anger about crime was shown to be... the most typical specific reaction to... victimisation', according to research.<sup>1</sup>

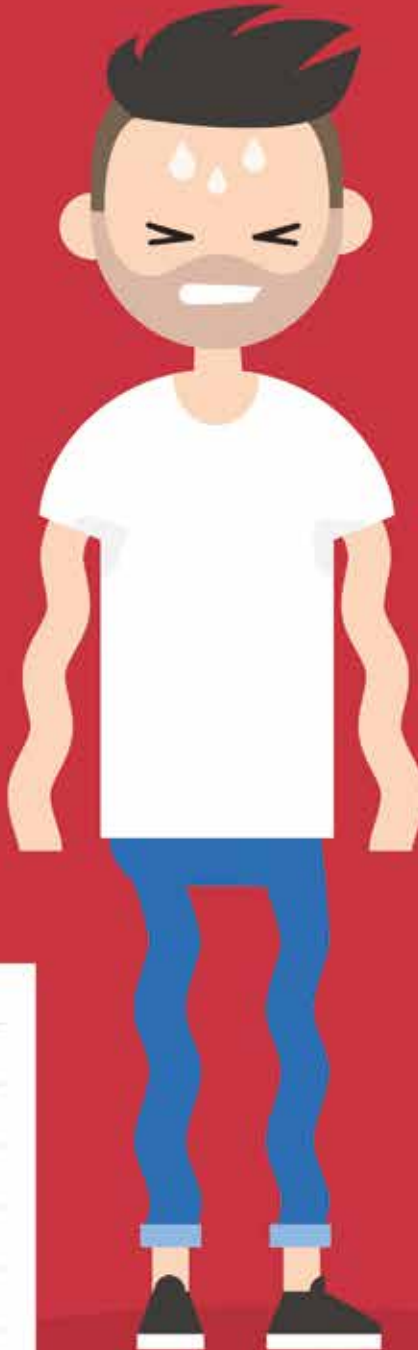


# The early warning signs

How do you feel in your body when you get angry? Do any of the feelings below sound familiar? Jot down any more that you can think of.

Remember, not everyone will experience all of these sensations or experience them in the same way, but identifying your early warning signs could help you recognise when you're feeling angry, so you can reassure yourself that it's normal, take a breath and work out the best thing to do next.

- Dizzy or lightheaded
- Heart pounding or beating faster
- A burst of energy
- Muscle tension
- Feeling sick
- Wanting to shout or scream
- Trembling or shaking



- Feeling hot
- Wanting to lash out
- Wanting to hide
- Feeling tongue-tied
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Churning stomach
- Wanting to cry
- Wanting to run away

Write here...

Write here...

**"My anger comes in many guises, but I've always found it dissolves with time. Knowing that my anger is a temporary feeling helps me to control the negative effect it has on me. It also stops me making rash decisions or lashing out to other people."**

Service user



# Know your anger

## Why do you get angry?

When you're feeling angry about something specific, such as a crime, seemingly unrelated things may irritate you more easily than normal. It could be that because you've not resolved the main source of anger, you're generally tense and have a 'shorter fuse'. However, for many of us, some day to day things are bound to wind us up – it could be crowded places, driving or talking about money.

**Recognising what might trigger your anger could help you plan for your potential reaction, or maybe avoid certain situations.**

Think about the last few times you felt angry – can you remember what 'set you off', or made the whole thing worse? Writing this down could help you spot any similarities.

Write here...



## How do you react?

**Jot down the ways you tend to react in the situations that bother you.** Do you shout, go quiet, lash out, or hide away? Perhaps you find yourself wanting to throw things or getting defensive.

Write here...



We can usually choose how we react to a strong feeling. When we're hungry we may **want** to eat a family size chocolate bar, but it is our **choice** whether or not to do it. Is there anything you'd like to change about the way you react to anger? How does your usual response tend to make you feel?

Write here...



# Emergency coping strategies

In the heat of the moment, **relaxing your body** can help you feel more in control, so you can step back and plan what to do or say next.

Emergency coping strategies can help, but they don't always come naturally at first. Practise them as much as you can, preferably when you are not feeling anxious or stressed. That way, you're more likely to remember them automatically when you need them.

**"I sometimes feel like I can't control my anger. If someone gets like this too, I would say take a breath, try to talk to someone, keep it calm and don't over fry your brain with the anger."**

Service user

## Deep breathing

When we're feeling angry or upset our breathing tends to speed up and come from the chest; it can feel like we're taking in tiny sips of air, which can make us hyperventilate and feel panicked.

Deep breathing helps you slow down your breathing and heart rate while giving your heart and brain a regular healthy dose of oxygen. This helps you calm down and think more clearly. What's more, no one need know you are doing it!

### How to do it

**Find a comfortable position** – either standing or sitting.

**Breathe in through your nose deeply and slowly for a count of five.** It is important that your breathing comes from your stomach, and not the chest. You want your stomach, not your chest, to 'puff out' as you breathe in. Try placing one hand on your stomach and one on your chest as you take a deep breath through your nose – the hand on your stomach should be pushed out as you breathe in, while the hand on your chest should stay quite still.

**Hold your breath for between five and ten counts.** Make sure you don't continue to hold your breath if it starts to feel uncomfortable.

**Then breathe out slowly and completely through your mouth for between five and ten counts.**

Draw your navel towards your spine to expel all the air from your lungs. Don't keep forcing your breath out if it starts to feel unpleasant. The important thing to remember is that your out-breath should be longer than your in-breath.

**Repeat** until your heart rate slows down and you are naturally able to breathe normally.





## Muscle tensing

Muscle tensing is a good way to release tension and stress.

When we are stressed our muscles can tense up tight: our body's way of getting ready to 'fight'. Scrunching up our muscles then letting them go can help us relax and feel more able to focus on what to do next.

### How to do it

1. Find a comfortable position – standing, sitting or lying down.
2. Tense all of your muscles. You could scrunch up your arms, legs, feet, hands and face all at once. Some people prefer to tense one group of muscles at a time, starting with their toes and moving up their body.
3. Hold your position and count to ten, and then relax your muscles completely.
4. Repeat four or five times until you begin to feel more relaxed.
5. Once you have tensed and relaxed as many times as you want to, you may find it helpful to stay in your relaxed state for a few minutes, noticing if any tension comes back into your body and trying to release it. Use a big breath out to relax your muscles again.

#### TOP TIP

**If you are in a situation where you don't feel able to tense your whole body, try just tensing your toes so nobody knows what you are doing.**



## Do an anger work out

When we feel angry, our bodies flood with adrenaline, giving us a burst of energy. This can make us jumpy and restless, but if all that energy has nowhere to go, it can sometimes turn into aggression.

Try channelling any excess energy into something productive.

Exercising, or using your hands – maybe getting out in the garden – can help use up energy and distract your brain while you calm down.

You could:

- Go for a walk or jog – take the dog if you have one!
- Get creative! Cook, bake, draw or paint something.
- Run some errands.
- Clear out that messy drawer or cupboard.
- Put on some music and dance!



### What would you do?

Write here...

**"Get to know yourself and recognise the symptoms of your anger. Don't be afraid of trying new things and even if something doesn't help you, it might help someone else, so keep trying new things."**

Service user

## Opposite actions

You may be starting to see a pattern: changing what you do (your behaviours) can help change the way you think and feel.

**So doing things differently could actually help you feel less angry.**

This is because our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all closely linked. In every situation, your **thoughts** influence how you **feel** both physically and emotionally. This then influences **what you do**.

You can find yourself in a vicious cycle, reacting in the same way every time you're in a situation that makes you angry. If things don't improve, we can end up feeling 'stuck'.

A simple way to break these cycles is to do the **opposite** of what your initial reaction tells you to do. This can be challenging, but with a little practice it can help you see things differently and move forward.

**Let's look at some examples. Can you think of any more you've come across in your daily life?**



Feeling/emotion	Our initial urge	Opposite action
Anger	Scream/shout	Stay calm and try to see the other person's perspective
Anger	Go quiet	Try to be assertive and explain calmly what has upset you
Low mood	Withdraw from other people	Be active and engage with others
Write here...	Write here...	Write here...

**"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."**

Susan Jeffers Ph.D.



# Managing anger long-term

If you're struggling with anger generally, it can seep into every part of your life. It can make it difficult to relax, concentrate or just be yourself. Try introducing the following strategies into your everyday life.

## Express yourself

Managing anger does not mean suppressing it. 'Bottling it up' never works – the pressure will build and build until you burst!

**Learning to communicate your thoughts and feelings to others in a productive way is key to managing anger.**

If you can make your voice heard – while listening to others and being sensitive to their point of view – there's no need to keep your frustrations to yourself. It could reduce your stress levels and blood pressure, but also help you better understand those around you and improve your relationships.

### When expressing yourself:

1. Take some time to think about what you want to say, so you don't say things you don't mean.
2. Try to be as clear as possible, using 'I' statements to describe how you feel. Using phrases like "**I feel** angry" instead of "You made me angry" allows you to express yourself without making accusations. For example, saying "You keep coming home late! It's so inconsiderate!" may get you a defensive and angry response. Instead, try "**I feel** worried when you come home late; it means I can't sleep".
3. When responding to someone, try not to be confrontational, even when you're feeling defensive. Take a moment to try to understand how they feel and why they may have said what they said.

### When listening to others:

1. Focus your attention on them and don't interrupt. Let go of any distractions (eg put your phone away, turn off the television).
2. Try not to make assumptions or guess what they are thinking. Try repeating back or rephrasing what the other person has said to check you have understood correctly.
3. Ask questions if you are unsure what they mean. It's helpful to know the feelings behind what they are saying.

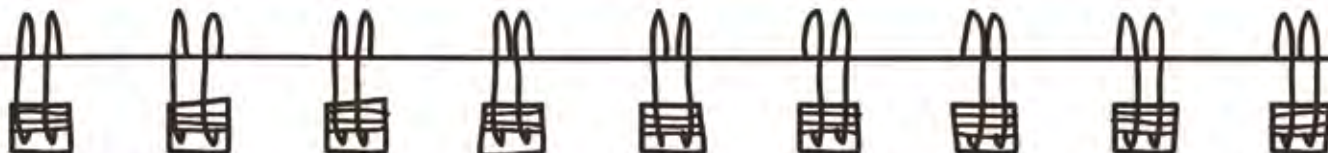


## Put it in writing

If you don't feel able to talk to anyone about how you're feeling straight away, you may find it helpful to get the thoughts out of your head and onto paper. Don't worry about spelling, it making sense or even being readable; scribble all over the pages if you want, or tear them up afterwards.

**"I journaled a LOT, especially when I felt particularly upset. This enabled me to rant on a page... I was free of the upsetting thought or idea. I could consider it in a different way if I chose to revisit it later and I felt strangely separate from the very distressed person who wrote it."**

Christine, counsellor and survivor.



Some questions to answer if you're not sure what to write:

**What is the problem?**

Be specific - what is causing you to feel angry generally/this week/right now?

Write here...

**How do you feel?**

Use as many descriptive words as you can. How do you feel in your body, as well as emotionally?  
You could use [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com) to find more words!

Write here...

**What do you want to happen?**

Be specific - rather than "I want to stop feeling angry", what about "I want person X to apologise" or "I want to move house" or "I want to feel safer".

Write here...

**Can you do anything to make it happen, or change things?**

What different things could you do?

Write here...

**Who could help?**

Think about the people around you, and other organisations you could go to.  
What could each of these people do to help?

Write here...

**If you can't change things, what can you do to change how you feel, or react?**

Can you use any of the emergency coping strategies, such as deep breathing? Can you think of any other solutions?

Write here...



## Restorative justice

Moving forward from anger and distress after crime can be hard if you're battling with the question 'why me?' Restorative justice could help you get answers to your questions, have your say and move on from what happened.

### What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice processes bring those harmed by crime and those responsible for the harm into communication, enabling everyone affected to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward. No one has to take part if they don't want to – it is completely voluntary.

### What could I get out of it?

Evidence shows that over 85% of victims of crime who have taken part in restorative justice come away feeling satisfied. Being involved can give you a chance to:

- Have your say;
- Explain to the offender, and perhaps your family and friends for the first time, what the real impact and consequences of their behaviour has been on your life;
- Get answers to questions and hopefully find some sort of closure;
- Move forward positively with your life; and
- Help prevent the same thing happening to somebody else.



**"I felt so frustrated that our voices hadn't been heard by [the offender] or the court. It was unfair and it hurt. It doesn't change what happened, but at least I sleep better knowing that I've said what I needed to."**

Service user

### How does the process work?

If you decide to take part, a specially trained facilitator will contact both you and the person who harmed you to assess the best way to communicate. This could be face-to-face, or by letter, live video chat or pre-recorded messages. The facilitator will arrange to meet you to talk about the impact of what has happened, what you can expect from the process and what could be done to make things better for you.

If everyone agrees – that's you, the harmer and the trained facilitator – a meeting or communication will be arranged. It will be held in a safe place and guided by the facilitator and you will be able to bring friends and family along for support.

The harmer has the opportunity to listen and answer any questions you may have. They might apologise for what they have done, and can agree with you about how they could make things better for you. Harmers have said that taking part helped them address their feelings of guilt and remorse, do something positive and understand how their actions affect others.

**"I was so angry all the time. All I needed was for him to be truthful with me and tell me why he hurt me and my family. I felt elated after the meeting."**

Service user





## Take time out

When you're going through a hard time, it's easy to forget to take care of yourself, so setting aside some time to do this every day can be a helpful reminder.

Self-care is all about being aware of your physical, mental and emotional needs. You can choose to do this at any time of the day, but make sure you schedule it – and stick to it. Everyone deserves some 'me time'.

You could:

Listen to music, play with a pet, change your environment so it feels calming (eg lowering the lights), take deep breaths, take a walk, write a list of positive things about yourself, eat a nutritious meal, exercise, visualise something positive, have a bath, have a hot drink, tense and relax your muscles, call a friend or family member, read a book, dance, write a to-do list, watch your favourite film, or do something creative like drawing, painting, or cooking.

**What works for you? Remember, you can refer back to this when you need an idea for relaxation:**

Write here...





## Stay healthy, stay happy

Working through difficult situations can mean maintaining a healthy lifestyle falls down your list of priorities. This can sometimes make you feel even worse. It's not always easy, but keeping healthy can increase your ability to deal with whatever life throws at you. Here are some tips to get you started.

### Exercise regularly

The NHS recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week through a variety of activities. This could be brisk walking, playing sports or even gardening.

What could you do to get more active?

Write here...



### Eat regular, balanced meals

You should aim to eat at least five portions of fruits and vegetables every day, and limit foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar. Remember to drink plenty of water too – six to eight glasses a day to keep you hydrated, more if you are exercising.

What could you do to improve your diet?

Write here...



### Get enough sleep

Most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep every night. If you feel like you're not sleeping well, try setting a bedtime routine, keeping sleep to regular hours, and making sure your bedroom is sleep-friendly.

What could you do to improve your sleep?

Write here...



### Avoid drugs and alcohol

If you think you might need support around alcohol or drugs, talk to your VS supporter, your GP, or visit [www.turning-point.co.uk](http://www.turning-point.co.uk)



"I was angry at where the crime led my life. It dragged me down and impacted on my health and my family. Try and avoid unhealthy habits like drink and drugs as they will not help you in the long run."

Service user

**This can feel like a lot of things to manage when you're having a difficult time, so start by thinking about one thing in this list and work through it gradually.**

For example, if you don't tend to get much exercise, you could start by going for a walk every day, even if it's just around the block, then you can build it up bit by bit. Then next week you can set a bedtime routine to try to improve your sleep, and so on.

For more tips and advice on developing a healthy lifestyle, go to [www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)

## It's not working!

Finding the right anger management strategy that works for you doesn't always happen straight away. Sometimes you will have to try different strategies before you find your own way to cope.

Keep a note of what you've tried to review what's helping and what's not. Think about how you've felt about each of the strategies you've used and if there is anything else you could try.

### What have I tried?

Write here...

### What worked for me? What didn't work so well?

Write here...

### What else could I try?

Write here...

## When to ask for specialist support

If you feel that your anger is becoming difficult to manage and is having an impact on your relationships and other important parts of your life, you might consider getting specialist professional support to learn how to handle it better.

There are various types of talking treatments available, which involve talking with a trained professional to explore the causes and effects of your anger. To access these types of treatments, the first step is usually to talk to your GP, who will be able to tell you what is available in your area. Many NHS trusts run anger management courses locally which often involve a combination of counselling, group sessions and cognitive behavioural therapy.

**Remember that it's OK to ask for this kind of help – that's what it's there for! The most important thing is to make sure you are looking after yourself, and those around you.**





## Resources

Take a look at the websites below for more information and exercises to try.

Moodjuice is a website designed to help you think about your emotions and work towards solving any problems you may be having.

**[www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)**

Mood Panda is a mood tracking app which is designed to help you improve your mental health.

**[www.moodpanda.com](http://www.moodpanda.com)**

Live Well has information and advice about all aspects of healthy living, from diet and exercise, to sleep, stopping smoking and mental health.

**[www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)**

Be Mindful is an initiative of the Mental Health Foundation, and aims to improve your wellbeing through the practice of mindfulness.

**[www.bemindful.co.uk](http://www.bemindful.co.uk)**

## References

<sup>1</sup> Ditton, J., Farrall, S., Bannister, J., Gilchrist, E., & Pease, K. (1999). Reactions to victimisation: Why has anger been ignored? *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal*, 1(3), 52.

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



**Remember, if you feel you'd like any additional support or advice, our door is always open.  
Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.**

**My local Victim Support contact:**



We are an independent charity offering free, confidential support to people affected by crime and traumatic incidents.

For information and support, contact us by:

- calling: Supportline **08 08 16 89 111**
- using Next Generation Text (add **18001** before any of our phone numbers)
- Online: **victimsupport.org.uk**

To find out how you can help us, visit **victimsupport.org.uk/get-involved**



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