



# A is for ADOLESCENT ANGER

This resource has been designed by Lyn French, A Space Director, to be used with the emotional learning cards from the set entitled '**A-Z of Emotions**'. Purchase the cards online at [www.inivacreativelearning.org](http://www.inivacreativelearning.org)

## INTRODUCTION

Whatever our age, we've all been a teenager. We know from experience that this is a challenging phase of life and research with young people confirms this. Anger is normal - it only becomes problematic if we don't recognise it for what it is and if we express it in ways that work against us, rather than for us. This worksheet focuses on adolescent anger exploring it from different angles and posing general questions on related themes. You can also give examples from your own life or from what you've observed around you. As well, you might want to look at the **A to Z of Emotions** cards to see how anger is described and how Chila Burman's art work illustrates this.

## ANGER THROUGH THE AGES

At every stage in life, anger features. Babies, for example, get angry when they're hungry or need human contact. They can't call out for their mother or carer so they cry to draw their attention. Younger children have what's commonly called 'tantrums'. They don't yet have the words or the understanding to talk about what's going on for them so they have no choice but to express their feelings this way.

- **What do you think young children get angry about? Did you feel this way when you were small?**

As we grow older, we start to put our feelings into words. It's likely we'll begin to think more about feelings in general - why we have them, what they tell us and how best to express them. This doesn't come naturally - it is something we all have to learn and work on developing throughout life.

- **What do teenagers often get angry about?**

When we're teenagers, we begin to identify what we want to do with our lives. We get a sense of the opportunities we might be offered and those we may never have. At the same time, we become more aware of life's limitations and what's wrong in the world. We might also struggle with figuring out who we are and who we want to become. This can all contribute to adolescent anger.

- **What does 'figuring out who we are' mean in practice?**



If we don't learn how to think about, express and manage our anger in our adolescent years, it could lead to serious problems later in life. 'Domestic violence' is a term most of us have heard. It describes adults who may love each other but they repeatedly get drawn into physical expressions of anger rather than being able to sit down and talk honestly and openly about their feelings and the difficulties they may be having.

All relationships stir up every human feeling there is - there's no avoiding it! Many experiences we all have such as being jealous, envious, left out, disagreed with, ignored, fearful of being abandoned and so on can lead to anger. We need to own our feelings and work on understanding them rather than lump them altogether and call them 'anger'!

- **What are some common causes of jealousy in teenage years?**

Anger is necessary. It is a kind of energy which brings our engagement with people and the world around us to life. This is because anger makes things real. Used constructively, it can lead to bringing us closer to others rather than damaging our relationships or breaking them up. We get angry for many good reasons - it may be that we're not being respected, our needs aren't being met, we're being bullied or manipulated, we fear someone important to us might leave us, others have possessions or relationships that we feel we, too, have an entitlement to and so on. These are real life experiences for all of us.

- **Describe a situation in which someone could get angry. Now identify the feelings underneath of the anger.**

Here is an example: A friend doesn't show up as planned. On the surface, we get angry. Underneath, we might also feel humiliated and embarrassed - maybe we're being rejected. This could lead to fear that we're going to lose our friend and jealousy of others who seem to find it easy to make and keep friends. .

- **Using the example above, describe how, jealousy, envy and/or humiliation could be underneath of an initial angry response:**

We hear about other people's holidays on social media.

We're not told something important.

A parent threatens to leave.

We're not invited to a party.

We feel like an outsider.

Our differences are not understood.

Have any of the above happened to you?

## TEENAGE YEARS

The word 'teenage' is an abbreviation of 'between ages'. 'Teenage' describes the phase of life which is literally between the age of childhood and that of adulthood. Being neither a child nor an adult is very difficult for everyone.



Children are looked after and adults pay a lot of attention to their needs. They don't have to make many decisions for themselves and do not have any real responsibilities. Although most of us like the idea of growing up and gaining our independence, we may not be too keen on the responsibility that goes with it! When we become teenagers, it can make us angry to have to do things we don't want to and to give up on some of the pleasures of being a child.

- ***What do teenagers most dislike doing?***
- ***What might they miss most from their childhood years? Miss least?***

### ***Being able to think for oneself***

Young children are very much looked after by parents or carers and teachers. They don't have to think for themselves. As a teenager, we enter a new phase. Gradually, we become aware that we have our own mind and we can think our own thoughts. We can decide what we'll share and what we'll keep private. Whether we are fully aware of it or not, in adolescence, we start to work out who we are. This includes everything from deciding what music we like, what, if any, fashion we'll follow and how we'll wear our hair to exploring our sexuality and sexual identity. We usually choose friends who reflect aspects of who we are.

- ***What kind of thoughts might teenagers keep more private or share only with a close friend?***
- ***What do the friends you have tell you about your lifestyle or interests?***

We also become increasingly aware of where we fit in and where we don't. We may find ourselves endlessly comparing ourselves to others. This can stir up quite strong feelings.

- ***What do teenagers commonly compare?***
- ***What do they see on social media that might make them have a strong reaction?***

### **UNDERSTANDING ANGER**

Adolescence is a time of great change. When we are in our teenage years, many things can stir up anger, even if it's irrational such as being angry about losing some of the pleasures of childhood. Anger itself is not a problem but the way we express it can be. If we are provoked in some way, our response may be like a gut instinct - anger can surge up and the need to let it out then and there can be very strong.

- ***What do most people have an instant, angry reaction to?***

Our capacity to suddenly get angry reflects the fact that we still have the same defences our ancestors used when confronted by a wild animal or some other threat: we are hardwired to fight or take flight. When we are angered, we may want to lash out verbally and maybe even physically too. Or we 'take flight' by distancing ourselves through shutting down, 'blocking' others



out and refusing to engage. Sometimes we don't even know we're angry and we get depressed or tearful instead which is another way of taking flight.

- ***Why might someone be afraid of getting angry and try to deny their feelings or get tearful instead?***

The first step is to learn what our 'triggers' are. What situations or experiences make us angry?

- ***Keep a little notebook and write down every time you feel angry. Include what you think caused it and what feelings the anger might be covering up.***

## CHANGES IN ADOLESCENCE

In adolescence, there are changes in the body to cope with. These can be welcome changes as they are signs that we are growing up and becoming young adults. They can also make us anxious. Perhaps we worry that our body isn't changing as fast as those around us. Or we don't like what's happening to our body.

- ***What are some of the stereotypical 'shapes' boys/ young men and girl/ young women want their bodies to be? Why is it unhelpful to think in this way?***
- ***What is involved in accepting our body, whatever its shape?***
- ***What can we do if we recognise that we are overweight and our body size needs attention?***

In our teenage years, we usually experience changes in our social life as well. For example, friendships may change. Perhaps our friends make new friends and see more of them than us. Or they get boyfriends or girlfriends and have less time for us. Many adolescents find all of this stirs up feelings that are hard to even name.

- ***If someone we want to remain friends with starts up a friendship with someone else and drifts away from us, what do we feel?***
- ***What do we feel if we're the ones moving away from someone who used to be a friend?***
- ***Why do friends move on from each other?***
- ***What keeps friendships together?***

## ANGRY FEELINGS TOWARDS PEERS

Often teenagers experience anger quite powerfully even if they don't fully recognise it. For example, it can take the form of believing things are hopeless. Feeling hopeless is often a way of saying, 'There's nothing for me in life so I may as well not even try'. This is a form of anger. What's being expressed here could be worded differently such as 'I'm very angry because it seems life doesn't seem to be offering me as much as other people.'



Without even being fully aware of it, teenagers might feel angry towards friends or peers. It's hard to admit to feeling excluded or left out by them which can, of course, happen. Or teenagers can feel angry even though it may be irrational if they think their friends or peers or siblings are smarter or better looking than them.

- ***From time to time we can all feel left out or as if life is not going our way. Give some examples of what causes people to feel this way, regardless of their age.***
- ***How can friends repair their relationship after an angry episode?***
- ***How do students repair their relationship with teachers or school staff if they have had a difficult encounter with them?***

### **ANGRY FEELINGS TOWARDS PARENTS**

Teenagers can also be angry with their parents or carers. Every adult was also a teenager once but often it doesn't feel that way. Frequently, teenagers feel adults just don't get them. And it can be true. Every new generation thinks their own thoughts and does things their way. Leaving childhood behind and experiencing parents as people who can seem to expect something from them can also make teenagers angry. Anger is bound to be in the mix for most if not all teenagers even if its anger about having to grow up and take more responsibility for themselves.

- ***What are some of the common causes of anger between parents and their teenage son or daughter?***
- ***What do parents or carers expect of teenagers? Does this usually match what teenagers want for themselves?***

### **WHAT WE DO WITH ANGRY FEELINGS**

What teenagers do with anger is important. Some write lyrics for songs or poetry or find a way of letting it out safely such as talking things through with close friends or family. Writing lyrics or poetry is a healthy way to deal with feelings as it provides release and helps teenagers to develop and move on.

- Give an example of a song or a film or book or piece of art which explores strong feelings.

Others might find they're drawn to drinking or drug taking to make them feel good and to get away from anger, hurt, loneliness, stress and other painful feelings. Or they may turn to self-harm, preferring physical pain to emotional pain. When this happens, it's usually because strong feelings of loneliness, despair and hopelessness have been experienced since childhood and no one has understood or helped. Often there is underlying anger that may be very deeply buried.

- ***Who can help young people who are suffering like this?***

Drinking, drug taking and self-harm share a feature in common - they are all addictive. The more we rely on escaping from our feelings and thoughts like this, the more we'll automatically do it whenever we need release from emotional pain or mental stress. It is important to get help early on if this kind of reaction to feelings becomes a feature.



## EXPLORING FEELINGS

It takes courage to own our feelings, especially the painful or embarrassing ones, and to explore them. Anger is often the feeling on the surface, hiding other more vulnerable-making feelings underneath. For example, anger can cover up fear or hurt.

Or the opposite - feelings of hopelessness and depression can cover up anger. . Some teenagers find it difficult to experience and express their anger in ways that enable them to feel good about themselves but anger has many positive uses. Here are some examples:

- It motivates us to be more assertive and to stand up for ourselves, our family and our friends in a more mindful and considered way.
- It inspires us to get involved in improving the world, working for positive changes (e.g. volunteering in the community, joining a political party or forming an action group ourselves).
- It signals to others that they can't take advantage of us.

Sometimes the anger is quite mild, such as when we are annoyed or irritated. Everyone gets angry from time to time – it's natural to feel this way. Learning to manage anger in positive ways is something we all work on throughout life.

## **UNDERSTANDING ANGER**

*It's common for everyone to feel angry when:*

<b>We are misunderstood</b>	<b>We don't fit in</b>	<b>We are stressed</b>
<b>We feel anxious</b>	<b>We've been humiliated</b>	<b>We are teased</b>
<b>We've been Criticised</b>	<b>We are worried</b>	<b>We've been left behind</b>
<b>We are envious</b>	<b>We feel jealous</b>	<b>We've been made fun of</b>
<b>We've been treated unfairly</b>	<b>We've been hurt</b>	<b>We are in pain</b>
<b>We've been overlooked</b>	<b>We've been neglected</b>	<b>We are fearful</b>
<b>We are feeling inadequate</b>	<b>We feel disappointed in ourselves</b>	<b>We are feeling rejected</b>
<b>We've had a significant loss</b>	<b>We feel life is more difficult for us than for others</b>	<b>We feel stupid</b>

## **UNDERSTANDING ANGER**

*It's likely we'll feel angry when:*

<b>We are afraid of missing out</b>	<b>We are fearful of losing our self-respect</b>	<b>We feel lost in life</b>
<b>Our culture isn't valued</b>	<b>We can't figure out who we are</b>	<b>We feel unattractive</b>
<b>Our differences are not understood</b>	<b>Our needs are not being met</b>	<b>We are not being looked after</b>
<b>Home life feels unsafe or insecure</b>	<b>We feel threatened</b>	<b>We feel trapped</b>
<b>We feel unwanted</b>	<b>We feel as if we are falling apart</b>	<b>Our home is a painful place to be</b>
<b>We feel unpopular</b>	<b>We feel we don't belong</b>	<b>Our siblings get on better with each other than with us</b>
<b>We don't have friends</b>	<b>We have too many responsibilities</b>	<b>Even though we try, we aren't succeeding</b>