

Working on Anger Week 1



The five classes

This course is made up of five classes which last 2 hours. Each class deals with a separate bit of anger, but as they all link together, it is important that you come to all five classes. However the first class aims to give a brief view of anger and offers emergency control strategies. By coming to the whole course you will get the whole picture.

During the course you will be given information about anger and how you may manage it. Keep the workbooks you get so that you can use them in future. It is okay to write in these workbooks. You will not be asked to show your comments to anyone. They are personal to you.

Week 1: About anger

The aim of the first week is for you to be able to understand more about your own anger and how it works and factors which can make it worse. We will give you information about anger and what causes it as well as looking at preparing to change and thinking about goals for change. This class suggests emergency control strategies.

Week 2: What makes anger worse and quick control

In the second class we will talk about ways to help you manage your anger. We look at how to recognise the early warning signs of anger and quick ways of controlling your anger by looking in more detail at ideas from the first class.

Week 3: Strategies to manage anger

In the third class we continue to look at ways of managing anger, building on what you learned in week 2. We will talk about assertiveness, taking care of yourself and a number of other strategies which you may find helpful.

Week 4: Recognising & changing unhelpful thoughts

In the fourth class we will look at identifying and challenging unhelpful thoughts that trigger anger. We also consider ways to develop more helpful thoughts about situations that currently lead to anger.

Week 5: Relationships

In the final class we will look how to manage anger in relationships and to develop more helpful ways of communicating. We also look at what might happen when you try to change your behaviour and how to cope with setbacks and increase your chances of success!

What is anger?

Anger is a normal feeling that we all experience. It is an instinctive response to feeling threatened. When we become angry our bodies change to meet the threat: tense muscles, pumping heart, etc. Words you may use to talk about anger include: rage, mad, wound up, furious and on your toes. Anger is often a sign that something is not right. Anger can let you know that you are being hurt, physically or emotionally. Anger can also tell you that your needs are not being met. If something is happening that is wrong you may feel angry. Anger is just an emotion which is neither good nor bad, it is what you do with it that counts.

However, anger can have unwanted side effects. Anger can lead to difficulties in relationships, health problems, poor work performance, and difficulties with “the authorities”. Anger is also connected with aggression and violence. Aggression is an action that is intended to cause injury, harm or damage, whilst anger is an emotion.

Anger, hostility, bitterness & aggression

It can be helpful to define the key words that relate to anger, so that you can better understand your difficulties and better describe what you experience.

Anger is an emotional response to a threat, injustice, hurt or frustration where the desire is to confront or damage the supposed source.

Hostility is a belief that other people are threatening and the world is unjust.

Bitterness is dwelling over hostile thoughts about a specific person or event

Aggression is behaviour that causes physical or emotional damage to protect from future harm

Goals of the Class

If anger is normal, why are you coming to an anger management class? Good question. After looking at the definitions on the previous page, it would probably be better to call it something like “**Aggression Management**” or “**How to Express your Anger in a Healthy Way**” rather than Anger Management.

Therefore our goal is not to make anger go away. Rather it is to learn to deal with anger by using healthier ways that will empower you and allow you to let go of the temporary illusion of power that aggression may provide.

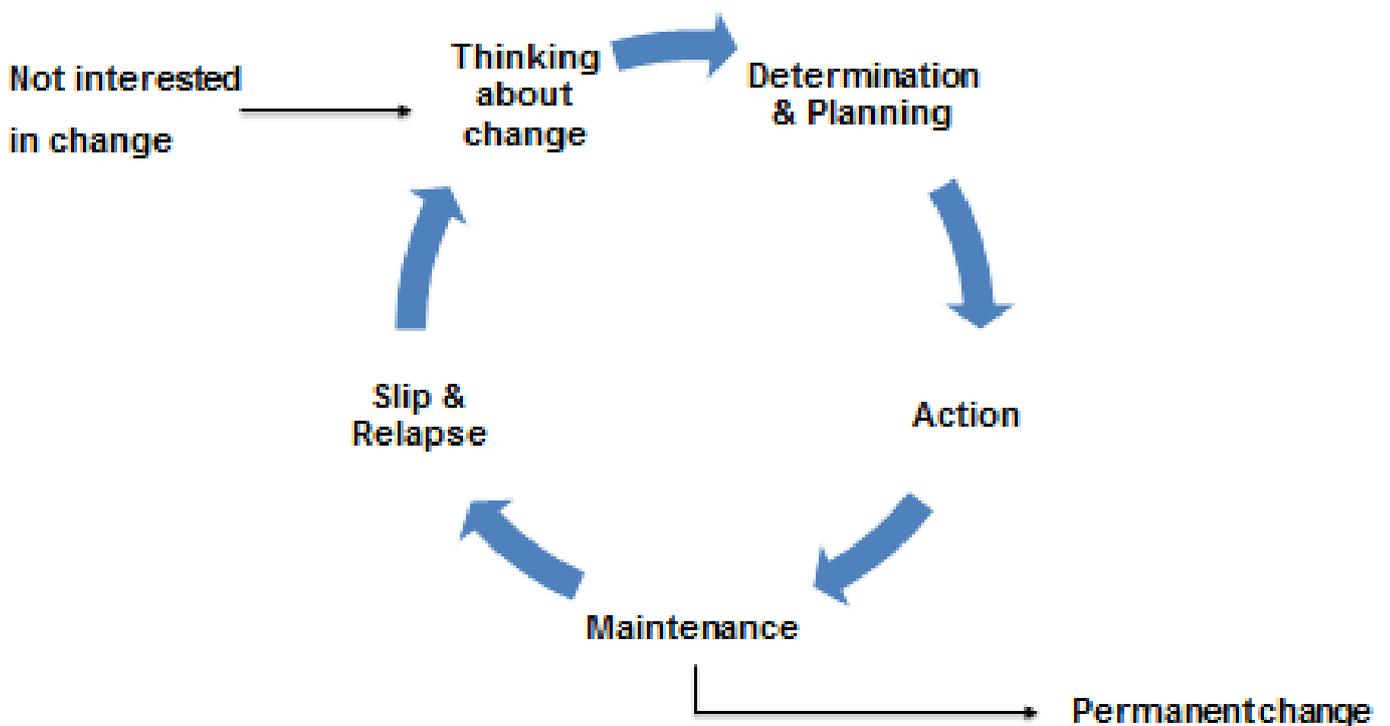
Readiness for Change

Stages of change

This model helps us to identify where we are at in the cycle of change.

By coming to the classes you could argue that you are thinking about change. Hopefully you will start to move through these stages and reach the maintenance stage and eventually achieve permanent change.

However, change can be challenging and sometimes there are setbacks/slips, but when this happens you don't go back to square one, as you have previous knowledge of change. Also, if you slip then you may progress to the action stage more quickly than before.



Ways of thinking about change

When it comes to changing behaviour, we can look at the behaviour in a number of ways. The overall aim is to move from thinking about change to acting on these thoughts. There are a number of questions that you can ask yourself to help tip the balance from just thinking about change to planning and doing something different.

Advantages of change

Below are a number of questions that aim to help you think about how life could be better if you change.

- What are the advantages of making this change?
- How would you like things to be different?
- What would you like your life to be like in 5 years time?
- The fact that you are here shows that at least part of you thinks it's time to do something - what are your main reasons for seeking change?

In the box below write down five things which will be better in the future because you have changed.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

Optimism for change

Below are some questions that aim to help you think about how you have succeeded in changing in the past, and what strengths or skills you have that help you to change. You can also think about who might be able to support you that you can trust.

- Think about other significant changes that you've made in the past - how did you do it?
- What personal strengths do you have that will help you succeed?
- Who could offer you helpful support in making this change?
- What do you think would work for you, if you decided to change?

In the box below write down some things that would be helpful for you to change, a past change you have made (e.g. giving up smoking or cutting down on your alcohol intake), your strengths (e.g. good talker or good sense of humour) and the name of a person who would be supportive and you could trust.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

Intention to change

Below are a number of questions that aim to help you think about how willing you are to change. The more important it is to you to change your angry behaviour, the more likely you are to want to do something about it. Try to see that changing your angry behaviour will mean that you and those around you will experience less pain and hurt.

- How much do you want to do this?
- What would you be willing to try?
- What will it take to help you succeed?
- So what do you intend to do?

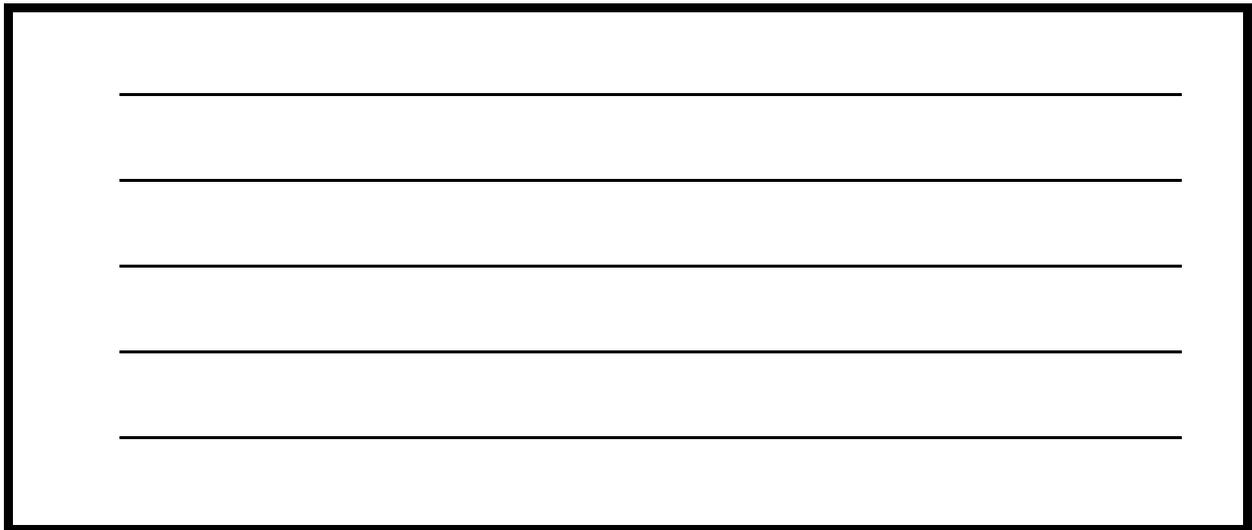
In the box below write down possible things you are willing to try in order to manage your angry behaviour more effectively. Write down what you think it will take to succeed.

Concerns

Having looked at what anger is - it is time to think about anger and you.

What really concerns *you* about your anger?

In the box below write down your concerns about your anger.

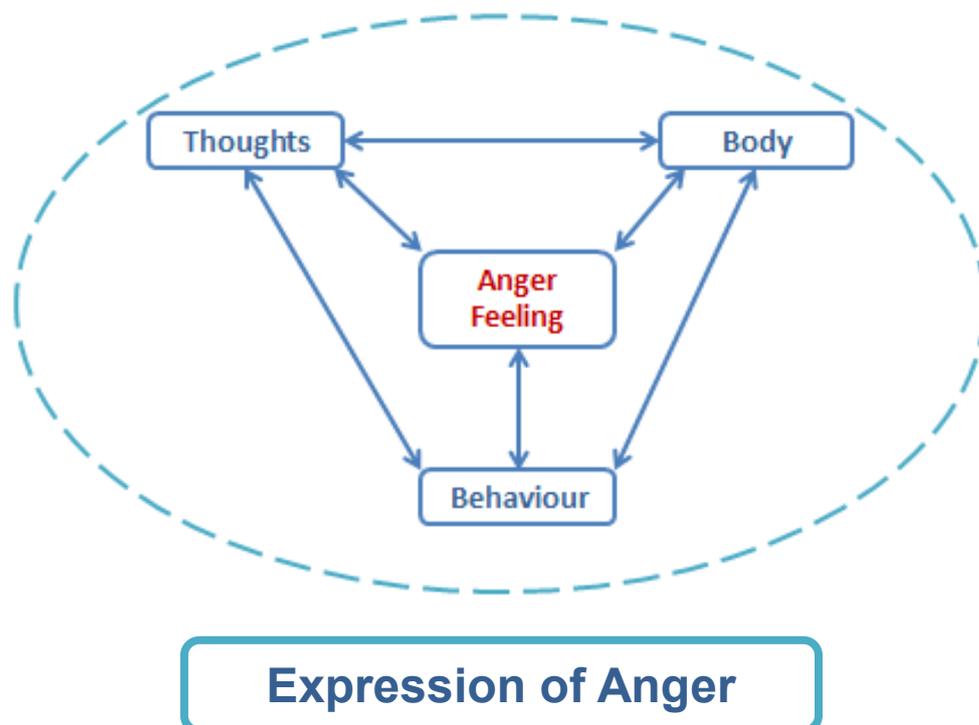


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Starting to Understand Your Anger and Vulnerability to Stress

Understanding Anger (1)

Anger is not a big complex mess and from what we have said so far we can see that we could put it into a picture like this. Understanding anger is the first step in controlling it and making it work for you.



We can see our problems with anger are influenced by how we are feeling at the time, how we are thinking and how we are behaving.

Exercise 1: breaking up your anger

Think about the times that you get angry and answer the following:

1. What are the effects on your body (tick all that apply and add any others)?

- Muscles tense
- Heart beats faster
- Breathing becomes faster
- Making my hands into fists
- Stomach feeling knotted
- Sleep problems
- Headaches
- Sweating
- Problems swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Feeling unreal

-
-
-

2. What sort of things go through your mind (thoughts)?

.....

.....

.....

3. What do you do when you get angry (behaviour)?

.....

.....

Anger Affects the Body

Anger itself generates a physiological response inside of the body. This is the body's own way of preparing you for a stressful situation. Levels of stress are linked to levels of anger; therefore it is likely that the first sign of becoming angry is how your body feels/changes in physiological response.

Anger Affects Thinking

Every emotional response constitutes a thought; however, we are not always aware of our thoughts. We can also fall into repetitive ways of thinking.

It is important to remember that thoughts are not objective facts. Therefore to help manage our anger, we should try to obtain a balanced and realistic view of events.

Anger as an Emotion

Anger is often used as a mask for other emotions, including fear; guilt; disappointment; shame; and sadness. It is important to take time to recognise how we are really feeling.

Anger Affects Behaviour

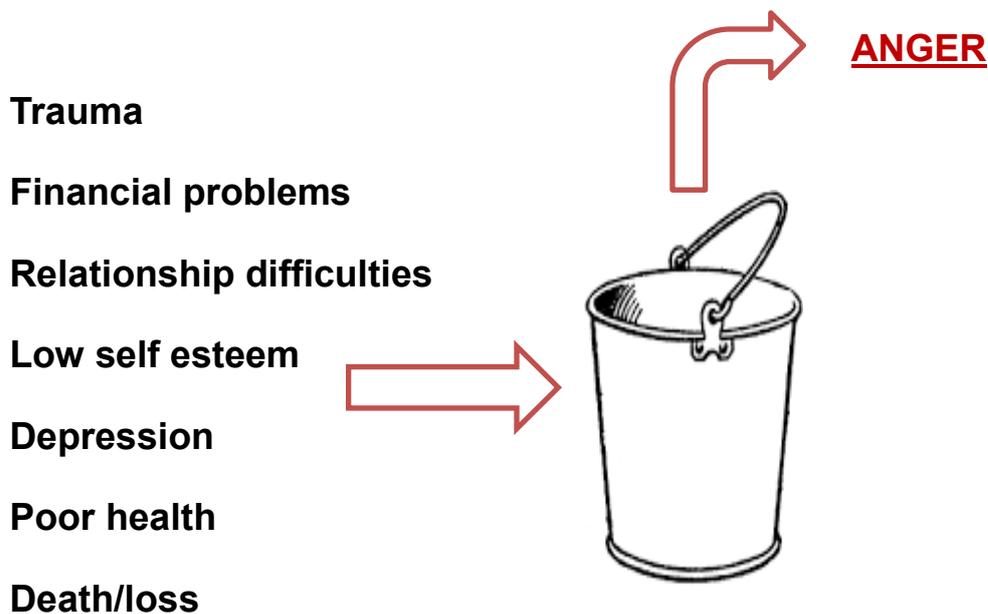
We often let others know we are angry through our behaviour. This can include aggression, irritability and withdrawing from situations/individuals. These behaviours can often make the situation worse, making our anger last longer or cause it to become more intense.

Vulnerability to Stress (Zubin & Spring, 1977):

We are all born with a capacity for coping with or containing stress – it may be helpful to think of this as a ‘bucket’ into which your stress pours like water. Some people are born with big ‘buckets’, some people with small ‘buckets’, it’s just one of those genetic things like the colour of your eyes.

While our buckets are filling up, we are managing the stress and therefore, we aren’t so aware of any negative impact. When your stress bucket is full, it overflows and you will experience the side effects of stress - including anger.

Therefore it is important to **understand** and **monitor** your personal bucket to keep emotionally well and on top of things.



What triggers our anger?

Anger is an emotional reaction to events or things which happen. Below are some of the main triggers which can make us angry and fill our stress bucket.

Stress, Frustrations & Disappointment

A frustration is when you try to do something and are blocked or disappointed. For example, when trying to mend a bicycle puncture and the bike pump breaks.

Annoyances, Irritations & Resentments

These are things that “get on your nerves”. Examples include:

- someone making a nuisance of themselves
- accidentally breaking something that you like
- tearing an item of clothing
- loud noises or interruptions when you are busy

Abuse

This can be verbal or physical abuse. Verbal abuse can include name-calling, cursing, and other unkind remarks. The abuse can be obvious and direct. Other times it is less obvious like when someone tries to make you feel a fool. Physical abuse includes pushing, grabbing, punching and kicking. This occurs much less often than verbal abuse.

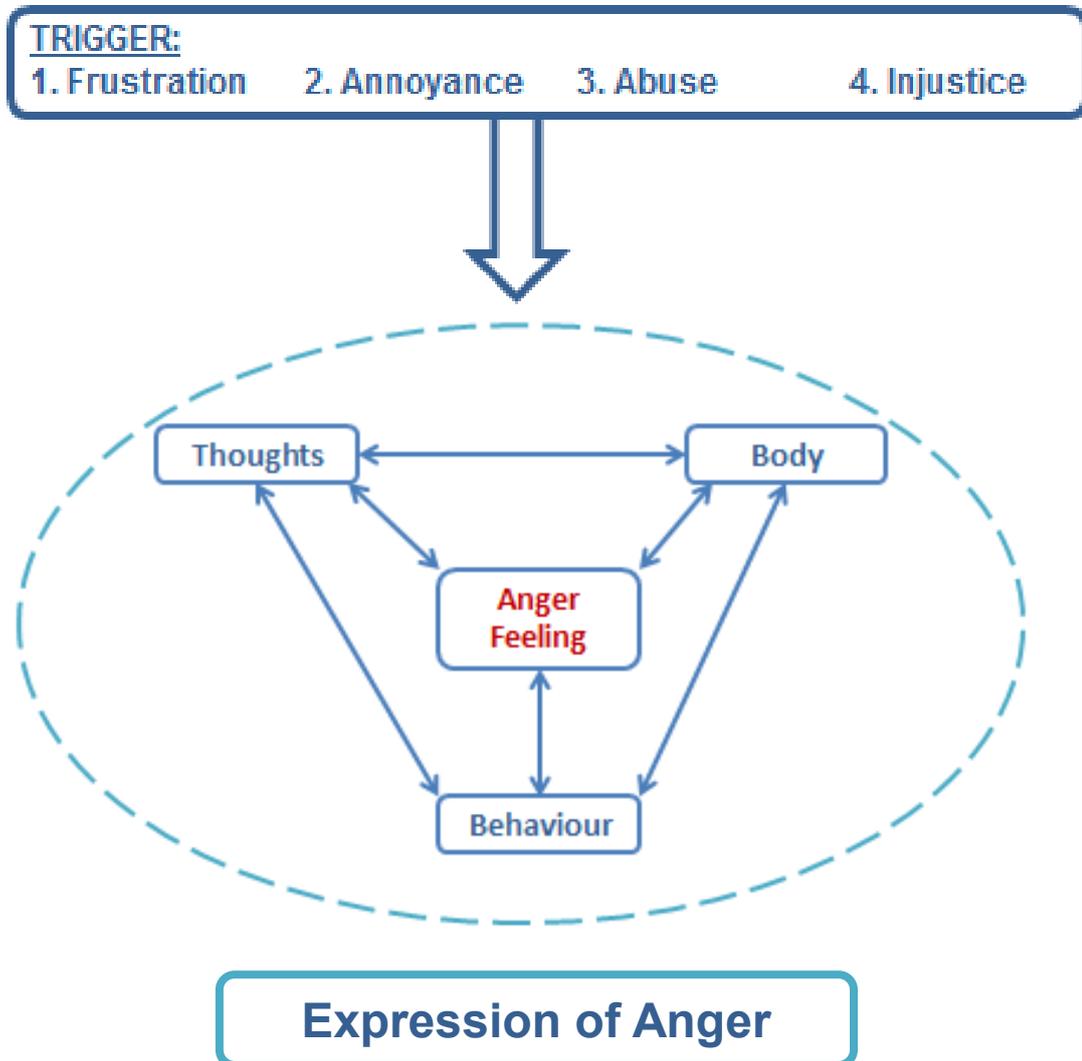
Injustice or unfairness

These are situations where you have not been treated fairly. An example is when someone fails to carry out his or her promise. You may also get angry if you feel that someone else is being mistreated.

Trauma

When something horrible happens to a person they can experience anger. Anger can relate to a sense of injustice or act as a defence to keep others away. If you have experienced a traumatic incident and are struggling to cope then consult your GP and seek psychological help.

Understanding anger (2)

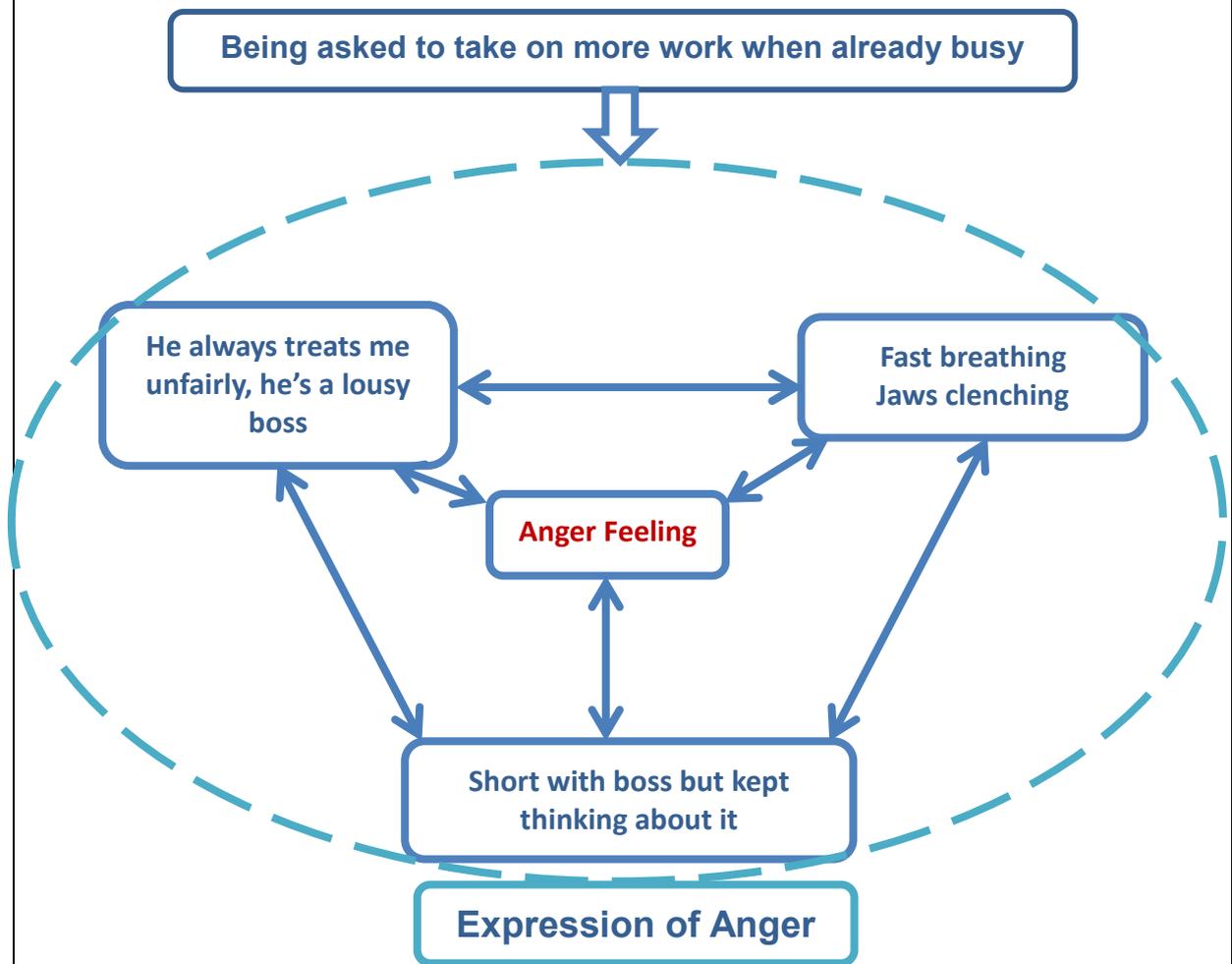


Our understanding of anger now includes the immediate triggers for our anger. Often we may find that it is the same sort of things triggering our anger, sometimes it will be a variety of things.

Gary

Gary, an electrician, was asked by his boss to go to a house to look at some wiring that the owner thought might not be safe. He already had a lot of work on and felt that his boss was taking advantage of him, knowing he wouldn't complain (injustice).

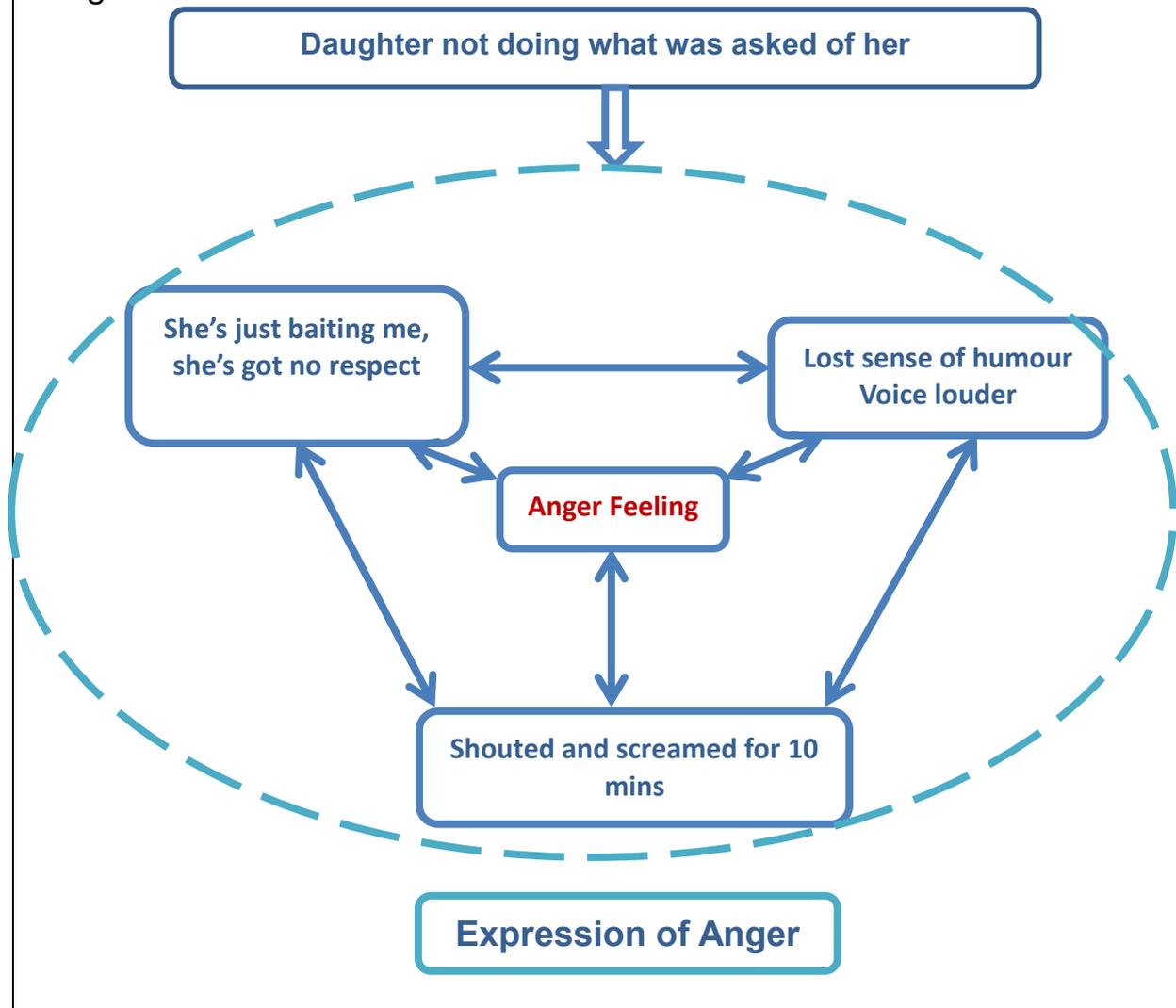
Gary could feel his breathing quicken and noticed his jaws clenching. He thought, "he always treats me unfairly, he's just a lousy boss". Gary was very short with his boss, to let him know that he was irritated. He finished off the work he already had and then took on the new job. He knew that if he gave his boss a mouthful he would lose his job. He couldn't get the situation out of his head that night. He kept thinking about it and was really irritable with his wife at home.



Jenny

Jenny had been on at her daughter all day to tidy her room and she kept saying she would do it in a minute or a bit later. Early in the evening Jenny found her daughter sitting in the bath just washing her hair. She saw her daughter as deliberately provoking her saying “what are you going to do about it then?” (annoyance)

She had felt stressed all day. When she saw her daughter in the bath she completely lost her sense of humour, she could feel her fists clench and her voice got louder. These changes happened in the space of a minute or two. She thought “she’s just baiting me, the kid’s completely useless, she’s got no respect” Jenny says that she “really let rip”. She shouted and screamed at her daughter for around 10 minutes. Later her daughter cleaned her room.



Exercise 2: getting to know your anger triggers

Think about what sort of things set your anger off and write them down.

Think about:

- Particular places
- Certain people
- What really gets your anger going

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What makes anger worse?

Whilst there is normally an immediate trigger for our anger there are often more distant factors affecting whether or not we get angry. Not all of these will be present for everyone or all of the time. These factors will be discussed in more detail later in the course, but for now it is useful just to be aware of them.

Relationships

The relationships which we are in can be a big source of stress or a trigger for anger.

Drugs, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine & steroids

Drugs, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine & steroids lead to physical changes similar to when we feel frightened or angry. The brain can misinterpret these physical sensations and go into defence mode because it believes there is a threat. These substances also decrease our level of control over behaviour. Think about a time when you were drunk would you act that way when you are sober?

Depression, anxiety, trauma, bereavement

Psychological difficulties can complicate anger. These areas often need attention in their own right. Seek psychological help if these cause problems for you.

Living conditions

Living conditions, for example, overcrowding, heat, debt, living in a difficult area, job insecurity etc. can all increase stress, increasing our likelihood of getting angry.

Poor sleep

A lack of sleep leads to poorer coping and less ability to find solutions. Also we are more likely to be irritable when tired.

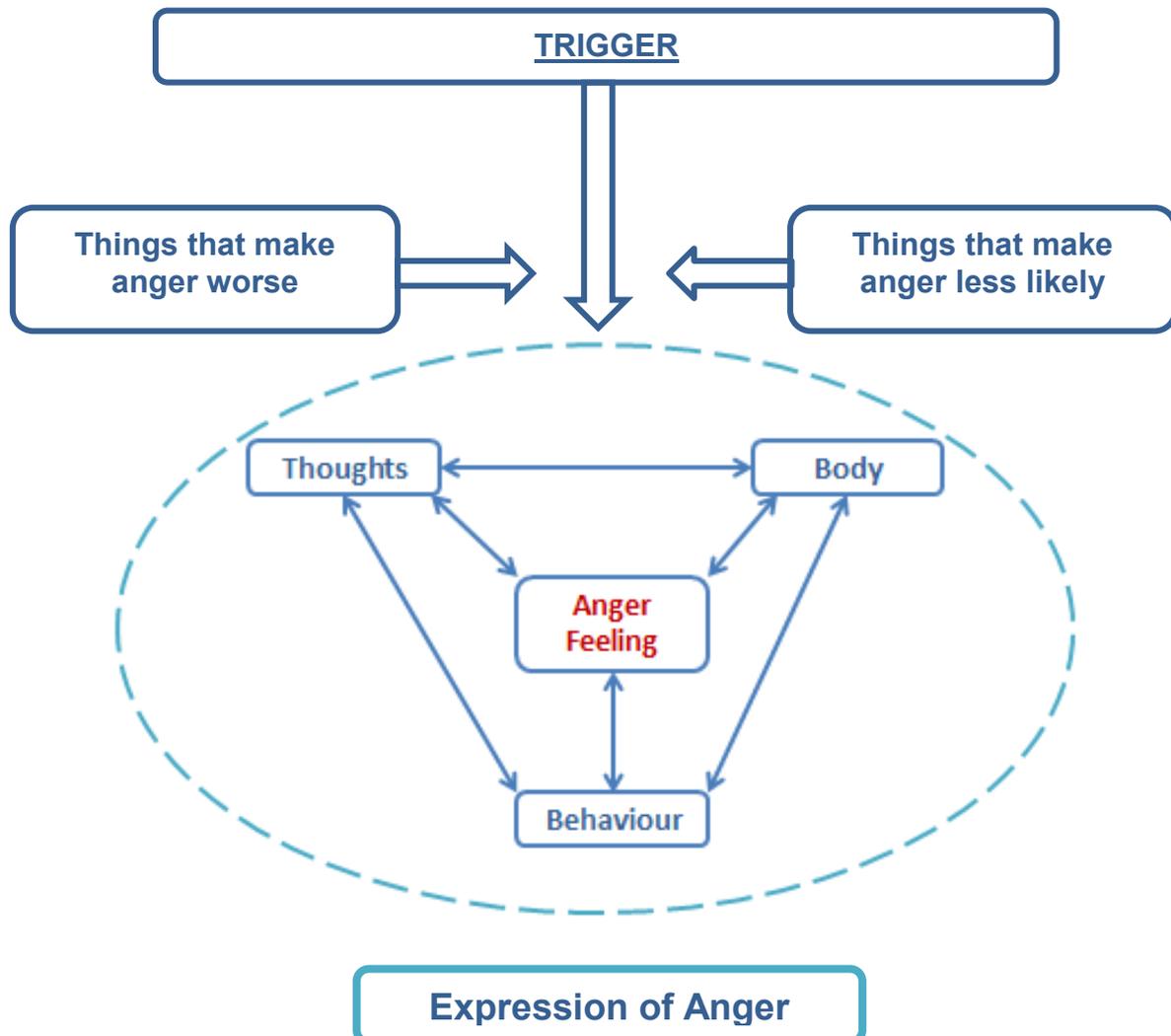
What can stop us reacting to anger?

Even when there are triggers for anger we do not always get angry. There are some things that make it less likely that we will get angry or act on anger. We will look at this in more detail in a later class. Some of these things are:

- Not wanting the bad things that come with anger
- Taking time out
- Controlled breathing
- “cool” thoughts
- Support from friends and family

You may already be able to think about some times when you did not get angry. Can you begin to think how this was possible or why you did this?

Understanding anger (3)



So now, looking at our picture of anger, we have the angry feeling leading to angry thoughts, body and behaviour. We can see that there is an immediate trigger for anger. We can also now see that there are often more distant triggers that can make anger worse or more likely. Finally, there are some things that can make us less likely to get angry.

The Tipping Point: when is anger a problem?

Different people will have different views on when anger becomes a problem. A simple way of thinking about whether anger is a problem for you is to think about whether the costs outweigh the benefits. Another way to think about it is to notice whether others are saying that your anger is a problem. Sometimes people we care about, or authorities, even provide an ultimatum. For example you may have heard “sort out your anger or I’ll leave you”, or “you need to get control of your anger if you want access to your children”. Anger can also be a problem if it is not doing what we want it to do. For example, if you get angry in order that people listen to you, it is then a problem if people just walk away from you when you get angry. Finally, anger can be a problem if it is lasting too long, is too strong or leads to aggression.

Benefits of getting angry

As we have mentioned before, anger is a normal human emotion. It therefore follows that anger has some uses or benefits. There are certain times when anger can be helpful:

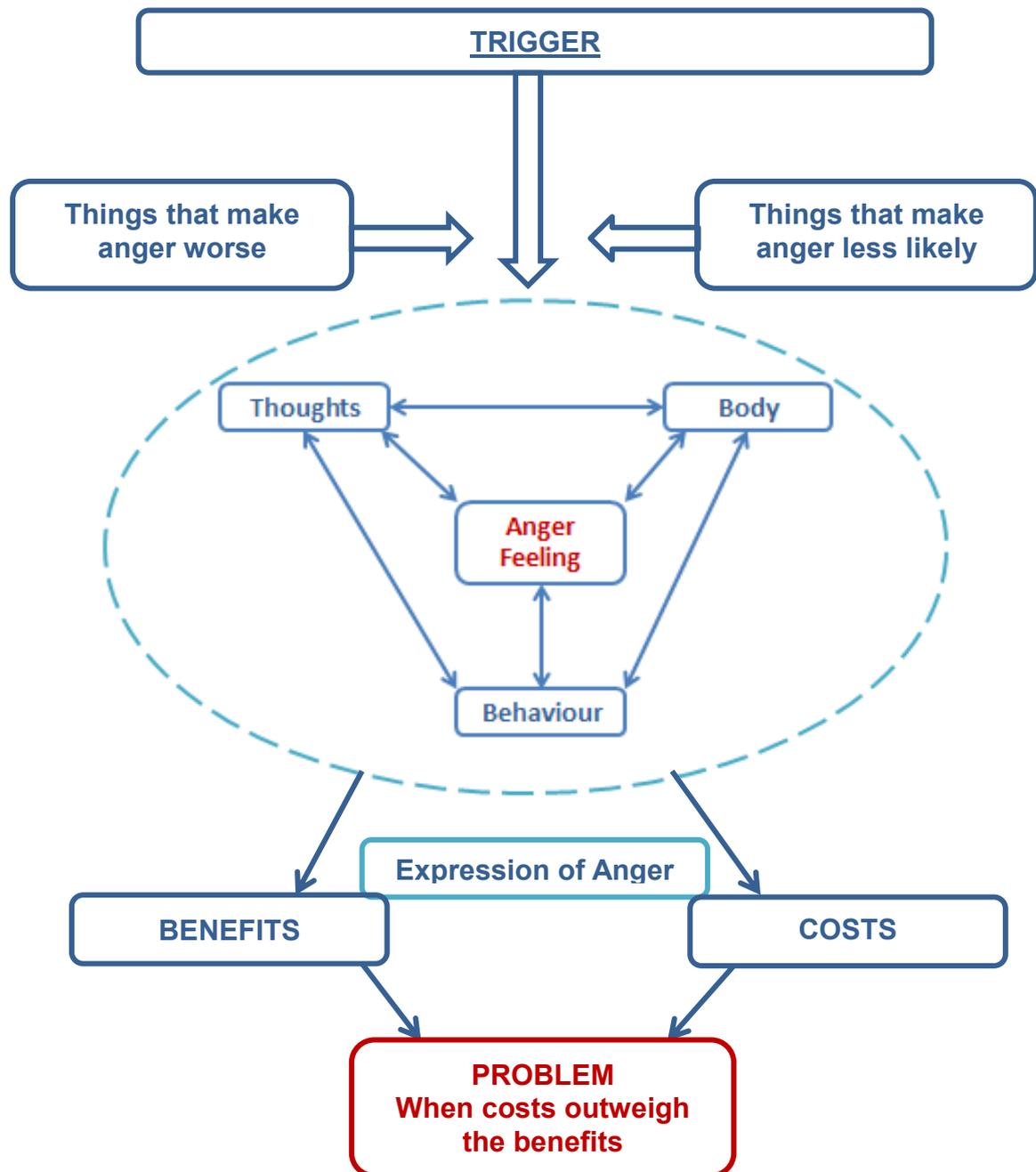
- Shows that something is wrong, *e.g. Noticing that someone has hurt us*
- Gets us going to do something, *e.g. When we need to complain*
- A way of expressing ourselves, *e.g. Telling someone that they have upset us*

Costs of getting angry

Showing our anger in certain ways can have downsides. Some of these are:

- Relationship problems: loss of friends or break-up of marriage, possibly as a result of aggression or violence
- Health problems: prolonged stress or arousal can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease etc.
- Problems with authorities: aggression and violence can lead to problems with police, probation, social services, health visitors, health services etc.
- Doesn't get us what we want: often aggression and violence do not even get us what we originally set out to get (e.g being listened to) or take away the hurt

Understanding Anger (4)



Finally, we have a complete picture. This begins with the expression of anger; feeling, thoughts, body and behaviour. Anger comes from an immediate trigger but there are things that make anger more or less likely to be expressed. And now we have benefits and costs of anger. The problem can come if costs outweigh the benefits.

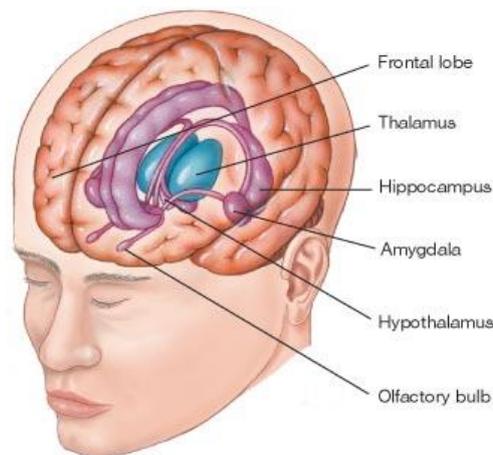
Emotional Brain v. Thinking Brain

This next section gives a brief explanation about how different parts of the brain acts when we are angry. Understanding how our brain works will explain why we need to use certain anger management strategies at certain times.

The Emotional Brain

When we say 'I didn't think, I just reacted', it is a result of our emotional brain responding to a threat. Our emotional brain is known as the Limbic System, which is responsible for emotion and emotional behaviour.

There is a group of structures in the Limbic System including the hypothalamus, amygdala, olfactory bulbs, and hippocampus.



- It plays an important part in emotions & physiological (bodily) responses
- One of its main concerns is self-preservation. It's always alert, constantly asking a very important question: "***Is it safe?***"
- It gets information before Thinking Brain and if there is danger, then it overrules the Thinking Brain by flooding it with hormones → ***Flight or Flight response***
- It has a memory that records all important threatening things that have happened to us.
- It judges situations in broad terms: good/bad, safe/dangerous based on previous memories that have involved threat.

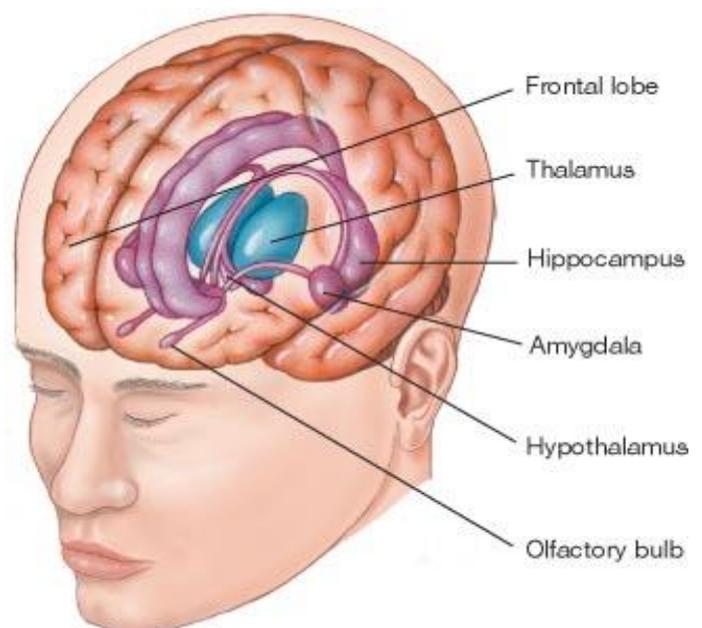
Thinking Brain

The Thinking Brain is located in the Frontal Lobes. The Frontal Lobes are responsible for:

- ◆ Feeling conscious, awake and alert.
- ◆ Making decisions, thinking, observations, planning, anticipates, responds, organises and creates new ideas.
- ◆ Logical thinking & questioning. They try to find a cause for every effect and an affect for every cause.
- ◆ They can control emotional brain if trained (Good News)
- ◆ But the thinking brain has its own prejudices that can trigger emotional brain response (Bad News)

Six stages of the emotional brain response

1. Information from our senses is sent to thalamus
2. Information sent to amygdala
3. Information is also sent to frontal lobes
4. Amygdala does quick threat assessment
5. If threat is seen as serious, then amygdala blocks by flooding it with chemicals thinking response
6. Emotional response: ANGER
 - Helpful for survival
 - No real danger → HIJACKED BRAIN



Emergency Control

The following ideas will be discussed in more detail in the next two classes. However people often want to try strategies now.

When you become so angry that you either react or you can't think clearly because your emotional brain has taken control, then you need to follow the following strategies.

1. Take **SToC** and **Act**

(SToC = STOP, THINK of CONSEQUENCES)

- How?
 - Calm the Emotional Brain
 - When you are calm you will be able to problem solve, decide on best solution (think of consequences) & act

2. Know yourself

- ◆ What triggers your anger?
- ◆ What signs tell you that you're on the brink of uncontrolled anger?
- ◆ What changes in you and around your health could lead to anger?
- ◆ What works to calm you down?

3. Calm the Emotional Brain

- Hormones released when angry take from 10 minutes to one week to leave your body.
- Why up to a week? Either the threat remains or you keep thinking about the wrong that's happened to you. The Emotional Brain thinks that the threat is real when you dwell on hurt.

Quick strategies to calm Emotional Brain:

- a. Time-out – walk away
- b. Relax breathing/muscles
- c. Distract yourself, count to ten
- d. Keep quiet/bite your tongue
- e. Avoid anger-provoking situations and pick times/places when you feel more able to cope
- f. Self-talk: “I need time to think this through”; talk yourself calm, what would your calmest friend say?

4. Make good use of the Thinking Brain

- When you are calm ask yourself:
 - What's my problem?
 - What do I want (is it that important)?
 - What are my options & the consequences?
 - What is my plan to carry out best option?
- Later, think what you achieved & what do you need to work on

Brief Tips

1. Always try to say I made MYSELF angry.
2. Know what to overlook.
3. Recognise that people aren't against you, they are merely for themselves.
4. Lower your voice.
5. Recognise the hurt or fear that precedes anger.
6. Recognise that another person's abusive behaviour says more about them and their emotional pain than it says about you.
7. Ask yourself if your feelings of anger are helping your problem solving skills.
8. Avoid scorekeeping.
9. Learn not to hit the sore spots.
10. Ask yourself how important the issue will be in a week.
11. Avoid mind reading.
12. Learn to agree to disagree.
13. Work on anger coping self-statements
14. Respond instead of react

What is change?

When it comes to changing behaviour, think about what you did in the past when you changed something. What did you do and what did you think? Change is about doing something different or becoming something different. What is it that you want to do differently? What kind of person will you become?

Summary

Anger can be understood and we have made up a picture of anger to break it into manageable bits. We can see that anger has benefits and costs. There are some things that make anger more likely and some things that make anger less likely. You may wish to consider avoiding becoming a victim of your own anger.

To change can be a challenge. However keeping things as they are and struggling to control your anger is also a challenge. If you can recognise that change is important and you can feel optimistic, then you increase your chances of succeeding. Increasing your knowledge about how anger affects you, learning new ways to cope and having a go are the steps to managing your anger more effectively.

Thinking for next week

This week you have been given a lot of information about anger and change. To get the most of this information it would help you to do some thinking before the next class. You might like to begin by re-reading this workbook and thinking again about the exercises we covered this week. Thinking about what you want to change and why will help you when you come to the rest of the course. The following questions may help you to think about your own personal goals.

1. What change would you like to make?

.....
.....

2. Why is it important to you to make this change?

.....
.....

3. What steps can you see that will help you make this change?

.....
.....

4. Complete anger journal

Date: _____ Time: _____

Where were you?

What happened? (Who did what? Who said what?)

What were you thinking?

How did you feel physically?

What were you feeling?

Angry Scared Guilty Worried Disappointed Sad Jealous
Hurt Embarrassed

Other -

What happened next?

How intense were your feelings:

0 -----5-----10
None Quite a bit The most I've ever felt

How did you handle yourself?

1 2 3 4 5
Poorly Not so well Okay Good Great

Use this space to think about how well you have handled the situation or how you could have handled the situation differently.