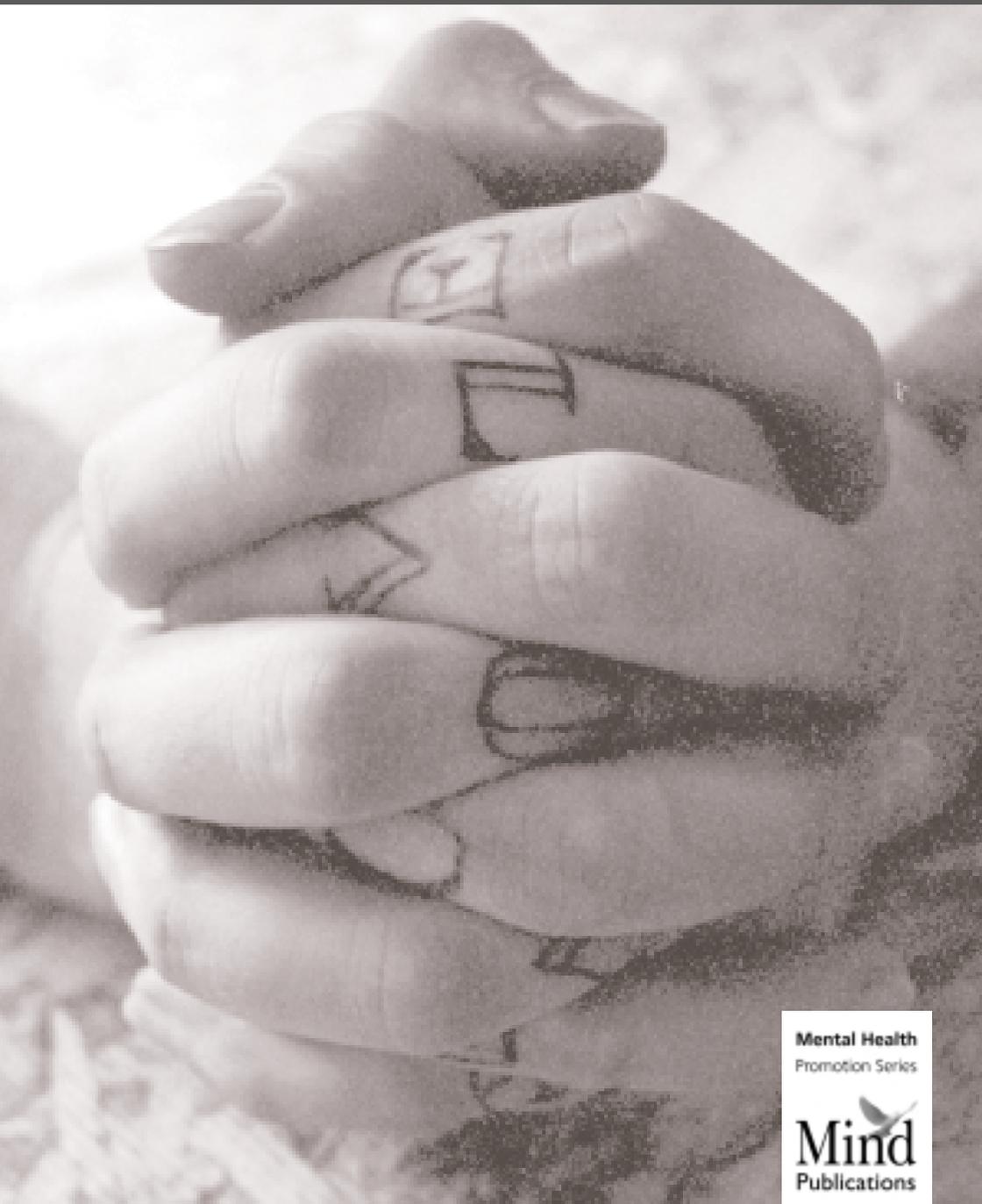


HOW TO ... restrain your violent impulses



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HOW TO ... restrain your violent impulses

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“I know I've got a problem with being violent. I feel so bad afterwards. It's as if it didn't really happen. She was nagging me the minute I came in, and I just wanted to relax after work. She didn't know when to stop so I started yelling that she should shut up. Next minute I had hit her and she was crying. I didn't even think I'd hurt her. I even thought she deserved it!”

This booklet looks at why men and women may behave violently. It explains how people can contain and express their anger safely, and how to get help. It also offers advice to family and friends who may be targets of violence.



What's the difference between anger and rage?

Rage is anger that has rapidly got out of your control. This can change so fast – in a matter of seconds – that you explode before you know what's happening to you. Inside you, there's an immense surge of energy as adrenalin rushes through. You feel hot, your breathing shortens, your jaws and fists clench. All you want to do is react, and let these pent-up sensations out.

When in this state, the thinking part of the brain is actually by-passed, which is why people say and do things they later regret. They fail to recognise that they may end up hurting other people, and even harming themselves in the process. They can't stop themselves and their violent impulses. This can be dangerous and frightening for all concerned.

Afterwards people often feel very guilty and try to make light of whatever happened, even denying any violence took place. They are highly uncomfortable about taking responsibility for the choice they made when they started acting violently.

Acting out anger, rage and violence is extremely damaging to property, people and relationships. Rage can cause you to lose everything – family, home, job, and even freedom. It robs you of time and energy that could have been put to more life-affirming use. If losing your temper is becoming a regular event, it's worth taking the problem seriously.

What causes rage and violence?

Anger is progressive and cumulative. It can build up over time like a pressure cooker waiting to explode if you don't have a release valve. What may have started as feelings of hurt or ongoing frustration slowly turn into anger. If this is not controlled and expressed in a safe way, it then controls you and may cause you to act out violently in rage.



Feeling hurt, being threatened or having a sense of grievance or injustice can all create angry feelings. The pressure-cooker effect is much more likely if those feelings are long-standing – if someone is in a situation where they constantly feel frustrated and powerless, or stereotyped all the time.

Stress plays an important part in creating violence. The more stressed you are, the more likely you are to lose your temper and turn to rage and violent behaviour. If you come back from a good holiday feeling relaxed, you're likely to be far more tolerant of situations and people. But after a few days back at work and being held up in traffic, you will probably begin to feel the frustration and annoyance building up again. Before you know it, you are in a rage again and the cycle starts itself up. (For more information about stress, see *Further reading* on p. 14.) Other factors also contribute. There is clear evidence that drinking too much alcohol increases violent behaviour.

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How can I learn to keep my anger under control?

Understanding the way you express anger will give you a handle on controlling your rage. There are four main styles that people adopt: intimidating, interrogating, passive-aggressive and distancing.

Intimidating: this is an openly aggressive expression of anger, aimed directly at someone in order to dominate and control the situation. It's the most confrontational and threatening style, and will often move into rage, and later violence, as the conflict worsens.

Interrogating: this is confrontational. The person uses aggressive questions – 'What do you think you're doing?', 'Who do you think you are?' – to unnerve the other person with their anger.

Passive-aggressive: this sidesteps a direct expression of anger. It uses weapons such as sarcasm, and tries to make the other person feel guilty with comments like, 'I've tried my hardest for you!', 'Whatever I do is no good!' (the 'poor me' approach).

Distancing: this takes two forms. The person may walk out or otherwise distance themselves from any situation they don't like, and anything they don't want to hear. Or, they may keep their anger in and declare, 'Nothing's the matter with me. I'm fine!'

We may practice all of these styles, depending on the situation, who we are with and where the power lies. The danger is that those who keep in their anger or bottle it up will one day be triggered into an explosion of rage and violence because they can take no more. The other danger is that those who express it outwardly and lose control will hurt someone verbally or physically. Anger management courses aim for the controlled, safe expression of anger, before rage and violence occurs.

Why are some people more likely to get into a rage?

Present anger and regressive anger

It's important to sort out where your anger is coming from. Angry feelings may be triggered by something happening to you here and now ('present tense' anger). Or they may be provoked because of what happened to you in the past ('regressive anger'). For example, if someone bumps into you and apologises, you may feel briefly angry, but accept that it was an accident and move on. This is 'present tense' anger – you've become angry about something, could express your anger, which then cleared (although, if you're stressed, this could be more explosive).

However, if the same event results in you feeling enraged and on the verge of violence, it could be because of a deep well of anger that you've been carrying around with you for a long time – probably since childhood. This is regressive anger. A family history of abuse (physical, mental or sexual), of violence, neglect and harsh discipline in the home may be the root cause of violence in adult life. Later hurts or injuries – things that friends, or teachers said that made you angry – may add to the burden, and you may still be carrying them around with you. When something happens to trigger those feelings, you may become extremely angry and explode. Your response is likely to be out of all proportion, and you are likely to find it hard to let things be. You may find it impossible to stop fighting, raging and arguing. You can't forgive and forget. An angry blow-up may hang over you for days or even weeks.

If you hold on to resentment, it adds fuel to the flames and keeps your anger burning. When a confrontation between two people has not been resolved, a lingering feeling of frustration may remain. One or other of them may then get emotional release by using an unrelated, new situation to fall into a rage and clear pent up frustration and anger.



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Habitual violence

Some people habitually resort to violence because they have developed a behaviour pattern of reacting instantly to an event without pausing to listen or to try and understand what is going on. There is little thought or reflection involved. Often the person has regressed to being a child having a temper tantrum. Sometimes people learn that by using violence they can control other people. They may be in the habit of using their rage to scare people.



How can I learn to stop before I get out of control?

It's important to recognise your 'triggers' – what it is that usually makes you feel angry. If you think about it, there is usually a lead up to feeling angry, then something happens to trigger the angry feelings. You may then instantly move into a state of rage and from there into being violent.

Anger management is about thinking what is going on and what you can do about it. For example, you might become angry if you are being blamed for something and take it personally. First, you may feel confused, then annoyed, and then hurt. For you, the next stage to feeling hurt may be to feel anger, and then resentment, rage and perhaps violence followed by guilt and shame. Plot your own rage pathway by thinking about which words might apply to you. Other words might be: frustration, disappointment, impatience, bitterness and hatred.

When you can identify the point just before you feel angry, it will help you to know where you are headed and what might happen if you don't take control. In the example, feeling hurt is the point before getting angry. When you can recognise that you feel hurt, you can bring in some of the rules of anger management to take control before things get out of hand!

What are the rules of anger management?

The first objective is to try to nip any potential conflict in the bud with the help of 'clean' communication. Expressing yourself cleanly is important in order to clear the anger out of your system without anyone getting hurt in the process and without repressing it or bottling it up. Try using words like 'I feel angry with you because...'. If you communicate exactly how you feel (in a non-threatening way), the other person will be able to listen to you.



Many arguments happen because we each think our opinions are correct and we have to prove it. Accepting that every one of us is entitled to our own opinion reduces the potential for a major argument. Work on listening carefully to what the other person has to say.

Learn to recognise what sets you off and how anger feels to you (see previous question). If something has happened to trigger angry feelings, take a deep breath and try and wait as long as possible before reacting (try counting numbers under your breath). The more time you can allow, the more you'll calm down and be able to look at the situation more clearly. This also gives you time to think about how you need to play things. If you need space to do this, then take 'time out' and leave the potential conflict.

There's a tendency to stop breathing properly (or listening) to what the other person has to say when you lose your temper. Deeper breathing has a calming effect on the body. Remember, there's a lot of adrenalin rushing around preparing your body to fight.

If you find yourself getting really heated, take yourself off and do something completely different. Afterwards, go back and try to understand and work out the cause of your anger.

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To control a flaming temper, keep reminding yourself:

- Nobody likes it when you rage; keep telling yourself to calm down.
- Delay your reaction.
- Think about the benefits of controlling your anger.
- Think about the consequences of losing control.
- Take deep breaths, imagine you are somewhere peaceful or use other actions to relax you.
- Consider the cause of your anger – often anger is due to a misunderstanding.
- Try to find positive or neutral explanations for whatever the other person did that provoked you.
- Tell yourself not to become violent.
- Don't argue and shout – this is not communicating and it's unlikely you will be listened to.
- Take time out rather than throwing more fuel on the fire.
- Make your goal to defeat the problem, not the other person.
- Find someone to talk things over with to help you calm down.
- Only you have the power to control your own violent behaviour – don't let anger control you.



What else can I do to stop myself getting so angry?

By adopting a more positive and healthy lifestyle and using support when you need to, you will be able to be more in control of your life. Learn to talk about your feelings. You can free yourself from a cycle of violence by learning to talk in this way. You could talk to a friend, or find a self-help group of people in a similar situation, or you may prefer to talk to a counsellor. (For more information about whom to approach, see *Useful organisations* on p. 12.)

Consider starting a physical activity. Exercise is good for the body and the mind – just going for a walk or a swim can make a big difference (see *The Mind Guide to Physical Activity*, details under *Further reading* on p. 14). Learning to become more relaxed is another positive move (see *The Mind Guide to Relaxation*).

Learn how to be assertive rather than aggressive or sarcastic (see *How to Assert Yourself* under *Further reading* on p. 14). Being assertive would mean you ask for something you want from someone instead of demanding it. This leads to positive results, in co-operation with other people.

Drowning your sorrows in drink (or drugs) won't sort out your problems – they'll only make it worse because they lower inhibitions. If drinking brings out your violent behaviour, it's worth making a concerted effort to reduce your alcohol intake.

What are the signs that violence may become a problem?

There may be a risk of future violence if there is: a history of violent or aggressive behaviour, a desire to be in a gang, if there's been threatening behaviour towards others on a regular basis, trouble controlling feelings like anger. Other signs include a withdrawal from friends and usual activities, feelings of rejection or loneliness, having been a victim of bullying, having problems with authority, feeling constantly disrespected or failing to acknowledge the rights of others.



These are the warning signs that violence may be imminent:

- loss of temper on a daily basis
- having plans to commit acts of violence or announcing threats to do so
- hurting animals or carrying weapons
- frequent physical fighting
- significant vandalism or property damage
- increase in the use of drugs or alcohol
- increase in risk-taking behaviour.

It's normal to feel anger and frustration, but anger and frustration do not justify violent behaviour. If you recognise the warning signs above, it's time to get help.

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Where can I get help?

It's important to remember that you do have a choice – to be violent or to restrain your violent impulses. Getting to grips with your anger will help you to be healthier and more energised, and can allow greater creativity and intimacy as relationships are strengthened by improved trust, communication and safety.

Domestic violence programme

This is useful if you have had a one-off violent outburst, or have been violent in the past, but now feel that you are able to take control and want to learn to express your anger appropriately. A typical programme helps explain all aspects of anger, rules of anger management, feelings and the clean expression of anger. There are one-day or weekend courses in anger management as well as longer programmes lasting up to eight weeks. This may involve some one-to-one counselling/coaching before or after the main group work. The groups are usually of around 10 people.

There are various different approaches available. Psycho-educational courses involve working from a workbook and learning all about anger and how to express it appropriately. This involves discussion, learning to express feelings cleanly and to be supported by those in the group. There is no therapy, as such, but the results are transformative and therapeutic. Sometimes homework may be given. Other courses may be 'experiential' – learning how to release anger safely, and working in pairs or groups to explore different areas and provide conclusions and feedback. Courses may involve other processes (including psychodrama, for example) to provide support for the participants with whatever arises.

Anger management programme

If you've recognised that you are regularly violent towards others, then a domestic violence programme can help you. Courses can last up to 18 months during which a plan of non-violence is often developed for you in the most supportive way.

A typical programme would require some one-to-one sessions prior to entering group work and perhaps for a period after. The focus is on behaviour modification, people taking personal responsibility for their actions and making a commitment to change and, in particular, to co-operate with the requirements of the programme. The group work is more therapy based and the necessary support is provided. Role play and discussions may be used.

Talking treatments

Counselling or psychotherapy can give you an opportunity to work through your feelings, to understand where they are coming from and to find a solution. Counselling tends to look at problems in the here and now, while psychotherapy will often look at the roots of current problems in your past. Cognitive behaviour therapy can offer practical techniques for tackling difficulties, often in a limited number of sessions. (See *Useful organisations* on p. 12 and *Further reading* on p. 14 for more information.)

What should family members do?

It can be hard to accept that there is violence and abuse in your life. Many victims are too scared to go for help and continue to put up with the situation for too long before seeking help. Often this is due to fear, a lack of self-esteem, or concern about losing their home. Do not live in fear. Seek out help as soon as possible. Talk to your GP or get in touch with one of the organisations listed overleaf who can provide support, and, in some cases, a safe haven.



It may be difficult sometimes to convince your partner that he or she needs to get help for their violence and to join a suitable programme. Domestic violence is a crime. The violent person has the problem and should recognise it.

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Useful organisations

British Association of Anger Management (BAAM)

91a Fortess Road, London NW1 5AG

tel. 020 7267 7264, e-mail: info@angermanage.co.uk

web: www.angermanage.co.uk

For men, women and children needing anger management

ChildLine

Freepost 1111, London N1 0BR

helpline: 0800 1111, office tel. 020 7239 1000,

fax: 020 7239 1001, minicom: 0800 400 222

web: www.childline.org.uk

Helpline for children and young people in trouble or danger

Everyman Project

40 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9ES

tel. 020 7737 6747, fax: 020 7737 6747

Counselling for men who want to stop their violent or abusive behaviour

Family Service Units (FSU)

207 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5QP

tel. 020 7402 5175, fax: 020 7724 1829

e-mail: centraloffice@fsu.org.uk, web: www.fsu.org.uk

Works with families in need

Refuge

helpline: 0870 599 5443, office tel. 020 7395 7700

or 020 7395 7712, fax: 020 7395 7721

Helpline for women and children escaping domestic violence.

Network of refuges



SupportLine

PO Box 1596, Ilford, Essex IG1 3FW

tel. 020 8554 9004, fax: 020 8554 9006

e-mail: info@supportline.org.uk, web: www.supportline.org.uk

Telephone helpline for people experiencing any form of abuse

Victim Support

Cranmer House, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ

Victim Supportline: 0845 3030900, textphone: 020 7896 3776

tel. 020 7735 9166, fax: 020 7582 5712

e-mail: supportline@victimsupport.org.uk

web: www.victimsupport.com

National charity for victims of crime

Women's Aid

tel. 0117 963 3542

Confidential helpline for women experiencing violence and abuse

References



Facing the Fire J. Lee (Bantam Books 1993)

Getting Over Getting Mad J. Ford (Publishers Group West 2001)

Growing Yourself Back Up J. Lee (Three Rivers Press 2001)

Hot Buttons S. Evans, S. Suib Cohen (HarperCollins Inc 2000)

Resolving Conflict with Others and Within Yourself G. Graham

Scott Ph.D (Airlift Book Company Ltd 1990)

Tongue Fu! S. Horn (St. Martin's Griffin 1996)

The Verbally Abusive Relationship P. Evans (Adams Media

Corporation 1996)

We Have to Talk S. Shem MD, J. Surrey PhD (Basic Books 1998)

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Further reading and order form

- The Anger Control Workbook* M. McKay, P. Rogers (New Harbinger Press 2000) £14.99
- The Assertiveness Workbook* R. J. Paterson (New Harbinger Press 2000) £12.99
- The Complete Guide to Mental Health* E. Farrell (Mind/Vermillion 1997) £8.99
- How to Assert Yourself* (Mind 2000) £1
- How to Cope with Relationship Problems* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Deal with Anger* (Mind 2000) £1
- How to Deal with Bullying at Work* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Increase Your Self-esteem* (Mind 2001) £1
- How to Survive Family Life* (Mind 1998) £1
- It's my Life Now: Starting over after an abusive relationship or domestic violence* M. Kennedy Dugan, R. R. Hock (Routledge 2000) £8.99
- Learn to Relax* M. George (Duncan Baird 2000) £10.99
- Learn to Relax (audio tape)* M. George (Duncan Baird 2000) £4.99
- Making Sense of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Making Sense of Herbal Remedies* (Mind 2000) £3.50
- Making Sense of Homeopathy* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Making Sense of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Mind 2001) £3.50
- Managing Anger* G. Lindenfield (Thorsons 1993) £6.99
- The Mind Guide to Managing Stress* (Mind 2001) £1
- The Mind Guide to Relaxation* (Mind 2001) £1
- The Mind Guide to Yoga* (Mind 2001) £1
- The Nature of Unhappiness* D. Small (Constable and Robinson 2001) £10.99
- Overcoming Anger and Irritability* W. Davies (Robinson 2000) £7.99
- Overcoming Childhood Trauma: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques* H. Kennerley (Robinson 2000) £7.99
- Understanding Talking Treatments* (Mind 2000) £1

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For interpretation, *MindinfoLine* has access to 100 languages via Language Line. Typetalk is available for people with hearing or speech problems who have access to a minicom. To make a call via Typetalk dial 0800 959598, fax. 0151 709 8119.

Scottish Association for Mental Health tel. 0141 568 7000

Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health tel. 02890 328474



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