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Managing Anger with CBT

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- Understand the consequences of angry behaviour
- Implement change for a happier, more balanced life



Gill Bloxham
Chartered Psychologist

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***Managing Anger
with CBT***

FOR
DUMMIES®

by Gill Bloxham

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part I: The Knowledge: Anger, CBT and Change</i> ... 7	
Chapter 1: Things You Need To Know About Anger	9
Chapter 2: Knowing About CBT and Making Changes	23
<i>Part II: Managing Your Anger: Putting CBT into Action</i>	43
Chapter 3: Investigating Your Own Anger.....	45
Chapter 4: Cooling Down Your Angry Thinking	65
Chapter 5: Dealing With Your Real Feelings	89
Chapter 6: Changing Your Angry Behaviour.....	103
Chapter 7: Using Assertiveness to Bypass Anger	131
<i>Part III: Changing for the Better, Changing for Good</i>	149
Chapter 8: Changing Old Habits for New.....	151
Chapter 9: Getting Past Setbacks and Finding Support.....	163
<i>Part IV: The Part of Tens</i>	181
Chapter 10: Ten Tips to Put Out the Fire When You're Angry	183
Chapter 11: Ten Tips for Dealing With Angry People.....	191
<i>Index</i>	199

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

About This Book	2
Conventions Used in This Book.....	3
What Not to Read.....	3
Foolish Assumptions	3
How This Book Is Organised	4
Part I: The Knowledge: Anger, CBT and Change.....	4
Part II: Managing Your Anger:	
Putting CBT into Action	4
Part III: Changing For The Better,	
Changing For Good	5
Part IV: The Part of Tens.....	5
Icons Used In This Book.....	5
Where to Go From Here	6

Part 1: The Knowledge: Anger, CBT and Change.... 7

Chapter 1: Things You Need To Know About Anger . . . 9

Grasping Normal Emotions.....	10
Following the CBT loop.....	10
Feelings about your feelings.....	11
Knowing More About Anger	12
Discovering the point of anger.....	14
Suffering the Consequences of Anger	19
Living an unhealthy lifestyle	19
Losing relationships	20
Struggling at work.....	20
Dealing with ill-health.....	21
Falling short of your potential	22
Using New Tactics to Manage Your Anger	22

Chapter 2: Knowing About CBT and Making Changes.....23

Uncovering the Basics of CBT	24
Linking thought and feeling.....	24
Looking at thinking mistakes	25

Understanding About Thinking.....	26
Getting to the bottom of your personal attitudes and beliefs	27
Thinking scripts and expectations	28
Seeing the effects of personality style on anger	30
Finding out about Behaviour.....	31
Looking at physical reactions to anger.....	32
Using the trigger–reaction–results chain	33
Considering Making Changes	34
Why bother changing?	36
The problems anger causes you.....	36
Results: The upside of changes	39
Making change work.....	40

Part II: Managing Your Anger: Putting CBT into Action..... 43

Chapter 3: Investigating Your Own Anger 45

Using Experience to Investigate.....	46
Taking Charge of Your Anger	47
Understanding What Goes on When You're Angry	48
Confusing anger with other feelings.....	48
Comparing anger and irritation	51
Taking your anger temperature	51
Recognising your anger style	55
Spotting your anger triggers	58
Finding the roots of your anger	61
Looking at the Long-Term Costs	62
Seeing what anger does for you.....	63
Getting into trouble because of your anger	64

Chapter 4: Cooling Down Your Angry Thinking 65

Spotting Typical Anger Triggers	66
'You're treating me badly'	67
'It's not fair'	68
'It's so frustrating'	69
'Don't be so annoying'	69
'I can't stop thinking about it'	69
Managing Your Angry Thinking	70
Spotting your angry thinking mistakes	71
Catching your hot thoughts	74
Finding evidence for your angry thoughts	77
Separating thinking from feeling.....	80

Replacing Unhelpful Thoughts.....	80
Stopping worry and fear in their tracks.....	81
Beating suspicion, distrust and paranoia.....	82
Seeking forgiveness, not revenge	82
Accepting less than perfection	83
Steering clear of demands and threats	83
Avoiding coercion and bullying.....	84
Finding the positives in any situation.....	84
Developing an Emergency Thinking First Aid Kit	85
Keeping anger in mind	85
Improving your problem solving.....	85
Caring about others.....	86
Focusing on your aims	86

Chapter 5: Dealing With Your Real Feelings 89

Feeling Balanced	90
Knowing your feelings better	91
Finding words for feelings	92
Looking at other feelings behind anger	94
Managing Your Personality Style.....	96
Clearing Up Common Myths About Feelings.....	99
Myth #1: Anger is your enemy	99
Myth #2: Feelings are weak.....	99
Myth #3: Hiding anger can't hurt you	100
Myth #4: It's all in the mind.....	101
Myth #5: Anger is about getting revenge.....	101
Myth #6: Grief doesn't last long.....	101
Myth #7: Hopelessness and isn't caused by anger...102	

Chapter 6: Changing Your Angry Behaviour 103

Acting Calmly.....	104
Analysing the actions of anger.....	104
Knowing your anger reactions better	106
Relaxing physical tension.....	108
Predicting the results of actions.....	111
Picturing answers to problems.....	113
Treating Your Body Better	114
Reducing your adrenaline level	114
Eating well.....	114
Sleeping soundly.....	114
Exercising regularly.....	115
Reducing medication.....	116
Reducing harmful substance intake.....	116
Managing pain and illness	117

Controlling Your Signals	118
Playing with a poker face.....	119
Toning down your voice	119
Choosing your words carefully.....	119
Talking with body language.....	120
Tackling Anger Face to Face.....	120
Pressing pause	120
Staying focused	123
Being honest	124
Negotiating win-win results	125
Handling Hidden Anger	125
Describing your anger style	125
Accepting help	127
Giving up payback and revenge.....	128

Chapter 7: Using Assertiveness to Bypass Anger . . . 131

Defining Anger Styles.....	132
Assertiveness in action	132
Aggression in action	133
Passive aggression in action	134
Becoming More Assertive.....	136
Asserting Yourself: Your Rights and Responsibilities	136
Bringing on the benefits of assertiveness.....	138
Following basic steps to being assertive.....	139
Solving Common Problems: Tips and Tactics.....	140
Using assertive signs and signals	141
Saying 'no' and meaning 'no'	142
Questioning guilty feelings	143
Using the 'broken record' technique	144
Dealing with criticism helpfully	145
Accepting that life's not perfect	147

Part III: Changing for the Better, Changing for Good 149

Chapter 8: Changing Old Habits for New 151

Starting to Change	152
Recognising your possible future self.....	153
'Yes, but . . .': Avoiding excuses that block change	154
Learning without failing	154
Turning Changes into Habits.....	155
Changing your thinking.....	156
Feeling differently	157

Behaving in new ways	159
Changing old habits – some tips and tactics.....	160

Chapter 9: Getting Past Setbacks and Finding Support 163

Taking Two Steps Forwards and One Step Back.....	163
When Old Habits Die Hard.....	165
The ABC of behaviour change.....	165
Spotting setback triggers.....	166
Practising Positive Ways to Make Progress	169
Thinking tactics	169
Feeling tactics	170
Body tactics.....	170
Action tactics	171
Staying motivated.....	172
Keeping new habits going.....	173
Finding Help and Support	174
Seeking information and top-up tips	175
Managing in a crisis	177
Getting professional help.....	177

***Part IV: The Part of Tens* 181**

Chapter 10: Ten Tips to Put Out the Fire When You're Angry 183

Letting Anger Evaporate	183
Staying Motivated To Stay Cool.....	184
Having SMART Goals	185
Taking Time Out.....	186
Giving Up Negative Self-Talk.....	186
Accepting You're Not Always Right.....	187
Forgiving Other People	188
Seeing Red but Keeping Control	189
Asking Whether a Fight's Really Worth Your Energy.....	189
Finding Help in a Crisis.....	190

Chapter 11: Ten Tips for Dealing With Angry People 191

Turning Lemons into Lemonade.....	192
Using Your Anger Knowledge.....	192
Spending Energy Wisely.....	193
Taking Time Out.....	193
Showing Sympathy.....	194

Appreciating the Power of 'Sorry' 194
Avoiding Walking on Eggshells 195
Dealing with Bullies 196
Using Cooling Tactics 197
Dealing with Extremes..... 198

***Index*..... 199**

Introduction

Anger management's a hot topic these days. Many sources claim that people are more stressed and angry now than in the generations before them. Anger is normal, a natural emotion that's part of your survival mechanism. Anger management doesn't try to get rid of or stop your anger. Instead, managing your anger means staying in control of your feelings, thinking before reacting. Getting the best from life is about solving problems instead of reacting in ways that cause you more trouble. I think of anger management as a life skill. Life skills are skills you learn to run your life smoothly with, such as looking after yourself, getting on with people, managing money, communicating, learning new things and solving problems. The ways you manage your anger now are the habits you've learned; by learning new ideas and tactics, you can make the changes you're looking for.

A couple of essentials are needed for success with your anger management. Accepting that learning how to control your anger's like learning anything – driving, speaking a new language, cooking, working, dancing – means you'll take time and put in genuine effort to pick up good habits. As a guideline, most people work on anger management for three to six months before the changes really start to feel familiar. If that sounds a long time, think that it's only 12–24 weeks of your life. Not bad, considering you've taken your whole life so far to develop your habits. It's not simple, or even possible, to change your anger overnight. But even setbacks are just another chance to practise, when you're using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). And accepting that you're the only one in control of your anger frees you up from thinking about other people and how they affect you. Your anger's *yours* to control, so you're in charge – you're not waiting for anyone else to agree there's a point to changing your anger habits or tackling your problems differently.

About This Book

Anger's a normal human emotion. If you get angry, you're not unusual, wrong or crazy. Frustrations, outbursts, feeling too uncomfortable to speak up are all normal in life. If you're looking for ways to handle anger better, to get the results you really want from people and situations without losing your temper or feeling badly treated, or to get on without other people's problems getting you down, then this book's for you.

CBT is a world-recognised approach to dealing with human problems – psychological, emotional and physical. An enormous amount of research shows that using CBT increases your chances of solving your problems, and that using CBT together with other help (including medication) if you're stuck has better results than going it alone.

Reading this book now can help you later. When you're irritated or angry and it's leading to trouble, you'll need information and tips to hand that have a good track record of success. Working out new ways to think, feel and act in the heat of the moment isn't practical – by preparing in advance, you're giving yourself the best chance of success.

You can just browse through this book for interest, but I suggest you also get stuck in and try the many CBT tips and tactics, questionnaires, short exercises, record sheets and quizzes to help you make changes to manage your anger or the anger of others. This isn't a test, and no one else is looking at your answers, so be honest with yourself. The whole point of understanding your anger better is to make changes that benefit you.

The exercises are for practice; they're not exams! You don't have to show anyone what you write or discover about yourself. Spelling and writing style don't matter either – what you get out of an exercise does. Exercises also remind you later where you were to start with – it's all too easy to lose sight of how far you've come.

Practice makes perfect. Practising positive thinking, calm behaviour, a healthy lifestyle and daily stress control all make a difference. Improving your skills in anger management is one way to protect yourself from the ups and downs of life and from coming off worst.

If your anger has already got you in trouble with the law, using both this book and the help you may get from professionals doubles your chances of making changes for good.

Life can be wonderful but also unpredictable, unkind and unfair. Anger's normal; it's how you handle it that counts.

Conventions Used in This Book

I keep the conventions to a minimum in this book. Here are the ones I use:

- ✓ I use *italics* for emphasis or to highlight new words or phrases.
- ✓ **Boldfaced** text indicates key words in bulleted lists or the key steps of action lists.
- ✓ Monotype font is used for websites and email addresses.

What Not to Read

This book is organised so that you can just dip in. Like all *For Dummies* books, you don't have to read it in a certain order or from cover to cover. Have a look at the Contents at the beginning and pick out the parts that look interesting or that you think may help. You can go through the chapters in any order you choose.

You don't have to read a lot of negative things about anger. In here are tips and ideas to make a difference. You only have to try them to find the ones that suit you best. The more new ideas you try, the better your chances of success are.

Foolish Assumptions

Making assumptions – guessing what people think or feel, what has happened or the reasons for something – is foolish when you don't have all the information. I almost never recommend assuming, because I've never met a good mind reader! But for the book to be helpful, I'm making a couple of assumptions about you and why you're reading it:

- ✔ **You're human and you've already got experience of anger.** Going through it isn't the same as understanding it or knowing how to handle it every time. You're looking for interesting facts, tips and tactics for managing your anger or dealing with people when they're angry.
- ✔ **You're smart enough to look for help when you hit problems.** Self-help books are a great start, and you're in good company, too – anger management's something everyone needs to know how to do. Evidence suggests that anger, revenge, hate and rage are becoming common problems, meaning that more and more of us need some help with these emotions.

How This Book Is Organised

This book is organised into four parts and a total of 11 chapters.

Part I: The Knowledge: Anger, CBT and Change

In this part, you discover the things you need to know about anger: When it's healthy, when it's not, and what the consequences of unhealthy anger can be for you and those around you. I also introduce you to the basics of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and how it can help you to bring about real change in your life.

Part II: Managing Your Anger: Putting CBT into Action

In this part I give you a toolkit of tried and tested methods to start to manage your anger. I guide you through ways of investigating the roots and triggers of your anger, show you how to calm your angry behaviour, and give you pointers on using assertiveness to bypass anger. Pick the chapters that best fit the difficulties you're experiencing, or work through each chapter in turn.

Part III: Changing for the Better, Changing for Good

In this part I concentrate on managing anger as an ongoing part of your life. I cover the ways in which you can develop new, more positive habits, and how to deal with the occasional relapse. This part helps you make the changes to your life permanent, and gives you some ideas for sources of support.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

Here you'll find vital information about using CBT to manage your anger. You'll find ten tips for quenching the fires of your own angry thinking, and ten more on dealing with anger in others.

Icons Used In This Book



This icon reminds you of important ideas or handy information to hold on to, so that even in the heat of the moment, you can handle anger well.



This flags up a chance to practise your skills, get more information about your anger, or find out what works to help you handle anger better.



This highlights practical advice for using CBT tactics on your anger.



This icon reminds you about essential, sometimes urgent, facts or about times when you need to stop and think before reacting as you're learning new habits.



This icon marks out CBT terms or jargon sometimes used in the psychology of anger management.

Where to Go From Here

Books like this exist because anger is normal and anger management is a life skill everyone needs.

Reading this book may really help you. But self-help isn't always the full answer. If you've dipped in to most chapters, tried different exercises and ideas but still feel stuck, some professional help is the next positive step.

If you're in trouble with the police because of your anger, the long-term effects on your life and your health are serious, never mind the effects on those around you. For this reason, finding some support while you learn new ways to deal with old problems is worthwhile. If changing was easy to do alone, you'd have done it already.

If anger has destroyed or affected your close relationships, maybe you're ashamed or avoiding what you've really said and done. However bad you feel, professionals trained to help with anger have heard and seen it before. What you talk about gives a picture of what you're good at and what you find hard. Professionals aren't interested in judging you as a person – CBT is all about the view you have of life, not the professionals' view of you. See Chapter 9 for contact details and web addresses.

Part I

The Knowledge: Anger, CBT and Change

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"The only thing that will improve Greg's performance around the greens is a course of anger management."

In this part . . .

In this part, you discover the things you need to know about anger: When it's healthy, when it's not, and what the consequences of unhealthy anger can be for you and those around you. I also introduce you to the basics of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and how it can help you to bring about real change in your life.

Chapter 1

Things You Need To Know About Anger

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining anger
 - ▶ Picking up new ideas and information
 - ▶ Understanding the way anger works
 - ▶ Avoiding the pitfalls of anger
-

Anger is a natural survival mechanism and a normal emotion, even if you're usually a calm, optimistic and positive person. Healthy anger usually passes quickly without being intense or happening several times a day. Anger is meant to work as an alarm, warning you about possible threats – to your life, your values and beliefs, people you care about, even your pride. But when your angry feelings distract you from finding answers, anger gets in the way of your potential happiness and damages your health.

In this chapter I give you the basic facts about anger and how it works – this book's for you if you're looking for ideas or ways of changing your anger habits, or for more options for dealing with anger from others. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is tried and tested on anger and many other common human problems. Cognitive simply means thinking – you're using the power of thinking to change your actions. The aim of CBT is not to get rid of your anger but to help you react to anger in less intense, lasting and extreme ways. Instead of acting on impulse or angry feelings, you'll pick up ways to feel calmer and to solve problems without causing new ones.

Grasping Normal Emotions

Research into human nature shows that everyone shares some basic emotions. Studies suggest that having feelings helps the human race survive and thrive. Having feelings motivates you to act and react to what's happening in your life, as well as making it possible to get on with others, to remember events and to sort out what matters to you and why. Wherever you're born and however you're raised, you'll recognise the following six emotions and their associated facial expressions:

- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Disgust
- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Happiness
- ✓ Sadness
- ✓ Surprise

As well as showing in your expressions and body language, emotions also have physical effects. Anger is part of a survival reaction known as 'fight or flight'; in other words, your body gets ready to fight back or run away when you detect a threat. This gears you up to pay attention, think on your feet, or come up with new ways to solve problems – all good for your survival and success. But because anger gets your heart racing and produces a mixture of body chemicals, when it's extreme, lasts for a long time or happens too often, it's not helping your survival at all. Instead, it can lead to serious health problems or even early death, whether you're showing anger or hiding it.

Following the CBT loop

Using CBT helps you understand how your thinking, your body reactions and emotions, and your behaviours link together. When you feel angry, your body's reacting to anger with chemicals like adrenaline, you're thinking angry thoughts, and your actions are affected by anger too – I show how this works in Figure 1-1.

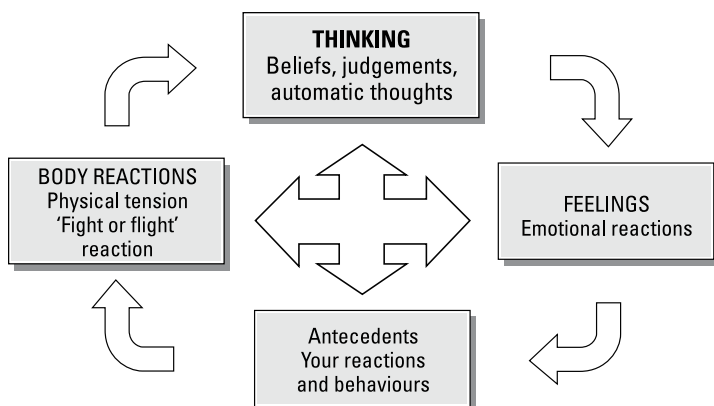


Figure 1-1: The basic CBT loop: mind, body and action.



Your thinking affects your feelings and actions, feelings affect your thinking and actions, and actions affect thinking and feelings. This loop can be a vicious circle, but the great news is that you can break a circle at any point – there's no one right place to start. In Chapter 4 I deal with changing angry thinking, in Chapter 5 I focus on feeling differently and in Chapter 6 I offer ways to calm your angry behaviour.

Feelings about your feelings

Humans can be complicated. As if feeling angry isn't enough, you can feel depressed about how it's ruining your relationships, nervous about whether your angry friend will become violent, guilty about shouting at your child, or be taken over by the desire for revenge against someone who's hurt your feelings. And when you're trying hard to change your angry habits, feeling unmotivated can bring your plans crashing down – leaving you feeling puzzled because you know you'll really benefit from changing.

These feelings about your feelings add to what's bothering you about being angry, making it all feel worse. CBT helps you find ways to get to the bottom of why and how you get angry, to leave feelings about feelings aside, and to understand what you can do to start swimming instead of sinking.