

Parent/Carer Anger Toolkit

A resource for parents & carers to help support their child or young person to understand and manage anger.

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About this toolkit

Children can feel angry about different things at different ages. Many of the behaviours that they will show are a normal part of growing up, however sometimes anger and aggression can get in the way of normal everyday life, this is when they may need some help.

When young children feel angry, they cannot always understand or express why they are feeling that way. You may notice that they:

- ◆ become irritable, and disruptive
- ◆ have difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Struggle with relationships
- ◆ Disruption of family life
- ◆ Frequent frustration
- ◆ Aggression used as a tool.

There are many factors that can contribute to a child being angry and hostile. For instance, unresolved feelings, such as grief related to a divorce or loss of a loved one can be the root of the problem. A history of trauma or experiencing bullying may lead to deep-seated anger too.

Mental health issues also may be linked to angry outbursts. Children with depression, anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder struggle to regulate their emotions.

If your child is experiencing or displaying signs of anger, there are things that parents and carers can do to help. STEP have put together this toolkit to help you understand anger and how you can support your child to manage their anger and aggression. At the back of this toolkit there will be some resources for you to refer to and work through with your child.

Anger

What is Anger?

Anger is a word used to describe feeling angry, mad, furious, annoyed or frustrated and is a normal and healthy emotion. However, it can be a problem if you find it difficult to keep anger under control. Anger can really get in the way of our thinking, feelings, behaviours and relationships. It is important to get angry sometimes, but it is important to release the anger in the right way.

While having some angry feelings is normal at all ages, some children and young people struggle more than others to control these feelings and to sort the problems out. Angry feelings and aggressive behaviour can be very hard to deal with and can have a big effect on family life, but there are ways you can talk to your child about how they're feeling and work out coping strategies together.

Everyone has angry feelings, and they are a normal reaction when things go wrong, life feels unfair, we get overwhelmed, or people upset and hurt us. Anger can sometimes act as a positive force for change or it can be negative and destructive.

Myth: Anger is a negative emotion.

It's not bad to feel angry. Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. In fact, a lot of really good things stem from anger, and angry feelings can lead to positive change.

Understanding Anger

Anger is normal-

Anger is a normal and useful emotion. It can tell children when things are not fair or right. But anger can become a problem if a child's angry behaviour becomes out of control or aggressive.

Anger can be helpful -

Anger is a useful tool for young people to realise when things are not right and allow them to realise they need to talk about their feelings and understand the underlying cause for their anger.

Anger can become a problem -

Anger can become a problem if a child displays aggressive behaviours and their anger disrupts themselves, others and family life.

Anger at different ages and stages

Toddlers and young children typically have tantrums when they don't get their own way or feel frustrated. If they can't tell us in words, they use their behaviour.

Starting school can be hard, tiring and overwhelming for a small child. Trying to learn and stay good all day means that parents are understandably the first 'safe place' where their child can let it all out, and so they often bear the brunt of pent-up feelings and exhaustion after school.

The transition from primary to secondary school can make children feel anxious and unsettled, but express these feelings as anger.

Teenagers can be very defiant and refuse to keep to their parents' rules as they try and push the boundaries to increase their independence. Changes in the brain and hormones mean that many teenagers have trouble controlling their behaviour, seeing other people's point of view and doing things if they can't see the point. Being out of control can feel quite frightening for teenagers as well as for parents.

When a person of any age is consumed by anger, and it is having a persistently negative impact on their life and the lives of those around them, it is a problem.

How children communicate anger

Anger as communication How children and young people channel their feelings and communicate anger can vary greatly. They can show their anger by shouting, refusing to do what they are told, saying horrible things and trying to upset others. They can break or smash things, and hit or hurt their parents and other family and friends.

A positive!

If anger arises in one setting but not another, it is likely that the cause is connected to one setting. The young person is clearly capable of managing their anger elsewhere and can therefore learn more coping strategies for trigger situations.

Be positive

Positive feedback is important. Praise your child's efforts and your own efforts, no matter how small.

This will build your child's confidence in their ability to manage their anger. It will also help them feel that you're both learning together.

Help your child spot the signs of anger

Being able to spot the signs of anger early can help your child make more positive decisions about how to handle it.

Talk about what your child feels when they start to get angry. For example, they may notice that:

- their heart beats faster
- their muscles tense
- they clench their teeth
- they make a fist
- their stomach churns

How should I respond when my child gets angry?

Here are five which can really help:

1. Separate your child's feelings from their negative behaviours; feelings are valid, bad behaviour is not. It is important to try and make your child understand that you are not rejecting them and their feelings, but that you do not accept their behaviour. When children and young people act irrationally, they don't always understand your reasoning, and this can be when difficult situations escalate and get out of hand. Keep explanations calm and simple to avoid misunderstandings.
2. Don't mirror the anger. Keep a calm manner, neutral voice and open body language (no folded arms).
3. Limit your questioning. Acknowledge they are feeling angry. Say you would like to talk through how they are feeling and what they are communicating once they've calmed down.
4. Hold boundaries and be consistent in how you set consequences. They might not like it, but this helps a child feel contained; it helps them in their development and their understanding of what is acceptable behaviour and what is and isn't okay.
5. Plan ahead. Work out what to do if your child's anger outbursts increase.

What can I do to help my child?

While having some angry feelings is normal at all ages, some children and young people struggle more than others to control these feelings and to sort the problems out. Angry feelings and aggressive behaviour can be very hard to deal with and can have a big effect on family life, but there are ways you can talk to your child about how they're feeling and work out coping strategies together.

These are things which can really make a difference:

1. If your child doesn't know why they are feeling angry, try and work out together what might be causing their feelings. If they aren't ready to talk, try saying you are there to listen whenever they are ready.
2. Say that you have noticed they don't seem happy and ask if anything is worrying them or stressing them out.
3. Don't change your usual rules. When teens are angry they can also be frightened about how out of control they feel; this is the very time they need family stability, so be consistent.
4. Give yourself and your child some time to allow things to resolve. Sometimes children just need parents to notice and acknowledge that things are hard for them.
5. Help them to recognise patterns of when and how they get angry.
6. Help them to work out ways of channelling their anger differently, for example, you could try encouraging them to:
 - ♦ try some simple controlled breathing techniques
 - ♦ do some physical activity/ join a sports team
 - ♦ plan some 'time out' doing something they enjoy
 - ♦ get creative to communicate their thoughts in a different way e.g. drawing, writing, texting

And remember to look after yourself and keep yourself strong. Parenting can be tough, so do talk to friends or family for support, and try to find a bit of time out for yourself.

Dealing with aggression and violence

When a child or young person is very angry, they can get verbally or physically aggressive and even violent. It can be hard to help them, especially when they say there is nothing wrong and that everyone else has the problem.

If safe to do so for you and the child remove yourself from the room.

If not safe to do so, and you feel that you or anyone else are at immediate risk of harm, warn the child that if the aggression does not stop you will contact the police and follow through if they do not stop.

Calling the police to intervene in a situation with your child is an incredibly difficult thing for any parent to have to do. If your safety, or the safety of other family members, is in question, this may be the only course of action. The police can be incredibly supportive in responding to mental health issues, and can section someone under the Mental Health Act, if appropriate.



Resource Section

In this section you will find:

Useful Worksheets:

Recognising anger signs

Anger triggers

Anger discussions

Ways to respond

Coping/calm down techniques

Calm down colouring

Anger Discussion Questions

- 1** Although it might sometimes feel like your anger “explodes” and comes out of nowhere, this is almost never the case. Anger builds slowly, and if you aren’t paying attention, it can happen entirely outside of your awareness. Can you think of a time when your anger caught you by surprise? In retrospect, were there any warning signs you could’ve picked up on?

- 2** Some people describe anger as a “secondary emotion”. This means that anger is a response to a *primary* emotion, such as hurt, fear, or sadness. For example, someone might feel hurt, and lash out with anger in response. Do you think anger is a secondary emotion? Why or why not?

- 3** Many of us pick up life-long habits related to anger when we’re children, based off of the examples set by our parents. Do you notice any similarities between how you and your family members deal with anger? What are your family’s strengths and weaknesses in dealing with anger?

- 4** Everyone experiences anger—it’s a completely normal emotion, and it’s healthy within limits. But as we know, anger can become a problem when it gets out of control. When is anger healthy, and when does it become unhealthy or harmful?

- 5** People can express their anger through words, actions, art, or any number of other ways. Do you express your anger in any healthy ways, and if so, what are they? What do you think might happen if you *never* expressed your anger?

- 6** How you think about a situation can influence how you feel about it. For example, if you think that someone “has it out for you”, you will probably see all of their actions in a negative light. Can you think of a time when your thoughts affected your anger? In what ways could changing how you think help you control how you feel?

- 7** What would it look like if someone was really good at managing their anger? Not just hiding their anger or ignoring it, but managing it in a genuinely healthy way. Do you know anyone who manages their anger well?

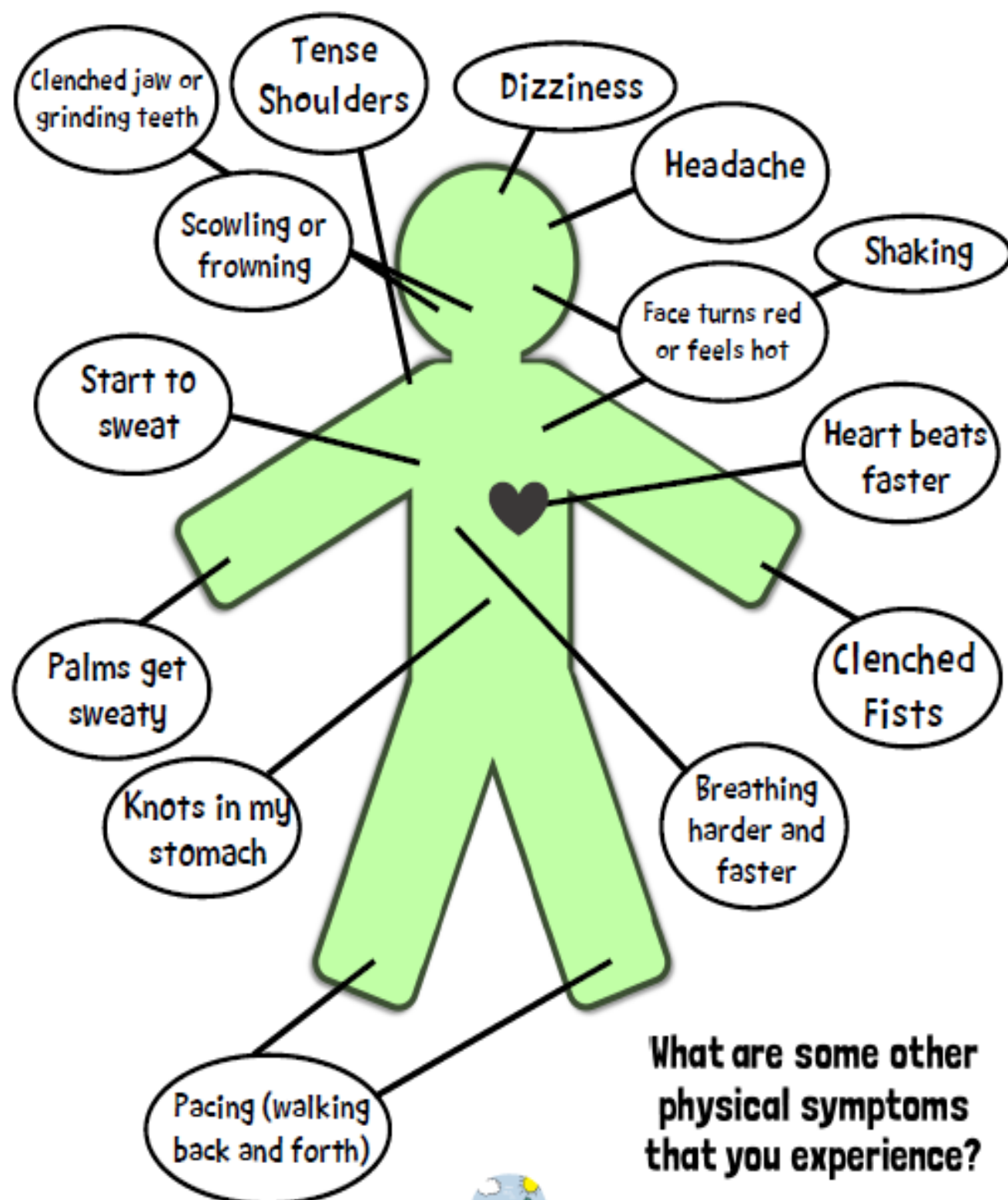
ANGER SCALE

HOW IT LOOKS & FEELS

SCALE	I LOOK...	I FEEL...
5		I'm really mad! I scream. I hurt myself or others. I spit. I throw things.
4		I'm angry. I shout. I say things that aren't nice.
3		Something bothers me. I frown. I don't want to smile.
2		I'm feeling ok. Not great but all is still good.
1		I feel great! I smile, I laugh and I'm relaxed.

ANGER AND MY BODY

Color in the reactions that happen to your body when you start getting angry.



What are some other physical symptoms that you experience?



Anger Warning Signs

Sometimes anger can affect what you say or do before you even recognize the feeling. This is especially true if you feel angry all the time. You may become so used to the feeling of anger that you don't notice it, sort of like how you can hear the sound of an air condition or the humming of a refrigerator but block it from your mind. Even if you aren't thinking about your feelings, they influence how you behave. The first step to managing anger is learning to recognize your personal warning signs that tell you how you feel.

How do you react when you feel angry? Some of these warning signs might start when you are only a little irritated, and others might start when you are very angry. *Circle the warning signs that apply to you.*

Mind goes blank	Insult the other person	Face turns red
Body or hands shake	Start sweating	Throw things
Heavy or fast breathing	Stare at the other person	Scowl or make an angry face
Scream, raise voice, or yell	Clench fists	Feel sick to the stomach
Punch walls	Feel hot	Become aggressive
Become argumentative	Go quiet and "shut down"	Crying
Pace around the room	Headaches	Can't stop thinking about the problem



MY ANGER TRIGGERS



0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CALM		FRUSTRATED			ANGRY			FURIOUS		

Read each of the items and rank from 1–10 how angry each trigger makes you!

HOME

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| _____ My siblings touch my things | _____ My parents yell at me |
| _____ I get in trouble for something I didn't do | _____ I get grounded |
| _____ I get treated unfairly | _____ I lose at a game or activity |
| _____ I get ignored | _____ My parents argue |
| _____ Someone calls me a name | _____ Someone breaks a promise |
| _____ I get told "no" | _____ I have to stop playing |

SCHOOL

- | | |
|--|---|
| _____ I get a bad grade on a test or project | _____ The teacher doesn't call on me |
| _____ Someone steals my things | _____ Someone touches my stuff |
| _____ I get in trouble for something I didn't do | _____ I have too much work to do |
| _____ I lose during a game or activity | _____ Someone tells me what to do |
| _____ Someone calls me a name I don't like | _____ I don't understand the assignment |
| _____ The work is too hard for me | _____ Someone lies to me |
| _____ People talk about me behind my back | _____ I get treated unfairly |

ON A TEAM OR IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| _____ I get criticized for my performance | _____ Someone talks trash about me |
| _____ My friends don't include me | _____ I lose a game or activity |
| _____ I don't play well in a game | _____ I'm talked about behind my back |
| _____ Someone talks trash about my family | _____ No one tells me "good job" |

What are some other anger triggers that you can think of?



WHEN I FEEL ANGRY



I THINK... (What are some thoughts that go through your head whenever you feel angry?)

I SAY... (What are some things you say to others whenever you feel angry?)

I DO... (What are some behaviors you display whenever you feel angry?)

What are some things you can think, say, or do instead?

ANGER LADDER CHART

The different levels of anger

	Feeling	How it feels
	Furious	Mind: My mind is completely angry. I need to express it! I may say or do something that can hurt myself or others. Body: My entire body feels hot. I may yell, scream, cry or use my body to express my anger.
	Angry	Mind: I feel very uncomfortable, like it is painful. It is hard to think clearly. I want to express how I feel. Body: My heart is beating fast. My jaw is tense and my fist are clenched.
	Frustrated	Mind: I am not getting what I want. I feel uncomfortable. If I am trying to do something, I feel like giving up. Body: My face and body is getting hot. My body shows I am frustrated.
	Upset	Mind: I am really not happy about something. I may also feel disappointed and sad. Body: My face and tone shows I am upset. My body is no longer calm.
	Annoyed	Mind: Something is bothering me. I can become more angry if it doesn't stop. Body: My face feels warm, my tone has changed.
	Calm	I feel calm and relaxed.

Provided by PlayAttune.com

I DO... (What are some behaviors you display whenever

BEHIND
THIS



MIGHT
BE



Anger balloon

Write down everything that makes you feel angry inside the red balloon. Once you have done this, get yourself a balloon, for each thing that you wrote down, blow into the balloon and say in turn each thing that makes you angry. Once you have said all that you have written down, let the balloon go. This will demonstrate how when we are full of anger and we don't deal with it, we can explode or become destructive. Once you have done this, repeat the process to blow up the balloon but then let a little bit of air out at a time. This will reflect how we can better manage our anger by using some of the different techniques and we are much more calm if we do so.



ANGER TRIGGERS

An anger trigger is a thing or situation that makes you feel angry. Write down your triggers and use the colors yellow, orange, or red to show how angry each of those one makes you!

YELLOW: Frustrated/Annoyed

ORANGE: Angry

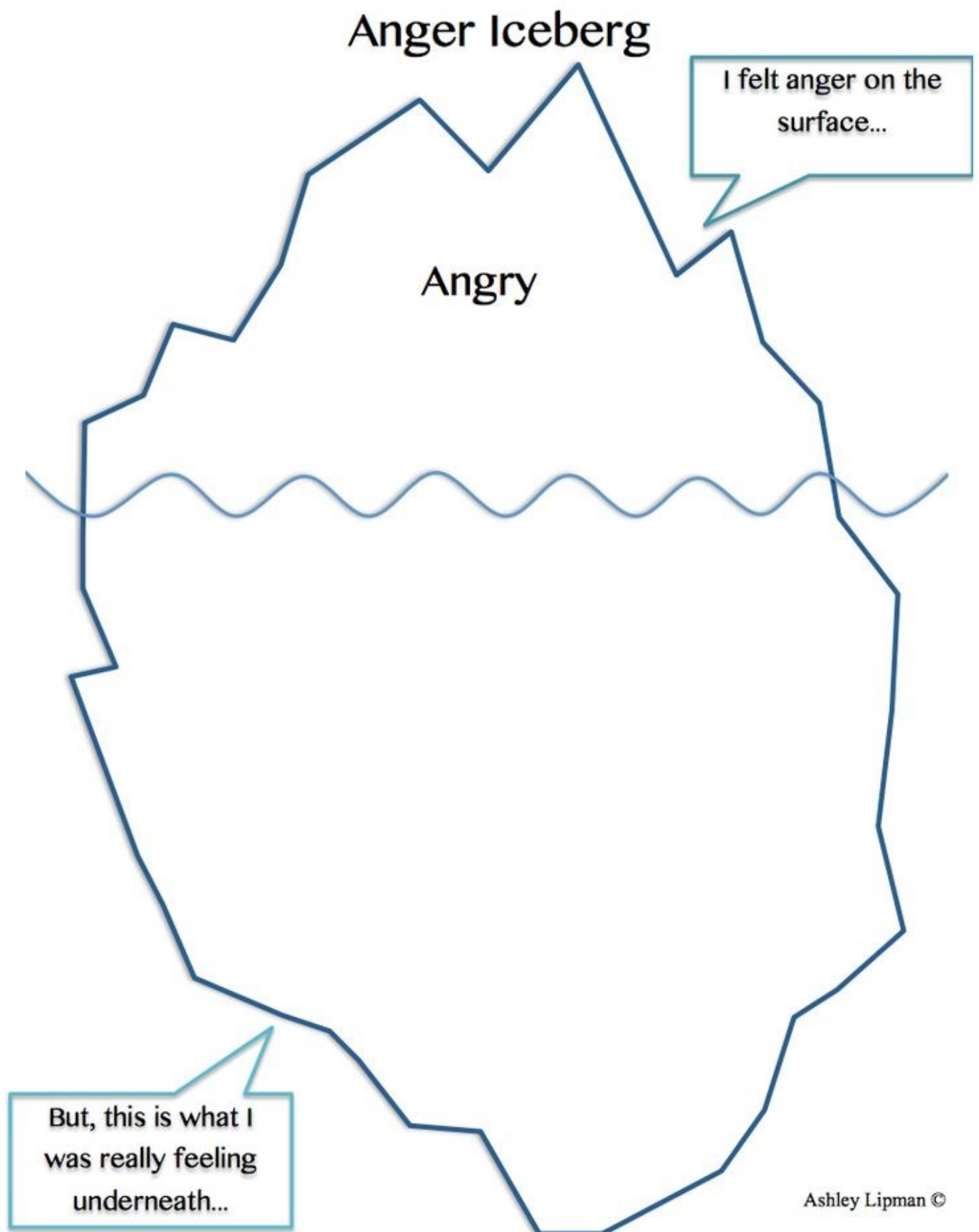
RED: Furious/Enraged

ANGER TRIGGERS
What are some things that
make you feel angry?

The worksheet contains ten empty ovals for writing triggers. Each oval is paired with a cartoon face of a boy with curly hair. The faces are colored yellow, orange, or red to represent different levels of anger. The faces are arranged in two rows of five, with the central red box between them.



Try to think about the anger that you show to others and write that in the tip of the ice burg. Then think about all the feelings underneath that others cant see. This may help you get a better understanding of your own anger.



Anger Iceberg

Sometimes when we are angry, there are other emotions under the surface

Icebergs are giant floating pieces of ice found in the coldest parts of the ocean. What you can see from above is just a tiny part. Most of the iceberg is hidden under the surface.

Angry

Anger, Straight Ahead!

Watch Out!

Let's go deeper!

Embarrassed Annoyed
Offended Attacked Rejected
Pressured Shame Scared
Overwhelmed Guilt Alone
Grumpy Unsure Grief Distrustful
Angry Nervous Insecure Disappointed
Hurt Trapped Disrespected Helpless
Jealous Tricked Sad Frustrated
Regret Uncomfortable Worried Name another feeling



Simple Tips

for Helping Your



Angry Child

- 1 Be sympathetic.** What seems small might be hugely important for your child.
- 2 Give space, but don't isolate.** Try a time-in or use a calm down corner.
- 3 Remind them that anger is OK.** It's a normal emotion, one that we all feel.
- 4 Don't overreact.** . Model a calm voice and demeanor (easier said than done).
- 5 Make eye contact.** Children need to feel heard, especially when upset.

CALM DOWN **ANGER** WITH YOGA



I AM AN ELEPHANT

I CAN BEND OVER AND
RELEASE MY ANGER.



I AM A JACKEL

I CAN EXHALE AND LET GO
OF MY FRUSTRATIONS.



I AM A CROCODILE

I CAN FEEL MY BODY
CALMING DOWN.



I AM A HIPPO

I AM "OKAY". I AM
SURROUNDED WITH LOVE.



I AM A LION

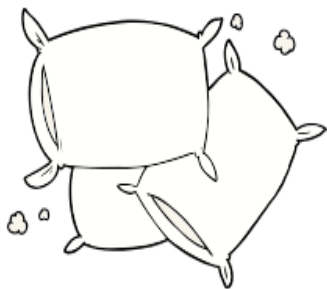
I AM SAFE. I CAN FEEL MY
WHOLE BODY RELAXED.



Let's Calm Down

What Can I Do to Calm Down?

Punch a pillow



Take Deep Breaths



Take a Timeout



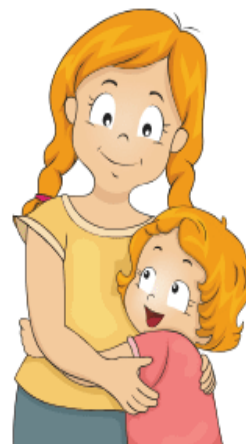
Count to 5



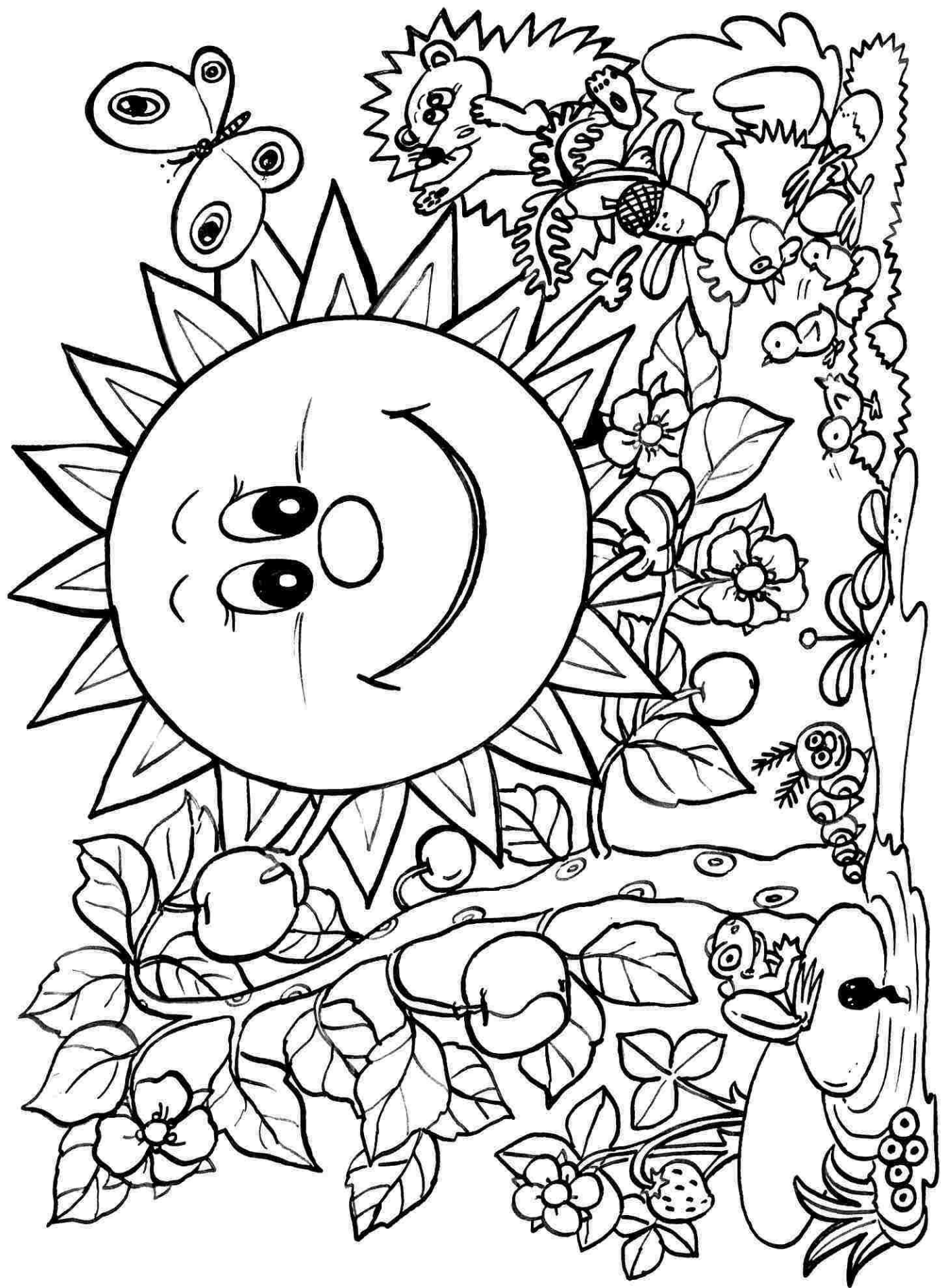
Stomp 3 Times



Hug Someone







Where can I get help?

Relate

- Advice about dealing with teenagers' anger and aggressive behaviour

Free and confidential talking support with Live Chat via website.

- Other counselling available - telephone, messaging, webcam -

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

- Offers support to young men in the UK who are feeling down or in a crisis.
- Helpline: 0800 58 58 58 (Daily 17:00- 0:00)

Webchat

Family Lives

- Online advice and information on anger, teens and boundaries,
- discipline, lying and stealing and violence.

Gangs and young people (NSPCC)

- Advice for parents worried about their children's involvement in gangs
- 24 hours freephone helpline: 0808 800 5000

Ditch the Label

70 alternative ways to channel your anger!

And 10 tips for parents about talking to teenage boys