

Understanding **ANGER** & its Opposite - Feeling Soothed or Calm

This resource has been designed by Lyn French to be used with the emotional learning cards from the set entitled '**A-Z of Emotions?**' Purchase the cards online at www.inivacreativelearning.org

Anger is a natural feeling that everyone experiences. In common with all of our emotions, anger gives us information that is important to pay attention to. For example, perhaps our anger is telling us that our rights are not being respected or that we are being treated in a way that is not acceptable.

Anger itself is not a problem but the way we express it can be. If we are provoked in some way, our response can be instant - anger can surge up and the need to let it out then and there can be very strong. This is because we have a primitive part in our brain which is left over from our early ancestors who needed to be able to respond to threats instinctively as their survival depended on it.

We still have the same defences that our ancestors used when confronted by a wild animal or some other threat: 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.

- **What is your earliest experience of your own or someone else's anger? Your most recent?**

It is still quite common for boys and men to believe that anger shows they are tough and powerful and for girls and women to feel it's not feminine to show anger. These are old ways of being that are no longer considered valid. Research reminds us that we all have the same set of human emotions and our brain responds in similar ways regardless of our gender. In fact, research also tells us that we feel better about ourselves and each other if we understand our feelings and are able to share them.

Look at **Chila Burman's image**. You'll see she has used a technique called 'collage'. Collage is from the French word '*coller*' which means 'to stick'. Chila has used paint as well as stuck down pieces of paper with different patterns and textures and words made out of cut out letters.

- What does her technique and her use of colour tell you about anger?
- What words can you pick out?

CREATIVE TASKS Choose from the following:

- Make a picture inspired by **Chila Burman's** art work. Write in it or around it the kinds of experiences that make people angry or pick key words to include.
- Read the back of the '**A**' card focusing on the feeling of anger and its opposite. Answer the questions posed.
- Look through the 'Dictionary of Emotions' handout on anger and its opposites. Pick some out and make a picture or tell a story relating to them or describe an experience from your own life when you felt this way.

COMMON CAUSES OF ANGER (1)

JEALOUSY

If a friend or family member is enjoying time with someone else and we are not included, we can easily feel anger which is sparked by our jealousy. In fact, any time we are overlooked or treated as if we are invisible, we can feel jealous of those who are included. We might even feel humiliated at being left on the sidelines, looking on.

- **Why might someone be excluded or feel overlooked?**

Being left out hurts if it leads to feeling unwanted or rejected. In such moments, we feel all alone in the world. This could stir up memories of other times we've felt this way. For example, all young children experience times when their mother or carer isn't noticing them and is paying attention to another child or an adult instead. Whatever our age or however popular we are, we can still feel jealous from time to time. **Chila Burman's art work** includes a large shape in the upper right hand corner that look like a heart torn in two. This captures what jealousy can feel like.

BEING IN THE WRONG

If we have done something wrong or made an error, we might get angry and try to blame someone or something.

- **What does this protect us from feeling?**

Anger covers up the guilt and anxiety we usually feel if we've behaved badly or made a mistake. Anger stops us from being in touch with embarrassment, shame and humiliation. It also protects us from the fear of losing the good opinion of others. All of us have a need to be liked and wanted. However getting angry and trying to blame someone else generally makes things worse. Our first response to being told we've made an error or that we have behaved thoughtlessly or aggressively can be to get angry. None of us likes this kind of feedback as it can make us feel inadequate or 'less than' which, in turn, may trigger even stronger anger. However, we can learn from the situation if we let go of having to 'be perfect' and remember everyone gets things wrong or behaves badly from time to time.

- **Give an example of a situation that leads to someone getting into trouble. What could they do to make amends? What can be learned from it?**

CREATIVE TASKS: Choose from the following:

- Make a picture using large and small letter 'A's. Arrange them so that some are left out to illustrate jealousy. Decorate your picture using **Chila Burman's** art work as inspiration.
- Read the back of the 'A' card focusing on one of the other emotions highlighted.
- Look through the 'Dictionary of Emotions' handout on anger and its opposites. Pick some out and make a picture or tell a story relating to them or describe an experience from your own life when you felt this way.

COMMON CAUSES OF ANGER (2)

FEELING MISUNDERSTOOD

Many situations lead to feeling misunderstood. Sometimes young people feel their parents or teachers don't 'get them'. Or we could feel that a sibling or a friend sees us in a way that we don't. Not being seen for who we are can make us angry.

- **Give an example of the kind of argument or conflict that can arise because of a misunderstanding.**

BEING SINGLED OUT FOR OUR DIFFERENCES

Most of us believe that there is something about us that makes us different. This can leave us feeling as if we just don't fit in. Maybe it's a hidden difference. For example, we might be convinced that no one feels the way we do or has had similar life experiences to us. Or we may feel what makes us different is very obvious such as our skin colour or our culture or ethnicity or even something about our physical features. Sometimes our differences lead to being misunderstood by others which can trigger angry feelings.

- **What makes people feel as if they don't fit in?**
- **Give examples of visible and invisible differences. What needs to be changed so that our differences do not lead to rejection or feeling 'less than'?**

FEELING CRUSHED

When we are harshly criticised or treated unfairly, we might feel 'crushed' inside. Perhaps we bury our anger, feeling hopeless or tearful instead. Hopelessness is a passive form of anger. In a sense, when we feel this way, we turn the anger on ourselves. Anger takes the form of 'killing off' anything good in ourselves or in our life.

- **Give examples of the kind of situations that can 'crush' our good feeling about ourselves. Now describe how the situation could be dealt with so that we don't lose our self-respect.**

If we give into hopelessness, we are allowing ourselves to be a passive 'victim' of our circumstances. Instead of being 'crushed' by life's challenges, we need to own the feelings of disappointment and hopelessness and move on. Sometimes the most important change we can make is in our attitude - how we think about the world and our situation influences how we feel about it.

CREATIVE TASKS: Choose from the following:

- Using **Chila Burman's** image as inspiration, make a picture based on a letter 'A' being crushed by words. Pick the words that you feel would leave someone feeling this way. Now make a picture of a more powerful 'A' and encircle it with words that strengthen self belief or represent hope and optimism.
- Read the back of the '**A**' card and answer some of the questions relating to anger or to some of the other feelings.
- Look through the 'Dictionary of Emotions' handout on anger and its opposites. Pick some out and make a picture or tell a story relating to them or describe an experience from your own life when you felt this way.

COMMON CAUSES OF ANGER (3)

MISSING OUT

We may get angry because we fear losing out. For example, we might feel we are missing out on opportunities or lifestyles that others have. Or we could believe we aren't getting the love, attention, help or respect we feel we deserve.

- **Give an example of a way of seeking attention that has negative results.**
- **Now describe a different approach that might lead to a positive outcome.**

REJECTION

Life moves on for all of us. Maybe we have outgrown a friendship or relationship. Or perhaps the other person chooses to break off contact, leaving us with a mix of feelings that could include anger, sadness and even a wish for revenge or to 'get even'. Our feelings can be particularly strong if a parent or someone we are very close to chooses to go. Or, if we reject someone else, we could find ourselves on the receiving end of their anger. Endings always bring up feelings - if we manage our endings respectfully then we are not left with so much hurt or anger to work through.

- **Give some examples of big and little rejections.**
- **Why might friends go their separate ways?**

FEAR

Anger often covers up fear. We can fear losing someone we're close to or losing the respect of others. Equally, we can fear other people's anger especially if we are afraid of our own anger. Sometimes we fear anger because we have witnessed family conflicts that got out of control and fear our own anger will be destructive. Talking about what makes us angry and letting it out with someone who understands can help.

- **Describe the kind of family situation that can lead to intense anger. How could the family behave or communicate so that strong feelings are expressed in ways that are not destructive?**

LOSS OR DEATH

Serious illness and death are part of life. If someone close to us falls very ill, it can be frightening. Anger is one of the responses that comes up. The same occurs if someone dies. When we grieve over any loss, we go through many feeling states which include shock, denial, anger, guilt, despair, depression and, finally, acceptance. We go through these feelings again and again which is why it is called 'The Cycle of Grief'.

- **Give an example of a loss that can feel like a small death.**
- **Experiencing death is always challenging - if this has happened to you, you may feel better if you can talk about it.**

Often angry and sad feelings go together although at the time we might not be aware of the anger under our sadness or vice versa.

CREATIVE TASKS: Choose from the following:

- Make a picture using **Chila Burman's** as a starting point. Create a large letter 'A' in a way that suggests fear (eg. it could be 'shaking' or in a black space or cowering in the corner). Include words that either represent fear or words that could be soothing and comforting or both.
- Read the back of the 'A' card and answer some of the questions.
- Look through the 'Dictionary of Emotions' handout on anger and its opposites. Pick some out and make a picture or tell a story relating to them or describe an experience from your own life when you felt this way.

CREATIVE USES OF ANGER

IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS

If we don't use anger creatively, it can be destructive and damage our relationships with those around us. Anger is a signal telling us that something is not right. The urge to express it in the moment can be very powerful. Perhaps we experience anger as a ball of rage that is trying to push its way out.

If we let our anger get the better of us and we 'explode', it usually makes things worse and can leave us feeling even angrier as well as guilty or ashamed of our behaviour. It helps if we can hold onto our anger, walk away from whatever is causing it and find someone who isn't involved with whom we can talk it through. This gives us the opportunity to let the anger out. It can also lead to working it through or finding a way to express it more constructively. Perhaps our anger is telling us that we need to 'clear the air' with someone by letting them know what is upsetting us. It is important to think carefully about the language we use. Instead of saying, '*You make me very angry when...*' we can own the feeling by saying '*I feel angry when...*'. Sometimes an honest conversation can lead to better understanding and improved relationships.

SOCIAL PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Many positive changes in society have come about because courageous individuals and groups have used their anger creatively and held peaceful protest marches to bring about change.

- **Give some other examples of social change.**
- ***In what ways are things different for you than for your parents' generation? What opportunities do you have that they didn't?***

CHANGING ATTITUDES AND MODIFYING SELF-TALK

Sometimes the most far-reaching change we can make is to change our attitudes and our 'self-talk'. If we are often feeling frustrated or angry and see everything, including ourselves, as 'hopeless' or 'not good enough', then our view is a distorted one and needs to be adjusted. We may realise that our 'self-talk' also needs changing. For example, it's easy to slip into getting angry with ourselves, saying to ourselves, '*Why did I do that? I always make mistakes!*' We need to replace harsh 'self-talk' with more compassionate thoughts instead of simply 'attacking' ourselves for our shortcomings. If we treat ourselves compassionately, we'll treat others this way too.

CREATIVE TASKS: Choose from the following:

- Make a picture using **Chila Burman's** picture as inspiration. Include the letter 'A' and add speech bubbles illustrating positive self talk. Or make a picture of A's on a protest march, using anger to bring about positive change in society.
- Read the back of the 'A' card and answer some of the questions.
- Look through the 'Dictionary of Emotions' handout on anger and its opposites. Pick some out and make a picture or tell a story relating to them or describe an experience from your own life when you felt this way.

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH ANGER

We all have to learn to recognise when we're angry, identify what sparks our anger and work out how best to contain and communicate it. Try keeping an anger diary. When you feel angry, or after an angry episode, make a note describing what caused it, what happened and how strong the feeling was on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being mildly annoyed and 10 very angry.)

As well as writing about present-day anger, record as many examples of past experiences of anger that you can remember. You can use the questions below to help you with this.

- Give an example of when someone has blamed you for their angry feelings. What did it feel like? Now give an example of a time when you've done this.
- Give an example of being criticised – what did it feel like? Now give an example of when you've criticised someone else. What feelings were you expressing at the time?
- Give an example of a time when you found it hard to admit to being in the wrong. What stopped you? What could you do differently if it happened again?
- Does the same kind of thing make you angry? What can you do about it?

TIPS

We can own our anger and find ways to speak about it. An example of owning anger is when we can say to someone 'I'm angry because I feel left out/ hurt/ disappointed etc....' If we express our anger by saying 'You make me angry when you ignore me/ disregard my feelings (etc)', then we are not owning our anger - we are blaming the other person.

We can recognise that being critical or sarcastic or making fun of others is an expression of anger. We can work towards understanding what the anger is really about rather than taking it out on someone else.

We can raise our awareness of how we react to stress. It is common to get easily frustrated or irritated when we feel under pressure or are anxious. This is because feeling stressed is an uncomfortable experience. Discomfort interferes with feeling good and this can make us annoyed. Sometimes we don't even know we're stressed - we just feel angry and annoyed at the world. Look beyond your anger - is anything stressing you? Is your anger covering up fear of failure or fear of not being able to cope?

Many of us get angry as way of avoiding admitting when we're at fault because we've behaved disrespectfully or we've had a part to play when something goes wrong. Most of us find it difficult to admit when we've made mistakes, acted badly or got things wrong. Do not be too hard on yourself - remember, no one is perfect. If we act with dignity, accept our errors and the times we've behaved badly and make amends, we will built our self-esteem.

We can give ourselves time make sense of our angry responses. For example, if we can step away from the situation, we might be able to talk to someone about it or figure out what went wrong. Or we can get our angry feelings out on paper and decide what to do about them.

CONCLUSION Remember anger is not a 'bad' feeling that needs to be denied, covered up or justified. We don't have to disguise our anger by crying, for example, or by cutting off from all of our feelings altogether to avoid being angry. Most of us need to work on understanding our anger and learning how to express it appropriately so it doesn't take away from our enjoyment of life. We can try to be honest about what we feel, talk openly about our life experiences and find new ways of dealing with our anger.

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Common causes of ANGER

Most of us feel angry when:

| | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| We feel LEFT OUT | We feel IGNORED | We are STRESSED |
| We feel ANXIOUS | We've been HUMILIATED | We are TEASED |
| We've been CRITICISED | We are WORRIED | We've been LEFT BEHIND |
| We are ENVIOUS | We feel JEALOUS | We've been MADE FUN OF |
| We've been TREATED UNFAIRLY | We've been HURT | We are IN PAIN |
| We've been OVERLOOKED | We've been NEGLECTED | We are FEARFUL |
| We are feeling INADEQUATE | We're disappointed because we got THINGS WRONG | We are feeling REJECTED |
| We are feeling upset about a SIGNIFICANT LOSS | We feel that life is more DIFFICULT for us than for others | We feel STUPID |
| Feeling UNATTRACTIVE | Feeling we AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH | Feeling UNPOPULAR |

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Common causes of ANGER

Most of us feel angry when:

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| We are afraid of MISSING OUT | We are fearful of LOSING OUR SELF-RESPECT | We feel LOST IN LIFE |
| Our culture isn't valued | We can't figure out who we are | We feel unreachable |
| Our differences are not understood | Our needs are not being met | We are not looked after |
| Our home isn't safe | We feel threatened | We feel trapped |
| Our life journey has damaged us | We feel as if we are falling apart | Our home is a painful place to be |
| We do not feel held | Our sense of belonging is fragile | Our siblings get on better with each other than with us |
| We don't have friends | We have too many responsibilities | Even though we try, we aren't succeeding |
| Our family is poor | Our home is unsettled | Home life feels insecure |

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Common causes of ANGER
Most of us feel angry when:

| | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| We are shouted at | We feel invisible | No one misses us |
| Our home doesn't shelter us | Our family can't protect us | We feel put down |
| We feel 'squashed' | Harsh words diminish us | Everything feels a mess |
| Everything is mixed up | There is no room for us | There is no place for us |
| We've experienced a death | We've been cruelly rejected | We are hurting inside |
| Our differences make us feel like an alien | We don't fit in | We want to hurt others because we've been hurt |
| We want to explode to release bad feelings | We feel self-conscious | We are ashamed |

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Opposite of Feeling Angry

Most of us feel calm and settled when:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| We are included | We are noticed | We are not stressed |
| We are not anxious | We have learned to soothe ourselves | We can walk away if we're being teased |
| We can accept critical feedback & learn from it | We have peace of mind | We are keeping up with our peers |
| We are grateful for the good in our life | We enjoy our friendships | We are treated with respect |
| We are looked after | We aren't hurting inside | We have people we feel close to |
| We know how to have fun | We have learned to calm ourselves down | We feel good about ourselves |
| We don't put ourselves down | We can accept that we will make mistakes | We can let go of bad experiences |
| We can be comforted | We know who to trust | Our needs are being met |

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Opposite of Feeling Angry

Most of us feel calm and settled when:

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| We have meaningful friendships & family relationships | Life feels 'good enough' | We have a direction and purpose in life |
| Our culture is valued | We know who we are | We feel 'good enough' |
| Our differences are understood | Our needs are being met | We are looked after |
| Our home is safe | We feel protected | We have choices |
| We feel 'held' and contained | We feel a sense of belonging | We generally try our best |
| We have friends | We have responsibilities that we can manage | We have self-respect |
| Our family has enough | Our home is settled | Home life feels secure |

DICTIONARY OF EMOTIONS ~ Opposite of Feeling Angry

Most of us feel calm and settled when:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| We are spoken to with respect | We feel visible | We are missed |
| Our home is a comforting place | Our family can deal with angry moments | We are treated as equals |
| We feel validated | We are not criticised harshly | Life is not too chaotic |
| We aren't overwhelmed by confusion | We have a place in the world | We are comfortable with who we are |
| We know we will be supported when difficult things happen | We can handle rejection | We are not hurting Inside |
| Our differences are understood & appreciated | We fit in | We treat others with compassion |
| We know how to manage anger | We have the right level of confidence | We are not carrying shame |