



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# Responding to Anger



## WE CAN RESPOND TO ANGER IN HEALTHY WAYS

Anger is a natural response your body uses to protect itself. Some people say that “anger is fear’s bodyguard.” In times of threat, isolation or stress, you may feel fearful or angry. You may have noticed more anger in yourself or others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although anger can be a strong emotion, that does not mean it is bad. It is normal to feel angry at times. We can choose to respond to our anger in ways that are either helpful or hurtful to ourselves and others.

We may have been taught unhealthy ways of responding to our anger from past generations. Anger can also be a sign that we have other strong emotions or needs that we have not addressed.

When we are in balance, we can feel all our emotions and talk about our feelings in healthy ways. If we are only able to feel and express anger, it is a sign that our other emotions and needs are not in balance, which impacts our overall wellness.



## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH ANGER

You might want to try some of the following approaches when you are feeling angry:

- **Check in with your basic needs:**
  - “Am I hungry?” (“hangry”)
  - “Am I safe?”
  - “Am I comfortable?”
  - “Am I tired?”
- **Be curious about your feelings.** When we are curious, we are not judging ourselves. Are there patterns to your anger? Are there other unmet needs that are causing anger to come up? When we can identify patterns, we can start to problem solve.
- **Remember that you are not your anger.** Anger is just a feeling and feelings pass.
- **Count backwards from 10.**
- **Ask the Creator for guidance.** “Creator, what is my lesson in this?” or “Creator, I pass this to you because right now I am struggling to deal with it. I let go of my anger to you.”
- **Call someone you trust to talk it out.** This is called “venting,” where you talk about your anger and process your thoughts. The idea is to let go of the anger with someone’s help. You might want to set a time limit, such as 15 minutes of venting, and then focus on something positive.
  - Ensure the person you talk with is okay with you sharing your feelings of anger and helping you process them. Some people are struggling to help others with their anger right now. When we share difficult emotions with someone, that person may then have new feelings to manage. It’s good to ask permission: try asking “can I process something with you right now?” or “I need someone to dump on, can you help me by listening to my thoughts?”
- **Leave the room and take three deep breaths.** Pay attention to your belly filling up with air and then releasing that air slowly. When we give our bodies permission to calm down, our brain no longer thinks that we are in danger. This makes it easier to make good decisions.
- **Ask yourself “What do I need right now?”** This can help you calm down and start to think about what you need to feel okay again.
- **Get outside for a quick walk.** Help your body process the anger physically. Try walking quickly for 20 minutes while you swing your arms, stomp your feet and focus on how your body is moving.
- **Write down what is bothering you.** Making a list can help you sort out your thoughts and think carefully about how you’re being affected. A list can also help you problem solve and come up with solutions. If you like, you can burn this list or write at the bottom “Creator, I give these things to you now.”

- **Once you have processed what is bothering you, ask yourself “Is this something I need to share?”** Keeping our anger in can make us sick, and communication is often very healing. Remember to use “I” statements and look at the [Lateral Kindness checklists](#) for ideas to ensure healthy communication.
- **Remember that everything in our body is connected and anger sometimes sits in areas that are vulnerable.** Pay attention to your body and acknowledge that allowing our anger energy to move in a safe way is a form of healing. The pains in our body, like stomach pain, may be a way that our anger is telling us that we are in need of healing.
- **Remember the teaching that our words have energy.** What we say has energy attached to it that can hurt other people. Young children pick up on the energy of anger and it can become a part of who they are. We need to take the time to understand our anger and be responsible for our thoughts and words.
- **Realize that we can tell a different story about ourselves.** The stories that we tell about ourselves are often what we become. If many of our stories are about our anger and what we do when we are angry, perhaps it is time to start telling a different story.
- **Remember that no one “makes” us feel a certain way.** We have a choice about how we react and how we feel. We also have the right to set healthy boundaries with people in our lives. It takes strength to forgive others. Ask yourself “is this something I want to hold on to?” and “what are the costs of hanging on to this anger?”

## **AN ANGER MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

Try working through the steps below to identify the causes of your anger and find healthy ways you can respond to it.

1. What is making me angry? Where am I feeling the anger in my body? How serious is the anger that I am feeling right now on a scale from 1-10 (1= a little angry, 10= extremely angry)
2. What do I need? How are my needs not being met?
3. What can I do to respond right now (do some deep breathing, share how I feel, go for a walk, make a phone call)?
4. How can I move forward? What are the next steps I might take? How do I want to feel when I come out of this? Who do I want to reconnect with?

If none of these strategies help you manage your anger in healthy ways, you may want to check in with a counsellor or a doctor. Chronic anger may be a symptom of an underlying medical condition (such as depression, a chemical imbalance or a vitamin or mineral deficiency) and a health care professional can provide support.