

Managing Anger Without Acting It Out: Exercises That Work

Anger is information, not a command

- Anger usually signals that a boundary was crossed, a need was ignored, or you feel powerless, threatened, or hurt.
- The goal is not to eliminate anger — it is to feel it without letting it choose your actions.
- Acting out anger may feel like relief in the moment, but it often creates more problems and deeper shame.

Exercise 1: The 90-second rule

- Neuroscience suggests the chemical surge of anger lasts about 90 seconds if you do not feed it with thoughts.
- When anger hits, set a timer for 90 seconds. Breathe slowly and do not rehearse the argument or plan a response.
- After 90 seconds, ask: Is this still an emergency? Most of the time, it is not.

Exercise 2: Name it to tame it

- Say out loud or write down: "I am angry because ____." Fill in the specific trigger, not a character attack.
- Then ask: "What is underneath this?" Common answers: fear, embarrassment, exhaustion, betrayal, loneliness.
- Naming the softer feeling underneath anger gives you something to address instead of something to fight.

Exercise 3: Change your body temperature

- Anger is a hot emotion. Cool it down: splash cold water on your face, hold an ice cube, or take a cold shower.
- Cold activates the mammalian dive reflex, which slows heart rate and interrupts the surge.
- Use this when you feel yourself about to say or do something destructive.

Exercise 4: Safe physical release

- Do something intense that does not cause harm: run up stairs, do push-ups, punch a pillow, tear paper, scream into a pillow.
- The body wants to discharge energy. Give it a safe outlet instead of a person or object.

- Set a time limit of 5–10 minutes, then check in with yourself.

Exercise 5: The STOP skill

- S — Stop. Freeze. Do not move or speak.
- T — Take a breath. One slow breath in and out.
- O — Observe. What is happening inside you and around you?
- P — Proceed mindfully. Choose the action that matches your values, not your heat.

Exercise 6: Write the angry letter you do not send

- Say everything you want to say on paper. Do not edit. Let it be ugly.
- Then wait 24 hours before deciding whether to send it, rewrite it, or burn it.
- Most unsent letters do not need to be sent; the act of writing is the release.

Exercise 7: Build a pause between trigger and action

- Track your triggers for one week. Notice the moment anger starts and the moment you act on it.
- Your job is to lengthen the space between those two moments by even one second at a time.
- Each second of pause is a victory. Skills grow through repetition, not perfection.

When anger is connected to depression or trauma

- Chronic anger can be a symptom of depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, autism, or unresolved grief.
- If anger is damaging your relationships, your job, or your self-respect, see a therapist — especially one trained in CBT, DBT, or trauma therapy.
- There is no shame in getting help with a feeling that has become bigger than you.

When to reach out immediately

- If anger leads to thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else, call or text 988.
- If you cannot stay safe, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
- You do not have to wait until you are calm to ask for help.

**If you are in
danger right
now**

Call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If there is immediate danger, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

This guide is educational information only. It is not medical, psychiatric, or crisis advice. If you are thinking about hurting yourself, contact 988 or 911 now.