

Cooling Down from Anger Activity

Lower anger and restore calm by taking a pause.

We all experience anger at times. Anger can be uncomfortable; it may also feel invigorating or seem like a way to get what we want. Anger-driven behaviors can be difficult to control—we may behave in ways we aren't proud of, such as raising our voices, using harsh words, or making harmful physical contact with people or property. These behaviors can negatively impact our relationships and health. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to lower our anger and maintain control in frustrating situations.

Part 1: Finding your “why” for lowering anger

Reflecting on why we want to manage our anger can help us stay committed to making decisions we can be proud of. Making a list of the pros and cons of working on anger can help us identify our “why.” For example:

- Pros: “I’ll set a good example for my kids” or “I’ll improve my relationships”
- Cons: “It’ll be hard” or “I won’t get to express my anger completely”



After listing your pros and cons, ask yourself: What is my most important reason for working to change my anger-driven behaviors? Write down your response, and consider carrying it with you or setting a digital reminder to help you remember why working on anger is important to you.

Part 2: Identifying and navigating your anger triggers

Anger triggers are certain situations, places, people, or feelings that tend to provoke anger. Being aware of our triggers can help us better notice when anger arises so we can take steps to cool down. What are your anger triggers? Reflect on experiences you've had with anger in the past to help you remember your typical anger triggers, and write them down. For example:

- Places: the supermarket, airports
- People: my landlord, politicians
- Situations: traffic jams, family gatherings
- Feelings: feeling disrespected, feeling ashamed

Part 3: Taking your “anger temperature”

We can identify our anger level, or “take our anger temperature,” by noticing our body's cues. These cues can be physical sensations (feeling hot, etc.), thoughts (“I've had it!” etc.), or behaviors (raising voice, etc.). Awareness of our anger cues helps us catch it before it escalates.

What are your anger cues? Reflect on past experiences of anger for ideas, and write down the physical sensations, thoughts, and behaviors you experience at low, medium, and high levels of anger. For example:

- Low-level anger cues: feeling hot, thinking “I don't like this,” fidgeting
- Medium-level anger cues: jaw clenching, thinking “This isn't fair,” raising my voice
- High-level anger cues: racing heart, thinking “I'm done with this,” name-calling

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Part 4: Making a “pause plan”

Once we catch our anger around a medium level, we can “pause” to take space away from an anger trigger and calm ourselves so we can better maintain control. Brainstorm ideas for your pause plan.

Where?

Where could you go during your pause? Examples: private spaces (bathroom, etc.) or outdoor spaces (patio, etc.)

What?

What could you do during your pause to cool down? Examples: breathing exercises, splashing cool water on my face, listening to music, going for a walk, etc.

Who?

(Optional) Might you benefit from sharing your pause plan in advance with anyone? Examples: I think it’ll be good to tell my partner I’ll be doing this.

How?

(Optional) Is there a signal you could use to tell others it’s time for a pause? Examples: I’ll tell my partner, “I need a timeout.”

After you’ve made your pause plan, consider practicing your pause at low anger levels first. Practicing in lower-stakes situations can make it easier to take your pause when experiencing medium or high anger levels.

Part 5: Reflecting after your pause

Taking time to reflect after using new skills can help us notice what went well so we can continue to do it and consider what we might do differently next time. Then, we can adjust our pause plan as needed. Use the following questions to help you reflect.

- **What went well?** Example: I caught my anger early and left to take five minutes alone in the backyard.
- **What could be improved for next time?** Example: I could probably use a few extra minutes in my pause next time.
- **What else did you notice?** Example: I'm able to calm down more quickly when I'm moving—walking during my pause worked better than standing still.



Reach out for more support

Lyra's mental health experts excel at helping people manage difficult emotions, like anger. It's especially important to seek care when anger-driven behaviors are frequent, uncontrollable, or dangerous to ourselves or others.

Get expert insights and support by signing up for care with Lyra today at care.lyrahealth.com.