

Helping Your Child with **Anger**

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What is this pack for?

If your child/young person struggles with anger it can be difficult to know what to do for the best to know how to help them. The aim of this pack is to give parents and carers some guidance in supporting their children.

This pack will offer information that you can share with your children/young people about anger, suggestions for activities, a variety of coping strategies and useful resources.

What is Anger?

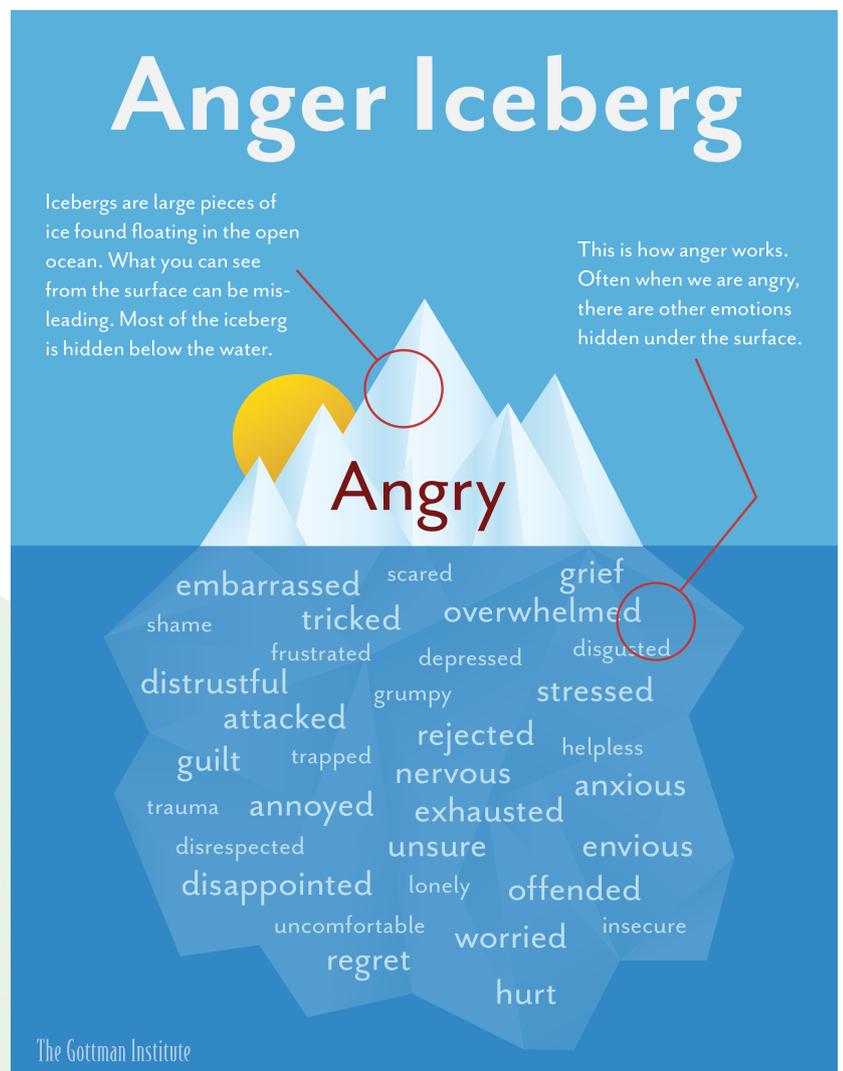
Anger is a normal and, at times, useful emotion and can help children/young people to understand when things are not fair or right. Anger can however become an issue if your child/young person's behaviour becomes out of control or aggressive.

It is helpful to firstly explain to your child that their anger is not wrong or abnormal and that it serves a purpose;

- **Anger** is there to protect us when we are in danger.
- **Anger** helps us to know when things are unfair or wrong.
- **Anger** is different from aggression, whilst anger is a perfectly natural emotion, aggression is behavioural. For example it is ok to be angry at someone but not to hit them.

Help your child/young person understand that if we manage it effectively anger can be useful but if we lose control it can cause us problems.

Anger is also often a secondary emotion which means that in many cases there is something that is underneath this emotion. You can liken this to an iceberg to your child and explore whether there are any other emotions that maybe causing them to present with anger (<https://cdn.gottman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Anger-Iceberg-1.png>):



Recognising Physical Symptoms

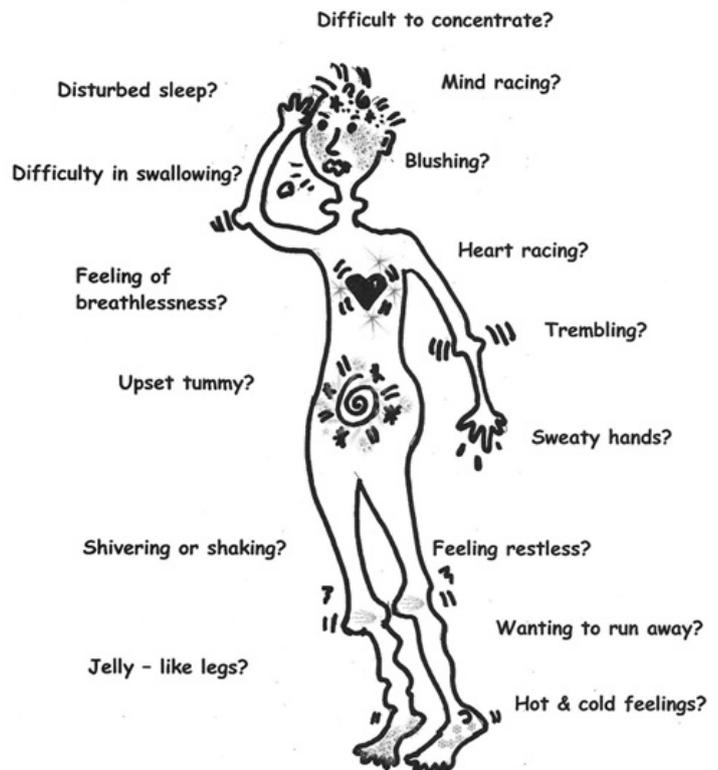
Helping your child/young person in being able to identify symptoms of anger is one of the first steps in learning how to manage it:

A way of helping your child or young person to think about these is to ask them to draw a gingerbread person and label the physical feelings they experience.

It can also be helpful to discuss the Fight or Flight response (if appropriate); you can ask your child/young person to imagine they are a cave man or woman living 100,000 years ago and they come across a hungry sabre-toothed tiger. Ask them what their options are? Fight it or run away (that's flight).

An example that might be relevant today is to think about our options to a bully who confronts you and won't listen to reason. You have two choices: 1) Turn and walk away (flight), or 2) fight, even though you know fighting won't solve the problem.

What does anxiety (worry) look like?



Do you have any of these symptoms?

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To prepare for fight or flight, your body does a number of things automatically so it's ready for quick action or a quick escape;

- Your heart rate increases to pump more blood to your muscles and brain.
- Your lungs take in air faster to supply your body with oxygen.
- The pupils in your eyes get larger to see better.
- And your digestive and urinary systems slow down for the moment so you can concentrate on more important things.

Recognising Psychological Symptoms

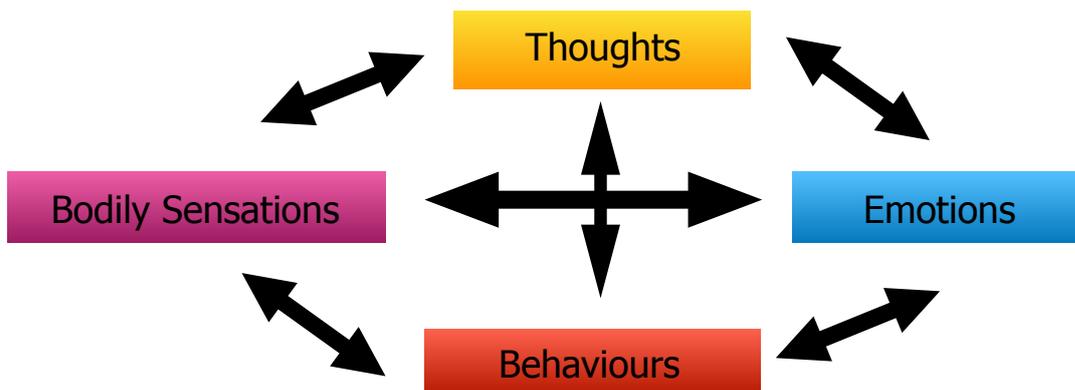
There are also a lot of common psychological symptoms of anger but these can sometimes be a little harder to spot:



These symptoms can be very difficult to identify for both you and your child, it may help to look at any behavioural changes that may be suggestive of underlying anger such as violence, inappropriate language behavioural issues, signs of anxiety, changes in school achievement, social withdrawal, restlessness, changes in appetite, changes in sleep or outbursts.

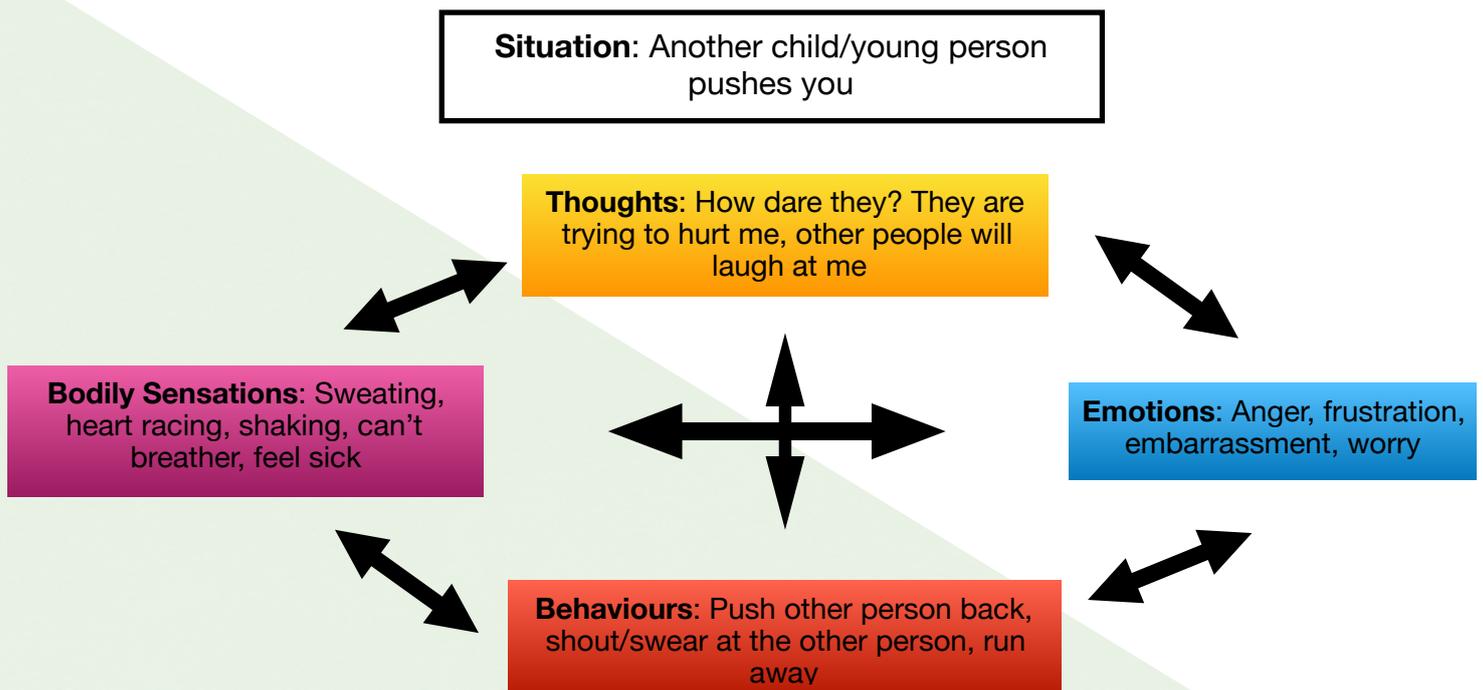
Recognising Triggers

Once we understand what anger is and how to recognise the symptoms it is helpful to help your child or young person to gain an understanding on how anger “works”;



The outside world will naturally have an effect on us and so our reactions to different situations, environments, social situations can be looked at using the model above; we all have **emotions** (how we feel), **thoughts** (what we say to ourselves), **bodily sensations** (physical symptoms or feelings) and **behaviours** (our actions).

It is important to understand that each of these interact and have an effect on each other. It can be helpful to show your child this using an example;



Recognising Triggers

At times it may be difficult to identify your child/young person's triggers or it could be that you have an awareness but they are not sure. Once your child/young person understands what anger feels like and how to stop it it may help them to know what is causing their anger so they can prepare for it.

It helps to use the example of a firework or a stick of dynamite when identifying triggers (Adapted from Novaco's model for Anger Arousal in Feindler & Ecton 1986);

Match: Trigger

This could be anything but common triggers for children may be siblings, friendship issues, not winning at a game etc

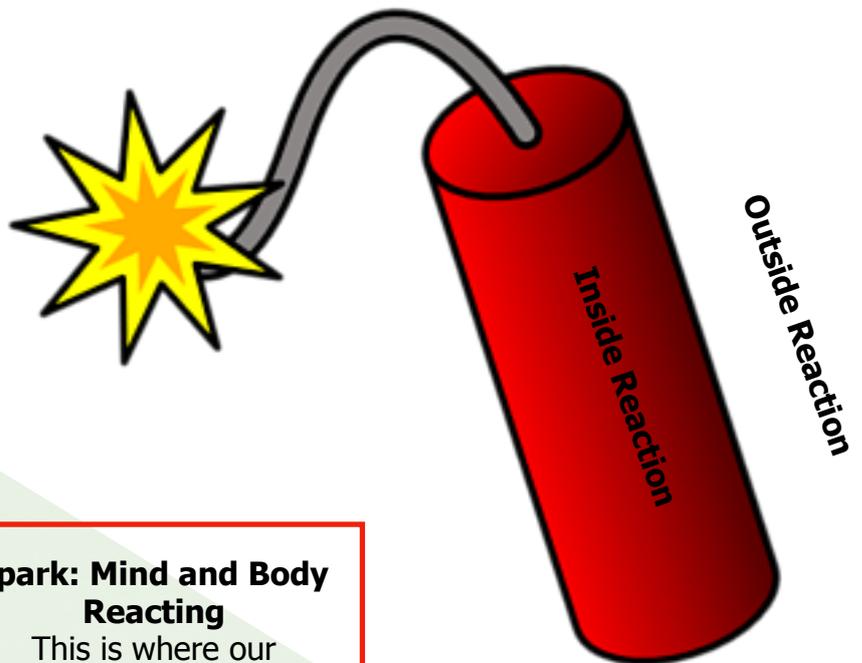
Dynamite/Firework: Behaviour

This is where we often blow up, but it is important to remind your child that their behaviour is a choice and they can choose to change this behaviour in order to help themselves feel better.



Spark: Mind and Body Reacting

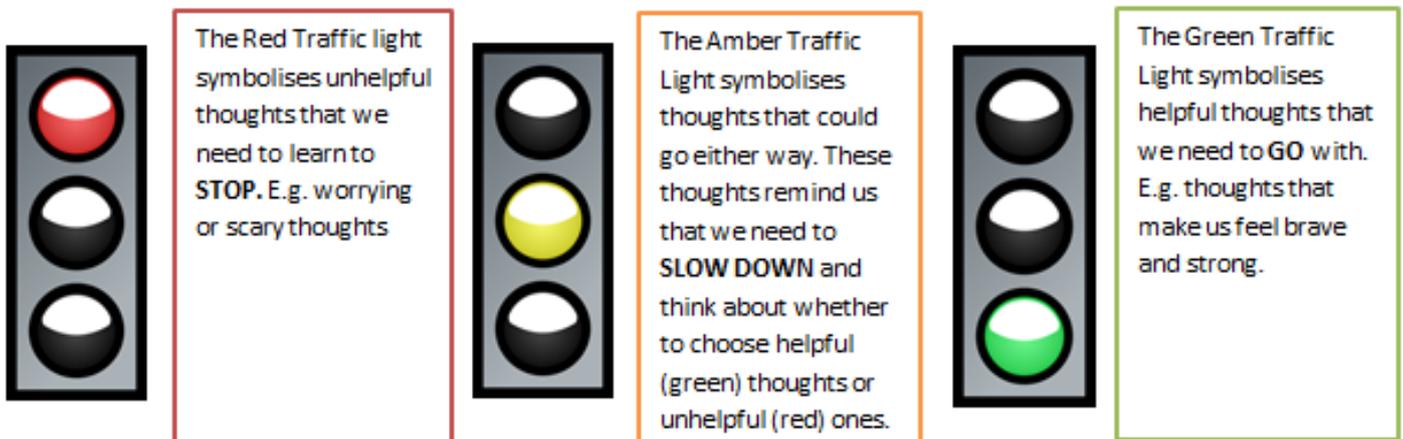
This is where our immediate thoughts and feelings occur.



Recognising Thoughts

Sometimes when children/young people struggle with anger they have angry thoughts that drive the emotion. Often these thoughts can be unhelpful. Helping your child/young person to manage their thoughts can really aid in managing their emotions.

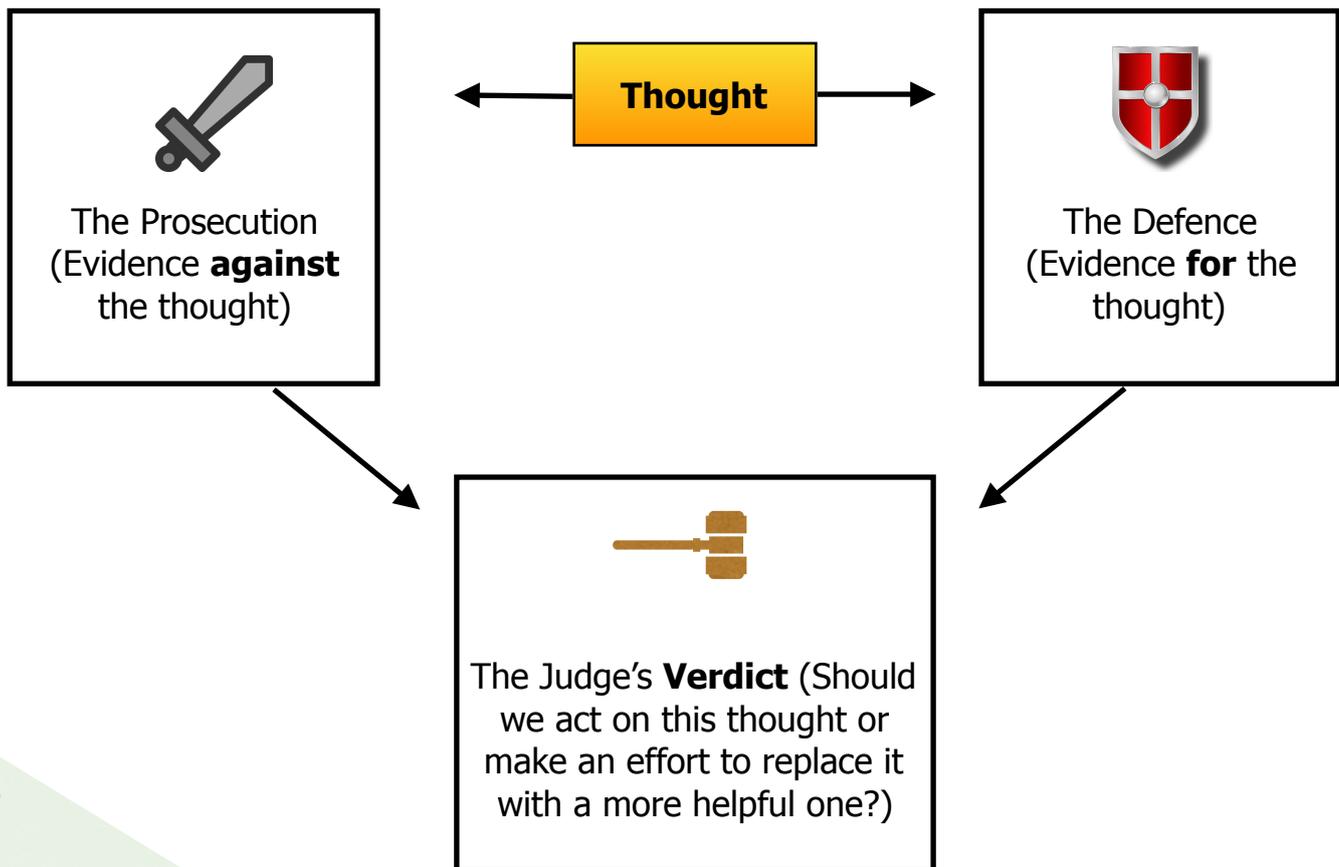
Helpful and Unhelpful Thoughts



Once your child/young person can identify unhelpful or 'red' thoughts it may be useful to introduce thought challenging as often our unhelpful thoughts can be untrue or an exaggeration. Some examples of thought challenging questions could be;

- Am I exaggerating?
- Is this true?
- Am I making this out to be worse than it is?
- Is this thought helpful?
- Is this thought rational?

Older children/young people may like to use the analogy of putting their thoughts on trial. You could have them imagine that their thought is on trial and they have to play the judge, prosecution and the defence;



Some common thought distortions that can contribute to angry feelings are;

- Blaming - blaming everyone else and not reflecting.
- Overgeneralisation- for example 'all teachers are out to get me.'
- Mind Reading - assuming what others are thinking or feeling.
- Negative filter - dwelling on negatives.
- Catastrophising - making individual issues far bigger than they perhaps need to be.

Management/Coping Strategies

Once anger has been identified there are many different ways to manage it. Some strategies are designed to help with the physical symptoms and others to challenge

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation teaches your child/young person how to relax muscles by systematically tensing particular muscle groups in their body and then releasing that tension. This helps your child/young person to lower overall tension and stress levels. It can also help relieve some of the physical symptoms of anxiety and improve sleep.

People that struggle with anxiety are often very tense throughout the day and often don't recognise what it feels like to be relaxed, by practising Progressive Muscle Relaxation they can learn to distinguish between feeling tense and relaxed.

There are numerous helpful videos on Youtube for example 'The Big Chillin' – World Mental Health Day'.

Guided Relaxation

Activities like guided imagery can support children/young people in finding a peaceful place and to help them to feel safe and re-establish feelings of tranquility when they are experiencing challenging emotions.

Below is an example:

Treehouse Relaxation Script

(<http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/treehouse-relaxation-script/>)

1. Get your body comfortable and gently close your eyes.
2. Slowly take three deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. Spend a moment or two, relaxing your feet and legs. Letting go of any tightness and letting them become heavy and relaxed. Imagine a wave of blue light traveling up from the earth into your feet and legs, relaxing everything it touches.

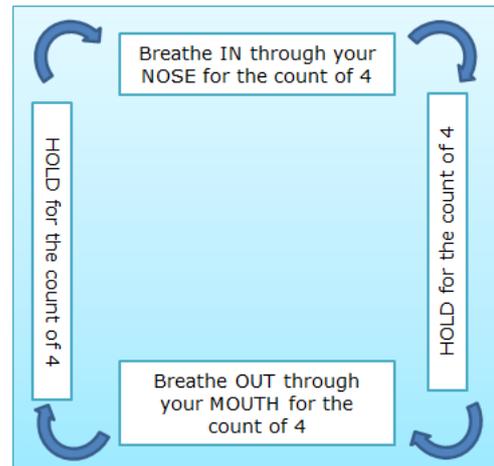
4. Now relax your tummy, chest, and shoulders. Imagine this wave of blue light sweeping through and relaxing this area for you.
5. Pay attention to your arms and fingers, allow the blue light to move through. Feel how relaxed you are.
6. Finally bring the blue light to your head and allow it to flow out of the top of your head and into the air around you. Beautifully done!
7. Imagine you are standing in front of a massive tree. This tree has deep, deep roots and branches that reach out in every direction.
8. This tree is home to your very own treehouse. This is a treehouse of your own design. Picture how you would like your treehouse to look.
9. (Pause between each idea) You can add swings, windows, trapdoors, plants, animals, your favourite things, your favourite colours, just allow yourself to design the treehouse anyway you like.
10. Can you see it? Good. Now allow yourself to travel inside the treehouse. (Pause) Are you inside? Good.
11. Inside the treehouse, imagine anything that makes you feel good to think about. Place pillows, waterfalls, plants, trees, birds, pictures of mountains, anything that you would like that you feel good when you think about it. Go ahead and design the inside of your treehouse now.
12. Know that when you go inside your treehouse you feel really really relaxed. This is a place to let go of all your thoughts, all your worries.
13. Take a deep breath and allow yourself to feel very peaceful and relaxed inside your treehouse.
14. This is a place that you can go any time you would like to feel more peaceful and calm. Know that your treehouse is available to you any time you would like. You can visit here whenever you would like.
15. Now take a deep breath and imagine yourself walking down out of your treehouse. Gently bring your attention back to the room.
16. Rub your hands together to make them warm. Gently place them over your eyes.
17. You can open your eyes whenever you are ready.

Deep Breathing

When we feel anxious our breathing will change, it tends to become shallower and quicker. This can sometimes even lead to hyperventilation. This kind of breathing can make our anxiety worse and so by doing some deep breathing we can lower our anxiety symptoms.

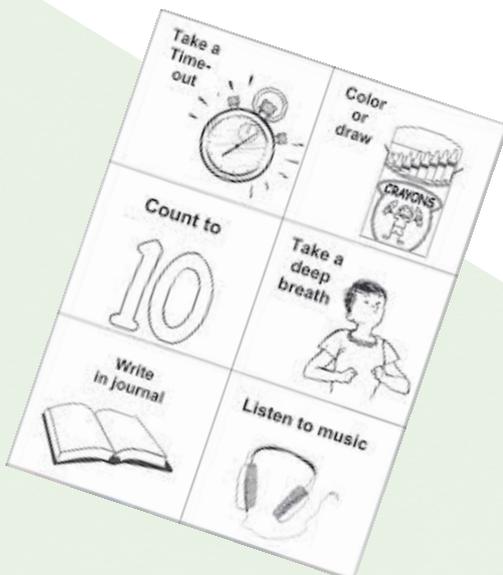
How To Do It:

- Take a slow breath in through the nose (for about 4 seconds)
- Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds
- Exhale slowly through the mouth (over about 4 seconds)
- Wait 2-3 seconds before taking another breath (5-7 seconds for teenagers)
- Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths



Coping Cards

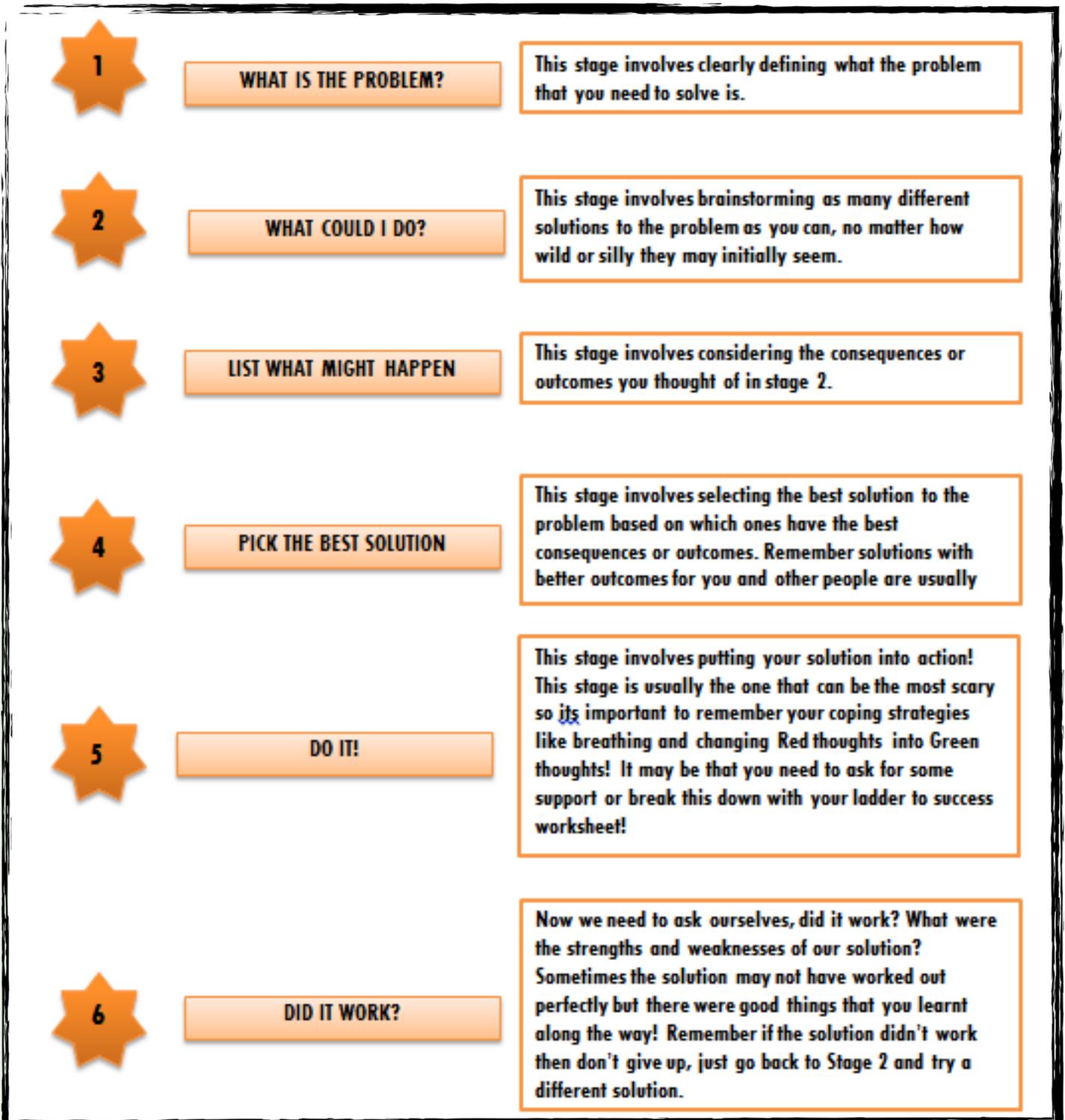
An important tool in your child or teen's anger management toolbox is the ability to change unhelpful thoughts into more relaxed and balanced thinking. However, it can be very difficult for children and teens to remember to use coping tools when they are angry. They are so focused on their feelings that they forget they have a way of controlling what they do.



With practice, however, your child can learn to use coping thoughts on his or her own. This is really helpful as you might not always be there to remind your child to use the tools (for example, when at school).

Problem Solving

Developing problem solving skills can be a significant tool in managing emotions. Before children/young people can solve the problem, they need to identify exactly what the problem is. In fact, just stating the problem can make a big difference. Once children/people identify the problem, teach them to develop several possible solutions before springing into action, you could try using this 6 step problem solving plan;



Grounding

Grounding is technique in which the child or young person uses their environment and senses to draw their attention away from the thing that is causing them overwhelming emotion. An activity such as below can be helpful in teaching children/young people how to ground themselves;

Name **5** things you can **SEE**



Name **4** things you can **HEAR**



Name **3** things you can **SMELL**



Name **2** things you can **FEEL**



Name **1** thing you can **TASTE**



Safe and Unsafe Behaviours

Teaching your child about the difference between safe and unsafe behaviours can also be helpful. By helping the child understanding how to express anger in a safer way gives them the freedom to release feelings of anger in a way that is less destructive.



Unsafe

- Hitting
- Breaking things
- Kicking
- Shouting at people (upsets others)
- Throwing things



Safe

- Scream into a pillow
- Talk to someone
- Punch a pillow
- Use a boxing bag
- Scribble on paper

Tips for Parents

- Model appropriate anger management skills; one of the best ways to teach your child/young person how to deal with anger is by being mindful of dealing with your own behaviour when you feel angry as children/young people learn from those around them.
- Establish rules or expectations for your child/young person and be consistent; children/young people need boundaries in order to feel secure and although at times they may resist rules in the long run it helps them build skills and keep themselves and others safe.
- Think about communication; often children and young people find themselves frustrated if they cannot communicate their feelings effectively and so offering alternative ways of expressing themselves may be helpful.
- Look around the behaviour; behaviour is often a form of communication and so trying to understand the cause of the behaviour or what your child/young person is trying to tell you may offer a more effective way of helping your child/young person with their anger.

Useful Reading

For Children:

- A Volcano in my Tummy - Eliane Whitehouse
- How to Take the Grrr Out of Anger - Elizabeth Verdick and Marjorie Lisovkis
- When I Feel Angry - Cornelia Superman
- When Sophie gets Angry - Really Really Really Angry - Molly Bang
- Cool Down and Work Through Anger - Cheri Meiners
- Hands Are Not for Hitting - Martine Agassi
- Sitting Still like a Frog – Eline Snel
- Take the Time: Mindfulness for Kids – Maud Roegiers

For Teens:

- The Anger Workbook for Teens - Rachelle Lohmann
- Keeping Your Cool a Teen's Survival Guide - Lou Priolo
- A Still Quiet Place for Teens: A Mindfulness Workbook to Ease Stress and Difficult Emotions – Amy Saltzman