

A Self-Help Workbook for Young People in Secondary School on Anger



Emotional Wellbeing
Service

Cardiff and the Vale



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Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan
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Adapted by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Resilience Project, from the guided workbook by the Emotional Wellbeing Service.

This guide is a self-help workbook for young people who may be experiencing. It explains what anger is, and what it feels like, but mainly it gives practical advice and activates that you can do if you are struggling with feeling of anger.

For some young people this workbook can be used simply by reading each chapter and completing the activities for each. But it may be helpful to work through it (or parts of it) with an adult you trust so they are able to support you.

It is helpful to work through this workbook slowly, completing small bits at a time. Give yourself some time to practice the strategies and activities before moving onto the next.

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

WHAT IS ANGER?



Anger is normal and we can feel angry for a lot of different reasons. It is part of the fight, flight freeze safety system. We'll talk about this in a bit more detail later on.

The feeling of anger can be different. It can be feeling a bit irritated or it can be feeling full of rage. Anger may have an effect on our body such as making your heart beat faster, increase blood pressure and your adrenaline.

The Purpose of Anger

Everybody feels angry at times, often due to stressful things that happen such as relationship difficulties and difficulties in school. Anger is normal and can be helpful in some situations when it can:

- Motivate us to create positive change
- Help us defend ourselves in dangerous or unfair situations
- Help us identify problems or things that may be hurting us



When anger becomes a problem

Anger may become a problem when it happens often, feels out of control, over the top for the situation or causes somebody being hurt emotionally or physically.

Some signs that you may struggle to control your anger may include experiencing some of the following regularly:

How we feel: anger, irritation, easily irritable, flashes of rage, humiliated, restless, uptight.

How we think: poor concentration, mind is blank when angry, hating yourself, life is unfair

Some common thoughts: "they have ruined everything", "they have made a fool of me", "I am an idiot"

Feelings in our body: heart pounds, chest feels tight, feel hot, sweating, tense muscles.

How you react: shout, argue, throw/hit an object, hit out, leave the situation, violent, aggressive, cry, and hurt yourself.

Important: to remember that anger rarely acts alone. Sometimes we feel angry because we have felt another emotion or feeling first. Such as humiliation, embarrassment, shame, sadness, loneliness and others.

Why do I feel angry?

A lot of things can cause you to feel angry. Someone might say something to hurt you, you might lose a game, get told off, break something or fight with someone. All of these things and lots more can make you feel angry. Everyone gets angry at different times or when different things happen. What makes you angry might not make someone else angry.

Everyone will have a 'trigger' that makes them angry. Triggers start us feeling angry and our body reacts to it in a variety of different ways.

Here are some reasons why people may get angry:



Task: Put a tick next to the ones that apply to you on the picture above. We'll look at triggers in more detail later on.

Anger and language

Sometimes when we think we are angry we are actually just a little bit annoyed or slightly irritated. The way we think we feel can impact the way we react. Think about how short your fuse is; is it quite long where it takes a lot for you to “blow” or is it quite short where you find you have barely any time between the trigger and reacting?

We like to think of anger in terms of a thermometer. The angriest would be the hottest point of the thermometer, at the top. At the bottom we would be coooooool.

Here are a list of words to describe anger to help you figure out at what point you feel each way on your thermometer on; NOT all of these words will relate to you as they are just examples. You may have other words to describe your feelings of anger. For some this may include swear words!

Angry
Irritated
Mad

Furious
Frustrated
Peeved

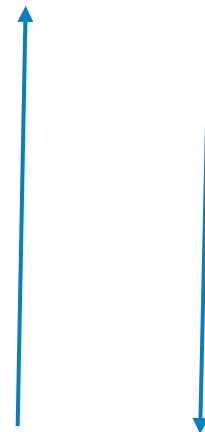
Vexed
Fuming
Cross

Annoyed
Bugged
Outraged

Miffed
Enraged
Outraged



E.G. Hot - Fuming



E.G. Cool - Chilled

Task: Make a list of the words you would use to describe how you are feeling.

Anger and adrenaline

Everyone experiences certain levels of anger from time to time. It is a normal response to situations we perceive as threatening or unfair. For example, being laughed at or being ignored. Some level of anger can even be helpful; like knowing when we are in danger.

Fight, Flight or Freeze

Imagine you are in a forest. Happily minding your own business. It's a lovely day and the sun is shining. When suddenly you come up against a bear. A big bear. A big bear with big teeth, and big claws.



Your muscles tense up ready for action. Your heart beats faster to carry blood to your muscles and brain and you breathe faster to get oxygen to where you need it for energy. You start sweating to stop your body overheating. Your mouth becomes dry and you feel sick.

What do you do?

Most will run (flight). Some may try and fight off the bear (fight). Others may stay really still and hope the bear doesn't notice them (freeze). All are natural reactions to something that is really big and really scary.

Once you are safely away from the bear you may feel a little bit shaky and weak, but everything starts to calm down; your heart rate and breathing reduce, you stop sweating, you stop feeling sick. You go back to normal.

Your body is programmed to respond in this way. This reaction is caused by adrenaline being released in response to the threat. In a freeze response, it is endorphins being released which numb and work to conserve your energy. This reaction is also known as 'fight, flight or freeze'.

Unfortunately, the brain does not differentiate between a bear attack, and the other non-life threatening situations we get angry about...like entering a room of people who ignore us, or being told off by parents. The fight, flight, freeze reaction is the same regardless.

Important: no matter what the cause, the reaction passes once your brain realises that you are safe again.

Once we know about fight, flight, freeze, we can work to understand the things that trigger us, learn ways of noticing the warning signs that anger is building and take action so that we are in control of how we react.

How anger impacts us



Anger can become a problem when:

It is expressed through **unhelpful** or **destructive behaviour** that causes harm to self or others

It has a **negative impact** on your **mental** and/or **physical health**

It begins to **negatively affect** your **relationships** and leads to **communication difficulties**

Anger can be expressed in many unhelpful ways:

Violent or aggressive behaviour towards others: e.g. shouting, swearing, throwing things, making threats, and/or physical violence.

Aggression towards self: e.g. expressing hatred towards self, self-harm, isolating self and denying self of basic needs.

Non-violent, passive aggression; e.g. ignoring people, refusing to talk or answer, being sarcastic or sulky, refusing to do things.

How does anger impact you and your life?

e.g. relationships (friends and family), school life, health

-
-
-
-

My hopes – How I want things to be

What are your hopes for how you want things to be? What's important to you?

For example, being able to talk to my friends about how I'm feeling, instead of shouting

A large, empty yellow speech bubble shape with a pointed tail, intended for a student to write their hopes and feelings.

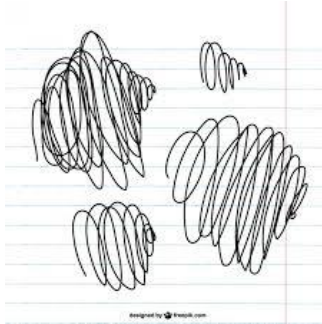
HOW DO I COPE?

Hot Coping Skills

When you are towards the top of your anger thermometer, it is difficult to have a clear head, which means it is not the time to have a conversation or think through why you are angry. At this point, we just need to do something to manage the ball of anger energy inside you that is not going to be harmful to you, or others.

Here are a few of our favourite 'hot' coping skills for you to try;

Scribble quite fiercely onto paper and then either rip it up or throw it a few times against a wall. Some people like to write what it is that's making them angry and scribble over that!



Scream into a pillow. You may want to forewarn people in your household so that they know you're ok and that it is a new coping skill.



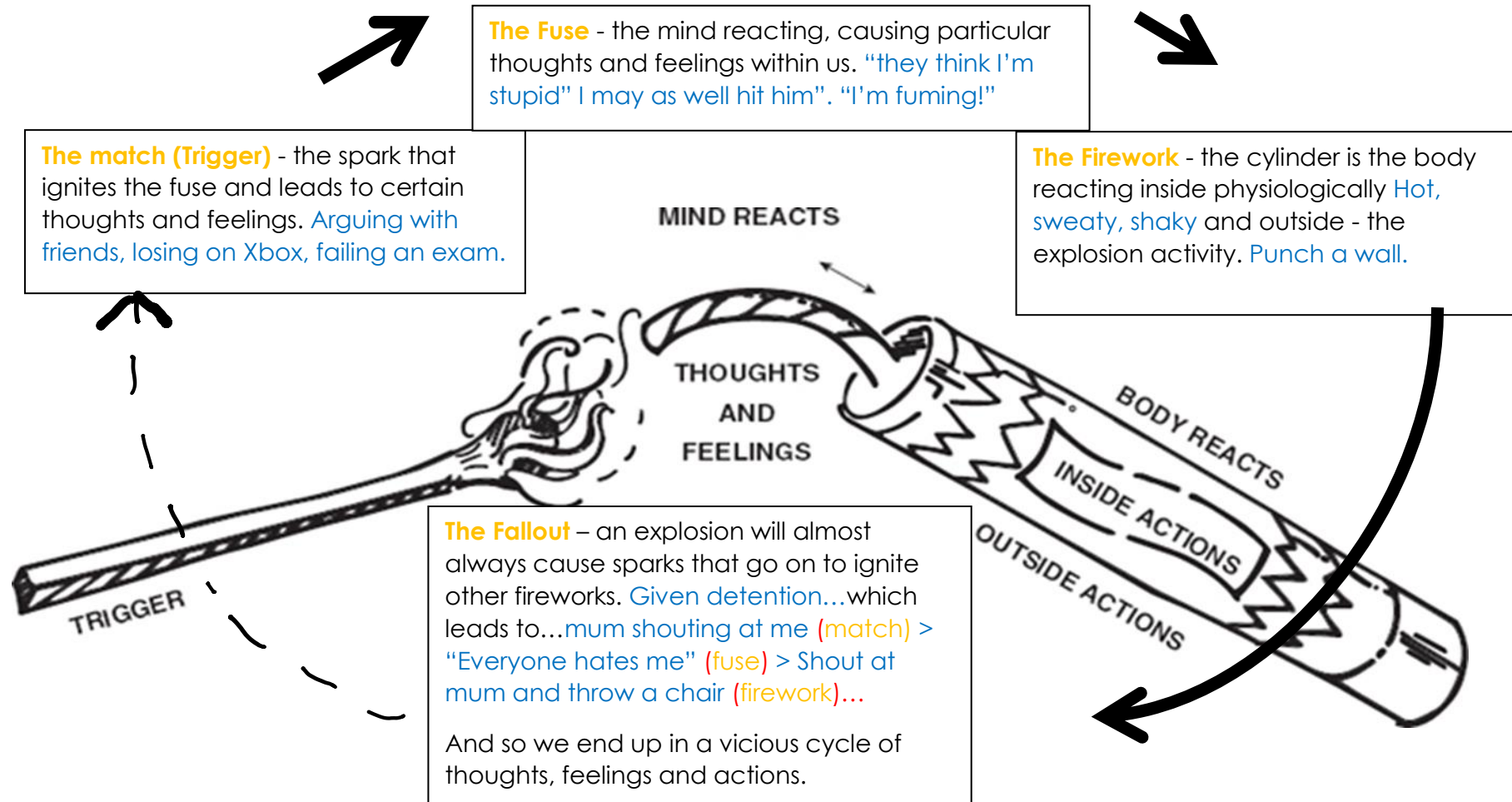
Punch the anger out, a punch-bag is great for this but if you don't have one, fear not!! Punching pillows or other soft objects are just as effective!!

Blow a balloon up and pop it. It's that simple! Think you are popping the anger!



Throw rocks at the ground or into a body of water like the sea or a river.

The Firework Model



The good news is you can learn to: put out your firework quickly to reduce the fall out, put strategies in place to lengthen your fuse and recognise sparks from a mile off to help you avoid potentially explosive situations.

Your firework

Task: Have a think about a time recently, when you felt angry.

What was the trigger? (What made you to feel angry)

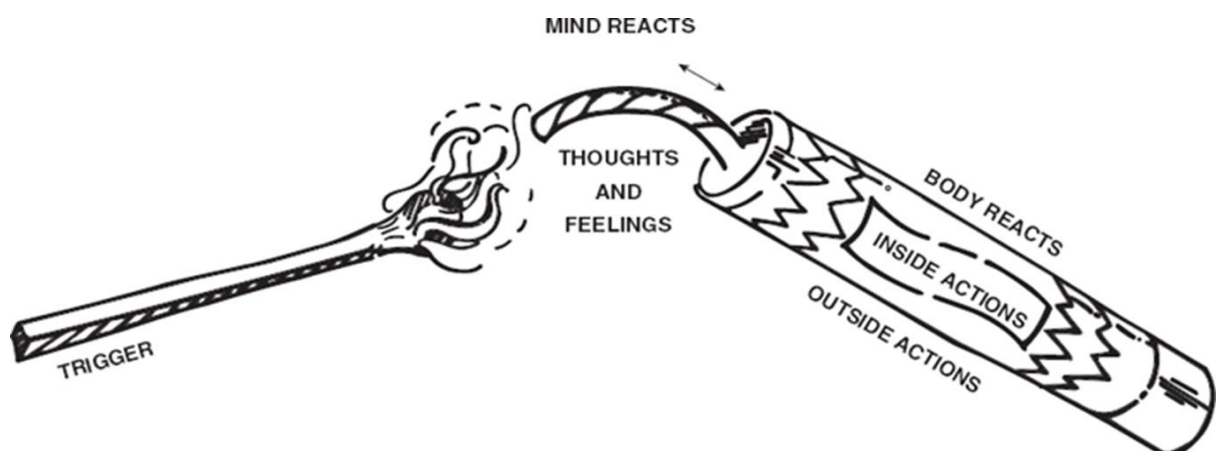
What did you think?

What did you feel?

What was happening inside your body?

What did you do?

What was the fall out?



The Match (Triggers)

Here are some examples of what may trigger an angry response...



Circle the ones that apply to you and jot down any other triggers you can think of here...

-
-
-

Hanger – Hidden trigger

Psychology Today

"Low blood sugar predicts higher emotional reactivity. At an hour earlier, a certain situation would have simply felt like a problem to solve. Instead, it triggers annoyance. When the intensity of your irritable reaction is out of proportion to the actual seriousness of the event, that's hanger."

Food and Mood are very closely related. Can you think about whether your diet affects the way you feel?

Do you find yourself sluggish and irritable when you haven't eaten for a long period of time?

What can you do to ensure you limit these intense feelings?

Eat well, eat regularly and eat mindfully.

Lack of sleep – Hidden trigger

Lack of sleep can also impact on your anger so look at these top tips for sleep;

Keep a routine

Keep environment cool

No late sugary drinks and snacks

Do some relaxation before bed

Keep a clean/tidy room

Reduce technology before bedtime

Managing triggers

If you are aware of your triggers you can plan to manage them. Write the triggers you identified on the last page, in the boxes below. If you already have ideas of how to prevent an anger explosion, write those in the box too as a reminder. As you go through this booklet, you can come back and add more ideas until you have a plan for all of them.

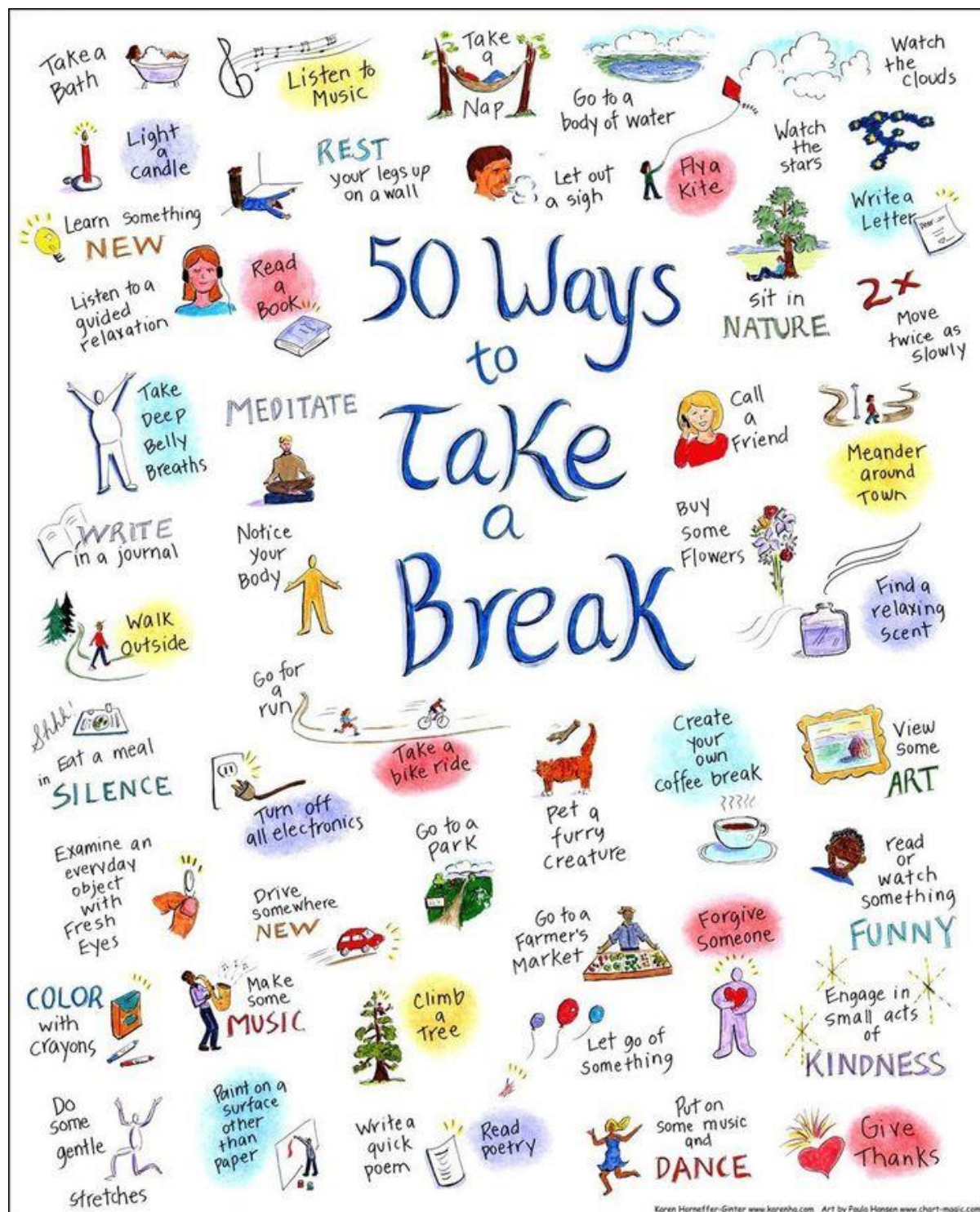
Task: Fill in your triggers and what you will do below.

Trigger – Arguing with sibling What I will do – Go for a walk (Example)	Trigger: What I will do:
Trigger: What I will do:	Trigger: What I will do:
Trigger: What I will do:	Trigger: What I will do:

Accept that you will be angry at times but also accept that your reactions can CHANGE and the feelings CAN be less intense. There are some ideas for distractions on the next page to help you along.

Coping skill: Distraction

Distraction is a quick and easy way to manage a situation that's starting to feel a bit 'warm'. Below are a bunch of popular ways to distract yourself and cool off. For known trigger situations that you can't avoid, you might like to plan what distraction(s) you will use to cope.



Task: Tick the picture above, with some of the ways you might use to distract yourself and cool off or take a break.

The Fuse

Feelings

Remember the thermometer earlier? Use this to ask yourself how 'hot' or 'cool' you are, and put words to what you are feeling...

Furious or annoyed

Angry or fed up

Raging or sad...

Hot thoughts and cool thoughts



Hot thoughts are **angry thoughts** that **flash** into your mind, making you **feel worse**. They can **shorten your fuse**, increasing the possibility of a **quick 'explosion.'**



Unhelpful Thought (Hot thoughts)	What I could think instead (Cool thoughts)
My friend hasn't phoned so I hate her	Maybe my friend is busy with something, I can call her later
I failed at maths so I'm never going to get good at it	I can learn from my mistakes and improve
I forgot to do my homework, I'm so useless	
Why are they staring at me? I should knock them out!!	
Everything is going to go wrong so I may as well give up!!	
She's doing my head in so I am going to tell her what's what!!	

When you start trying to get control of your anger you may go from cool to hot very, very quickly – people refer to this as 'having a short fuse'. If this is you, the HOT coping skills we talked about earlier will be most helpful for now to burn up some of that rage and hopefully prevent making things worse.

Once you have been able to 'cool down', you will be better able to look back at the event and consider what you were thinking and how you were feeling. As you get better at noticing and labelling your thoughts and feelings, you will start to build a picture of what your 'early warning signs' might be.

Early warning signs:



As well as thoughts and feelings, early warning signs can also include how your body responds and some of your actions.

Task: Which ones do you experience?

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Important: By getting to know your early warning signs, you will be able to start recognising them as they happen, so you can take action to put out the fuse before the firework really explodes.

As you continue to practice recognising the signs and use your coping skills, your fuse will start to get a little bit longer. This will give you more time to start looking at other things that may help in the moment – such as using assertiveness skills or trying different ways of communicating with people so that explosions happen less and less.

Task: In the table below write down your 'Hot thoughts', your 'Cool thought' and 'early warning signs' to help you put the fuse out before fireworks explode.

My Unhelpful Thought (Hot thoughts)	What I could think instead (Cool thoughts)	Early warning signs

MOVING FORWARD

My Anger Diary

Use this when you are feeling 'cool' (after an anger event) to help build a picture of your early warning signs.

Date and Time	What was the spark that lit your fuse? <i>(If you don't know, write what was happening before you got angry)</i>	What 'hot' thoughts flashed through your mind?	What feelings did you experience?	What bodily reactions did you notice? (Inside and outside)	What did you do when you were angry? Did you 'explode'?

Keeping your cool: TIIP skills

TIIP (Temperature, Intense exercise, Paced breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation) skills are an effective way to combat anger when you notice your warning signs. They could be called 'warm' coping skills.



Temperature

- Change your temperature when you feel yourself getting hot. Some examples;
- Open a window
- Take any excess clothing off
- Tie your hair back
- Have a cold drink
- Run cold water over your wrists
- Splash your face with cold water



Intense Exercise

- A short sharp injection of intense exercise can interfere with your adrenaline response and boost some happy chemicals in your body. Some examples;
- Jog or run on the spot
- Do some push ups, against the wall works if you can't get on the floor
- Jump up and down, star jumps are a favourite
- Dance to fast music
- Go for a brisk walk



Paced Breathing

When fight or flight kicks in, our breathing speeds up, so to return to calm, we need to slow our breathing down. Below are some breathing exercises to try.



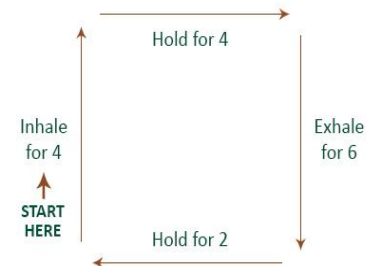
5 finger breathing:

Stretch out one hand like a star. Use your index finger from the other hand and starting at the bottom of your thumb, slide your index finger up and down tracing each finger. Breathe in slowly through your nose as you trace up and breathe out through the mouth as you slide your index finger slowly down the other side. Repeat for all fingers until you have traced your whole hand.

5 Finger Breathing - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8waMkhZ1jc>

Square breathing:

Start at the bottom left of the square. Breathe in for four counts as you trace the first side of the square. Hold your breath for four counts as you trace the second side of the square. Breathe out for six counts as you trace the third side of the square. Hold your breath for two counts as you trace the final side of the square. You just completed one deep breath! Repeat five times.



Try box breathing with this short animation –

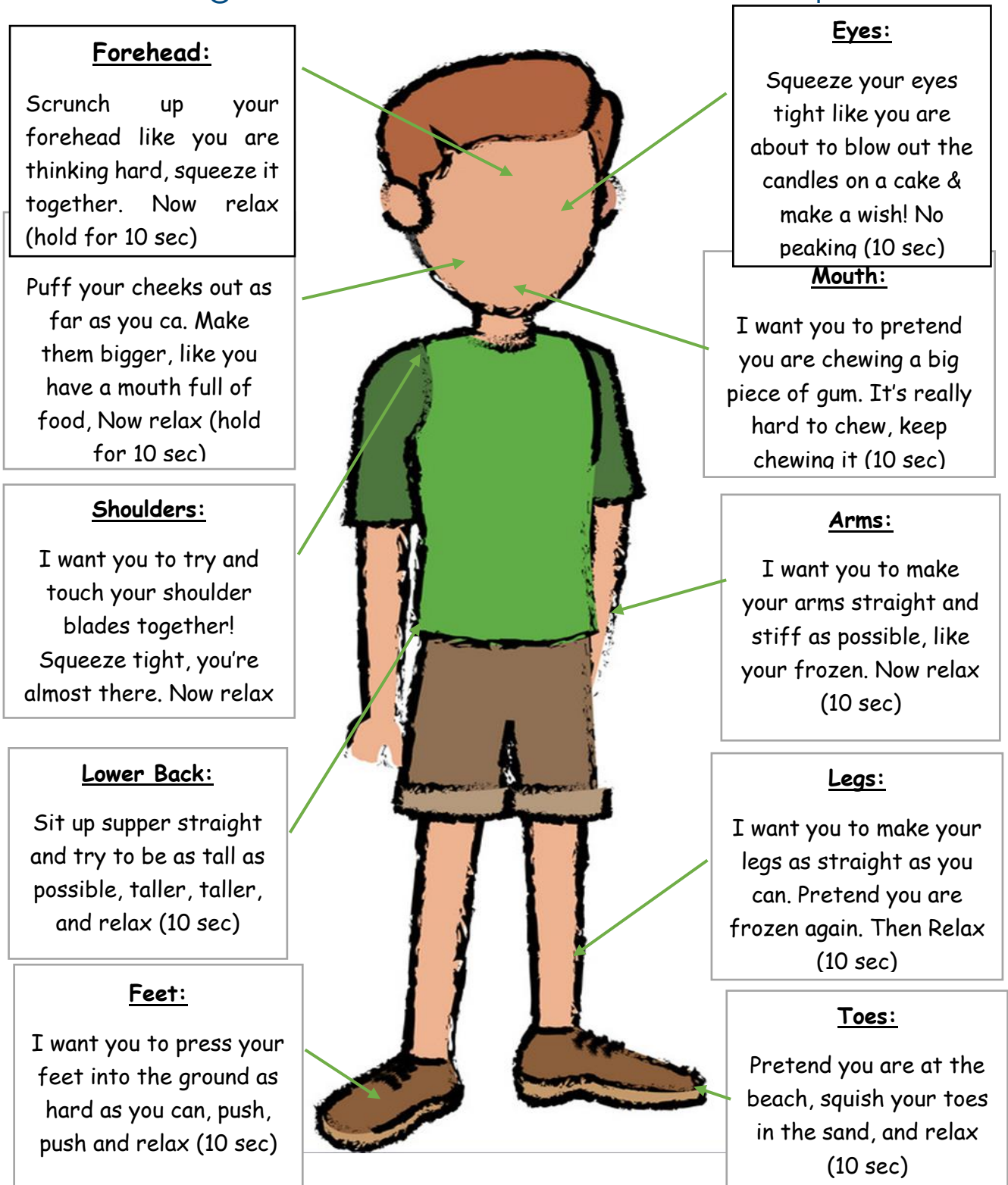
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOL3isokmY4>

Progressive muscle relaxation

When we are feeling angry we tend to tense our muscles, often without even noticing. In order to return to calm we might need to purposefully relax our muscles.

One very effective way of doing this is to work through each muscle group in your body clenching those muscles as much as you can for 10-20 seconds and then completely releasing them for 10-20 seconds.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique



Watch the YouTube video below to learn the Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li6BNa75TQw>

Task: Keep a diary of the TIIP skills you have tried and what worked for you in the box below.

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a yellow border, intended for a diary entry. The rectangle is centered on the page and occupies a significant portion of the upper half of the page.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Learning how to effectively communicate can help to...

- Avoid conflict all together
- Avoid anger escalating into an explosion (lengthen or put out a fuse)
- Repair relationships that have been damaged because of an angry outburst.



Remind yourself of how good you feel when communication goes well.

Communication 101

- Firstly, figure out **what level of anger you are feeling and why**. Use **TIIP skills** to help give you the space and time needed to do this.
- **Listen** to the other person before replying and **try not to interrupt**. Focusing on your **breathing** can help here.
- **Don't assume** you know what other people are thinking or feeling, **we can't mind-read!** Remember **hot and cool thoughts** and consider how you could re-frame what you are thinking.
- Express how you feel with **words**, using **'I' statements** and **avoid raising your voice** or **swearing**.
- If you need **time out**, explain this **calmly** and agree to talk at a **later point**.
- Use **'hot' coping skills** to release some adrenaline and the **distraction ideas** to take your mind off it and properly cool down before coming back to the conversation.

The Power of assertiveness

You are more likely to get a helpful reaction that will meet your needs if you communicate assertively rather than aggressively. Assertiveness will also avoid escalation and empower you. Aggression on the other hand does not usually help and often results in damaged relationships.

Task: Think about what it means to be assertive Vs aggressive. What are the differences? Think about verbal and non-verbal cues.

Assertive Characteristics	Aggressive Characteristics
Normal volume voice Respects others space	Shouting Invading personal space
Think of a time you were assertive. What happened?	Think of a time you were aggressive. What happened?

Caging the rage

We have gone through lots of different ways of noticing when anger is rising up, and have introduced you to a number of coping skills that, with practice, will help you to keep anger under control. Here's a summary:

Hot coping skills (Damage control): There is an imminent explosion, or there may have already been an explosion. They function to put out the live firework and prevent further explosions by dispersing the rage. More about these on page 7.

What will be your go-to 'hot' coping skill?

Warm coping skills (fuse lengthening): You have noticed some of your early warning signs and need to either lengthen your fuse or get out of there. Distraction (page 11) and TIIP skills (page 15-17) will be useful here. With a bit of practice, being able to change hot thoughts to cool thoughts will also come in here, as will communicating assertively.

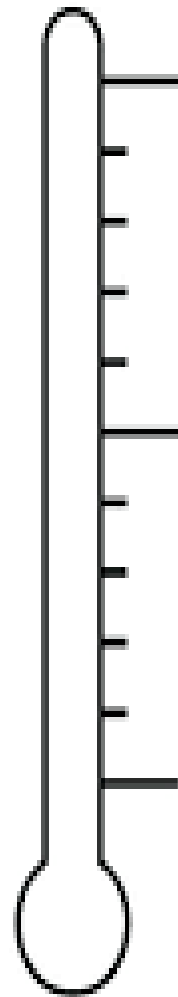
What is your early warning plan?

Cool skills (firework health and safety): After an explosion, once you have calmed down, or at a time when you are generally relaxed and able to think clearly. This is when you reflect on why you got angry and what you could do differently next time. That may be recognising new triggers (page 9) or warning signs (page 13) or acknowledging skills and behaviours that are working or not working for you. You can also use 'cool' time to learn and practice new skills (ie. being assertive – page 18) or make plans for how you will avoid or manage a situation you know will be challenging (page 10).

What 'cool' skill are you going to learn next?

Don't forget to relax! It is really important to spend time relaxing, every day. If you are constantly running around with no space to be still and reflect, you will quickly find yourself getting more and more, angry and not knowing why. Your mind needs time to process your day and you need time to switch off and have fun too (page 17).

What will you do to relax?



REVIEW

It can be really easy to think about how far we have to go, rather than thinking about how far we have come. Remember what was said about the dopamine release when you have done a good job...well you have to take time to recognise what you are doing to get that hit!

Task: Use the questions below to notice and celebrate your achievements.

Once you have identified what is going well, there are some questions to help you think about what changes you could make to help you do even better.

You may find it helpful to go back to the hopes you wrote on page 6 to see if they have been realised, or if you have new hopes now.

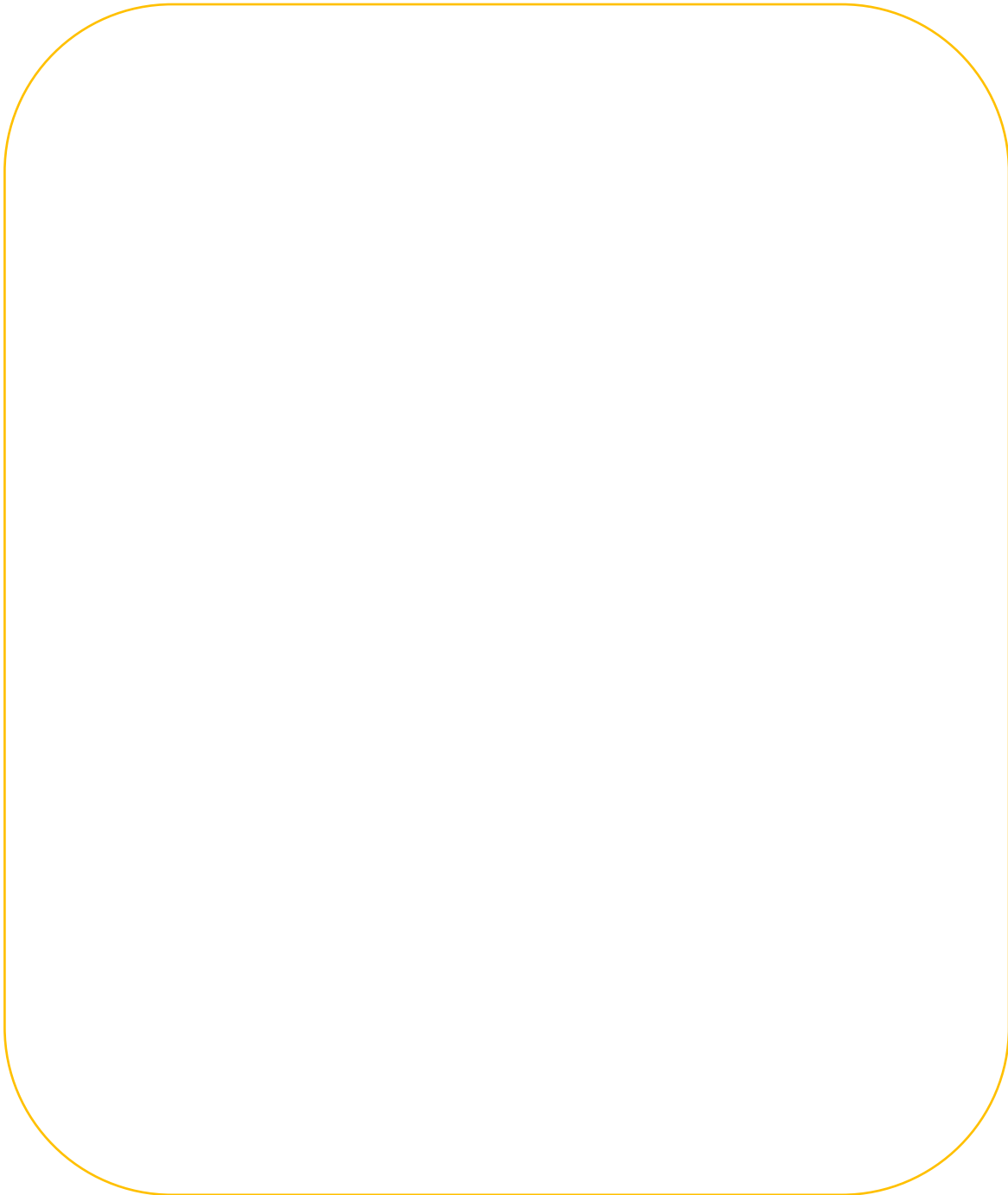
What has changed for me? *(Think about all areas of your life, your physical, mental, and emotional health and how you spend your time)*

What got in the way of me changing? *(Think about the things you would have liked to have done, but couldn't quite do. Were they too big? Was there not enough time? Or was there something more important to do first?)*

What am I going to do next? *(Look at your answer to the last question, is there anything you can do to overcome those challenges? Could you break the big goals down, or ask someone to help you?)*

What have I learnt and will use when I get angry?

Task: In the box below write down what you have learnt about anger and the tools you have tried and found useful.



FURTHER SUPPORT

Some helpful places to go online:



Emotional Wellbeing
Service

Cardiff and the Vale



PAPYRUS
PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE

DrugWise

Some mindfulness apps we like:



< Calm

Headspace >



< StopBreatheThink

Smiling mind >



Some other apps we like:



COMBINED MINDS

Combined Minds to
help friends and
family support a
young person's
mental health

Clear fear to help with
anxiety management



www.mind.org.uk

www.medicinenet.com

N.B. <https://www.parentingni.org/family-wellness-project/family-resources/anger/>