

**Mindful Approaches to**

**Letting go of anger**

**Creating calm - Covid 19**

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**Including written and audio resources**

## Introduction

Coming out of Covid restriction and returning to normal is for many people an immense task that involves reintegrating back into the work force. The organising, planning, processing and even re training of staff creates pressure and anxiety for all those involved. Returning to what for many will feel like a new environment can create pressures and adjustment to the different cultures of home working to office working. For some this can become overwhelming. Most of us, at sometime, will feel some level of **anger and frustration**. This guide is designed to help you deal with your own anger and also the anger that you may find in the situation and in other people around you.

## What is anger?

Anger is not uncommon, at some point we all experience it. For some people it is something that simply comes and goes though for others it can, if not dealt with appropriately, become a continuing problem. We should begin with this clear concept...

**...when you are angry the only person that it truly damages is you...**

There are several forms of anger, which we will look at, however, they all have one thing in common. People that sufferer uncontrolled outbursts of anger are not mindfully living in their present moment, they are mindlessly adrift. In that sense angry people have a disorder that often requires help, support or therapy. Because angry people can be scary they become their own worst enemy because other people end up avoiding them, not supporting them, and they often become friendless and isolated.

The ability to remain calm, while those around you are becoming more agitated, is a learned skill. In modern psychology the ability to live in the now, to live in the present moment, and not get lost in anger is called **Mindfulness**. Mindfulness is a learned skill, it is a learned habit. Just as anger is also a learned habit.

## **Mindfulness - an introduction**

Mindfulness teaches us how we can take control of our experience. How we can take control of our feelings, anger and our responses. A Greek philosopher, Epictetus, over 2000 years ago said...

**...we are not effected by events. We are effected by how we respond to those events**

We may not be able to change what is happening to us but we can change how we respond to it. In mindful psychology we would say...

**...thoughts become things**

**The thing's that we think a out we bring about**

In this sense mindfulness represents a choice. The choice is do we rehearse and build on our negative thoughts, feelings and angers or do we decide to focus on the positive. What we know from mindful psychology is that...

**What you feed grows and what you starve dies**

But we can all change. First we need to learn to observe what is happening in our mind and emotions and change any habits or patterns that we have developed that do not serve us well.

### **The unattended mind creates monkey business**

The unattended mind will always wander. It may wander to hopes, desires, dreams, ideas, worries, concerns or angers and frustrations. The mind is often described as a monkey that, if not controlled, the monkey will run off and throw bananas at you. When this happens it is because you are not living in the present moment and your mind has gone off to wherever the monkey decides to take it. Unless you take control of your monkey your mind becomes a rudderless ship washed around in the currents with no clear direction or purpose. Mindfulness is the psychological process of fixing your rudder, of taking control and bringing your attention back from the wandering mind to paying attention to what is happening in your present moment. Mindfulness is not allowing yourself to run off with your monkey, it is observing the the monkey, letting it go, and allowing it to return to it's cage.

### **Living in the now**

In the present moment, in the now, there is rarely any problem. In anyone moment, in the present, you are usually safe, secure, nothing is harming you and nothing is hurting you. You only have an anger problem when your mind tells you differently. In many ways anger

is monkey business as your frustrations are played out as your mind wanders into what feel like unresolvable issues.

## **Rumination**

When your mind wanders and you repeatedly turn over something in your mind we call it rumination. When you ruminate on unresolved issues, people or events and relive those experiences in the present moment you can create feelings of **anger and frustration**. We know that focus on unresolved past can have the added factor of making you feel depressed. Just as if on the other hand if you ruminate on **future** events, that may never happen, and we live our worries, fears and concerns in the present we can create feelings of **anxiety**. And if we are really clever we can do both and create a state of anxious depression as our mind wanders to the past and the future. Which is exactly what most of us do when we feel that the pressure is on us

<b>FOCUS -</b>	<b>PAST</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>FUTURE</b>
Feeling -	Depression	Happiness	Anxiety

Anger at what has happened and anger on what will happen stops you living in your present moment. The present becomes the things that pass you by while you ruminate on what was and what will be.

Rumination of past events or worrying about future events, can contribute to poor mental health and mental illness such as depression and anxiety disorder. Unresolved anger almost always creates, or contributes to states of anxiety and depression.

Mindfulness exercises and mindful interventions, will teach you to live in the present and have been shown to lessen levels of depression, worry, anxiety, frustration and anger.

The anger that you are feeling may be unfinished business and may be generated from unresolved past issues. In the same way feared future issues may create an angry response to immediate events.

# ANGER - what is it?

Anger is a normal response, it is a part of the fight, flight and freeze mechanism. Anger has probably kept us safe throughout evolution. It has both a physiological and psychological effect on your system. Anger is a part of your defence mechanism and is very effective when used in the right situation appropriately.

Anger disorder is when you have lost control of your emotional responses and you are no longer able to respond and communicate appropriately with those people around you.

Reducing levels of anger improves your mental health and maintains your wellbeing. The recordings and techniques used in this guide are part of the Mindfulness Based Self Coaching Programme, MBSC. The aim of MBSC is to enable you to develop skills and techniques that will enable you to become your own life coach. Through the process of mindful observation and practice you can learn to take control your mental and emotional system rather than allowing your system to take control of you.

Learning to be Mindful, the ability to focus into the present and not the past or the future, the ability to let go of negative thoughts and feelings, of anger and frustration, leads to happiness. Learning to be mindful requires consistent and persistent practice.

**(practice, practice, practice.)**

Below is the first mindfulness exercise for you to practice to help calm your system.



## **Recording one: Mindful breath focus**

In this recording you begin your mindful journey with a simple breath focus exercise. The recordings in this programme can be accessed through the Occupational Health Intranet Page. This exercise lasts for about five minutes. As you practice the exercise your mind will wander to both past or future events and become distracted by thoughts, feelings, sounds or physical sensations. This is normal. When it happens observe the distraction, don't fight it, then let go of the distraction as you gently bring your attention back to your breath and the present moment.

The point of this exercise is not to create a still mind, the mind will always be churning out thoughts and feelings. In this exercise you are becoming aware as your mind wanders and each time you observe the distraction and return your attention to your breath you have just practised mindfulness. You are remembering to be mindful, to be in the moment. When the mind wanders you forget, when you observe the distraction you remember to be mindful, to be in the present moment.

The more you can remember to be mindful throughout your day the more you are living mindfully. It can take a long time to learn the art of living mindfully. Be patient with yourself. Observe your wandering mind without negative self criticism.

**Practice:** Ideally you would start with a five minute mindful breath focus practice once everyday and gradually increase the length of time that you are able to practice. When you can sit for thirty minutes everyday your mindfulness practice has become therapeutic and you are becoming your own self coach.

## Normal anger is helpful

Mindful exercises as described above will help anybody in any situation take better control of who they are and to adapt or change their responses to what they are experiencing. It may surprise you to know that anger is completely normal and is can even be helpful. It may seem strange to think of anger as our friend. Anger is really our natural response to actual or potential threat and danger. Anger has kept us safe over thousands of years throughout our evolution.

Normal anger is when you have the feeling that you are under threat and you respond with the increased alertness and awareness which may become sharp and communicate to others that they should now back off. Anger, when it expressed is designed to distance the threat so that either it moves away or you do move away. In a 'fight or flight' flight might be just as much an expression of anger as is fight. It keeps you safe and secure.

## Examples of normal anxiety

You might expect to have heightened levels of anger and frustration if someone has just bumped into your car, banged into you or made you drop your shopping. You might feel the same is you are told that you need an operation, you have just failed an examination or your relationship has come to an end. Such responses are normal and are a natural part of loss, grief, hurt and disappointment. In such cases the open expression of anger allows us to let go and move on.

## Helpful anger

There are many times when you might feel grateful for the natural raised awareness of normal anger. Perhaps you were threatened by someone wishing to take advantage of you or perhaps rob or assault you and your response kept you safe. We all have angry responses. Some of us can express them freely, without damaging others. Some people want to put their anger onto other people as blame or fault. However, many people repress their anger and in so doing damage themselves. We will look at this issues later.

Some people have jobs where the free expression of anger is seen as an asset. This may not be direct anger but used non verbally as a communication tool. Security guards, policemen, soldiers, even teachers or medical staff may need to communicate that they are not to be threatened.

## **ANGER DISORDER -**

### **When your anger becomes a problem**

Ok, so anger can also become a problem, we all know that. The main effect of problem anger is that other people may have an anxious response when they are with an angry person. If that person is a colleague or a manager they can have the effect of creating both anxiety and depression in those around them. They may also create an equally angry response as can be seen when two members of staff resort to violent communication - they hit each other. All staff need to, and have right to, work in a situation where there is no threat and they are completely safe.

### **Stress hormones**

All people who suffer anger disorder develop high levels of stress hormone to prepare for the expected reaction to the actual or potential threat. This includes raised blood pressure, faster respiration and heart rate, sweating and raised awareness as your system prepares for 'fight or flight'. The greater level of raised stress hormone, or the longer it lasts, the greater the damage on your body and mind system.

#### **Action point**

Monitor your blood pressure and the quality of your sleep.

Angry people have higher blood pressure and have problems sleeping well.

### **Anger makes you physically ill**

If you suffer anger disorder you will be hardening your arteries due to high levels of stress hormone in your system. This will be damaging your heart and your brain, creating tension in your muscles that will affect your joints. Over all you are shortening your life. If your response to that idea is that you don't really care, then you need therapy urgently.

#### **Action point**

Take exercise and work off your frustrations in a positive way. If you raise your heart rate for twenty minutes you will burn off the negative hormones.

### **Anger makes you emotionally ill**

If you suffer anger disorder you may also be losing your family, friends and colleagues. Angry people often become isolated. Often if people do choose to stay with you it is often out of fear, not loyalty or love and certainly not respect. In fact they may not actually even like you at all. If your response to that is that you really do not care about other people's feelings then you really do need therapy urgently.

### Action point

Talk to a therapist

### Your anger makes other people emotionally ill

When you act out your anger inappropriately you are creating responses of either flighting, fleeing or freezing in those around you. You are making other people ill. Those around you who are scared or have an underlying fear are likely to develop both depression and anxiety from being around you. How does that make you feel?

### Action point

Get some feedback - to see your self as others see you

### The unintentional psychopath

A psychopath is someone who is emotionally disabled and unable to connect or respond to other people with either insight or empathy. In most cases the unintentional psychopath does not realise the way that they are experienced by others. Often it is only when other people complain or perhaps take grievance procedures that there is any realisation of the effect they are having on others. You will only know how other people experience you if you ask. But then if they are scared of you they are unlikely to tell you the truth.

### Action point

Find people that you know, or believe, will tell you the truth and ask for their feedback

### The intentional psychopath

This takes us into difficult territory. The intentional psychopath enjoys the exercise of power and the negative effect that they have on others. The idea that other people are scared of them can bring them joy. Some psychopaths enjoy scaring other people and the easiest way to do that is to be unreasonable and angry. If you find that you enjoy being an angry bully, perhaps you even seek out people and situations to victimise and bully then you have just moved from psychology to psychiatry and are in serious need of help though will probably never admit it to anyone.

### Action point

If you find that you are the subject of bullying or any of the behaviours I have just described you should first distance your self from the person and second get help from HR, Occupational Health or a higher manager.

### Overcoming negative reactions

If we stay in the world of those that are expressing anger but do retain insight and would like to change it, the following mindful exercise is designed to change a reaction, which may be driven by anger or frustration, into an effective response that can be helpful



### Recording two: Seven, eleven breathing



You may have noticed the connection between your emotional state and your breath both in rate and depth. When you are relaxed and calm your breath will be deep and in your abdomen. As tension and anxiety grow the breath moves upwards to 'top breath' and becomes shallow and faster.

Your breathing mechanism is connected to the two sides of your nervous system, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. In practical terms this means that when you breathe in your adrenal system opens and Adrenalin is released into your blood stream. When you breathe out your adrenal system shuts down and the level of Adrenalin decreases. If your in-breaths become shallow and fast the level of adrenalin, stress hormones, increase with every breath that you take. This can build into tension, anxiety or a panic attack.

If you breathe out for longer than you breathe in the level of stress hormones in your system will reduce every time you breathe out.

**Practice:** This exercise can be done either sitting, standing or lying down. However, some people may feel a little woozy or faint so be aware of this if you are standing up. If you feel tension, anxiety or experience feelings of panic just two minutes of seven eleven breath can reduce the level of stress hormones in your system to normal.

## Overcoming physical tension

Anger is associated with physical as well as emotional tension. Exercise can help the angry person change their physical tensions and we know that emotions affect the body chemistry and that the body chemistry affects the emotions - one affects the other.

When the person that is angry is unable to exercise, they may be disabled or in some way incapacitated progressive relaxation will enable them to release the body tension and in so doing release the emotional tension at the same time.



### Recording three: Progressive relaxation

In specific anxiety or generalised anxiety responses it can feel as though anxiety is taking over your entire body. You may develop aches and pains and feel sore or tense.

In this exercise you deliberately tense and relax each part of your body. As you do so, you mindfully observe the difference between the feeling and sensation in the difference between tensions and relaxation. Often in this exercise you discover that you are actually tense when you thought you were relaxed. As you progress you learn the art of relaxation and you teach your muscles new ways to be.

**Practice:** Relaxation is a progressive things and is a learned skill. It is good to practice progressive relaxation when you get into bed to prepare your body for sleep. You can also practice it at any time of day, either sitting or lying, when you feel tense or anxious.

## Overcoming Anger

If your anger is considered to be clinical you may need medication and also to be referred for either one to one counselling or to an anger management programme. Anger management is normally run as a course in a group. Often these groups will look at childhood and what it is that might have created the angry habit response in the first place. You are encouraged to identify the causes and the triggers that feed into your behaviour. They then look at behaviour modification and techniques that can promote alternative responses.

Medication can have a mild sedative effect on your moods. Some medications will help to regulate the positive endorphins in your brain to promote feeling of calm and wellbeing rather than anger.

## The Psychological Route

Psychological approaches for overcoming anger often run alongside medication. In some cases medication is useful as an emotional prop while you develop the psychological skills to deal with your anger. In most cases you will need to see a therapist. Not all therapists are skilled in helping people deal with anger and you might need advise on who you chose to see. Practitioner include, mindfulness therapists, counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists and CBT practitioners. Once you have developed the skills required to deal with your anger the need for medication may well diminish and, perhaps be eliminated altogether.

Often Mindfulness or mindful psychotherapy may be all that you need to overcome anger and to maintain a healthy state of wellbeing.

## Mindfulness and Self Help

If you have some insight into your anger mindfulness and mindful psychotherapy are the quickest and often the most effective ways to deal with anger disorders. Regular mindfulness practice is the best way to 'future proof' yourself against anger the subsequent problems of both anxiety and depression, by keeping yourself mentally fit. By practicing mindfulness you learn to live in the present and dissociate with frustrated and angry connection to the past or the future. In mindfulness we learn to live in the present, we learn to be here now.

## Changing your anger disorder mindset

You were not born with anger. You did not come out of the womb with anger. Anger is a skill that you have learned. Anger is a habit. Your system is a habit forming mechanism. It has been creating habits since the moment of your birth. The problem is that the system is neutral and does not care if the habits that you have created are positive or negative, whether they serve you well or poorly. Many anger habits are learned from observation. For example...

If I observe my mother or father reacting angrily to me or my siblings, to friends, family neighbour, then I learn that this is normal behaviour. So, I do the same things. The more I do it the more normal it becomes.

When an angry response is learned in this sort of way you may have no idea of where it came from and simply think **“this is just the way that I am”**, this is never true it is always **“this is the way I have learned to be”**. All habits are learned through repetition. The repetition may be that of the visualised imagination rather than a repeated situation. For example...

Once you have learned the skill of anger you use rumination to build upon it. Then you find that you are wide awake at three in the morning, when you should be asleep, going over and over the things that make you frustrated and angry.

You can get yourself to the point when the mere thought or mention of a person or a situation can raise feeling of anger within you. If at that point, when you are feeling the anger, someone else appears on the scene, perhaps to ask a simple question they may well get the full force of your anger even when it is nothing to do with them,

## Dealing with the anger

You may know the cause of your anger or it may be hidden, lost in past memory. Your first question needs to be ‘do I need help from someone else to overcome this?’ If your answer is ‘yes’ then finding a Psychotherapist or a CBT practitioner will help you. This can be accessed through occupational health though you may choose to see someone privately.

### Self Help

If you take the self help route into changing your mental and emotional habits the following will be helpful.

#### 1: Can you identify the cause

Being able to see where your anger came from can often, help, dilute or desensitise it. Using the recordings, seven eleven, breath focus and the beach may be of particular use.

**The more that you focus into the present moment the less anger you will feel**

#### 2: Solving the problem

You might need to write it all down so that you can begin to see it. You might need a problem solving session, like having a brain storm. You may need to include other people in your brain storm to get some other ideas to help you change your situation. Create a list of possible actions and solutions and then act. The general mindful breath focus recording will help.

**A lot of anger comes from the frustration of not acting. It can then spill into an out break of anger or rage**

### **3: Dealing with physical symptoms**

As pointed out earlier when you are holding the effects of unresolved anger within you it has a direct effect on your body. Tiredness, fatigue, high blood pressure and so on. The two things that we know that help us deal with anxiety are both rest and action, exercise and relaxation. Developing an exercise regime increases the positive endorphins in your brains, it increases the happy hormones, that help in overcoming anger. If your heart rate is increased for around twenty minutes your system switches and produces positive endorphins such as serotonin. When you undertake a mindfulness exercise or a deep relaxation exercise you will reduce the level of stress hormones in your system.

A balance of both exercise and relaxation will reduce the physical effects of anger and help you to deal with the changes that are required for you to overcome it. Recordings seven eleven and the progressive relaxation will be of particular benefit.

**If you always do things in the same way you always get the same results.  
What do you need to change?**

### **4: Changing your breathing - emotional symptoms**

Anger is emotional. The first indicator that something has changed emotionally is that the breath has also changed. There are two main effects of anger on the breath but also the effects of the breath on anger. The first is the position or depth and the second is the rate of the breath. There are three lobes in the lung. When you are relaxed and calm you are bottom breathing, or belly breathing, and using the bottom lobe. As you become angry or upset the tension in the shoulders usually makes the shoulders rise so that you start to breath only with the top lobe. As this happens the breath becomes shallower though increasing the rate of breaths and raising the level of stress hormone in the blood stream. Using the seven eleven recording will help reverse this effects.

### **4: Changing the way that you think**

Thinking and feeling are different things and though they are distinct they both have an effect on each other. A feeling of either anger or frustration can lead you to have unhappy or negative thoughts or to relive negative memories.

**Reframing** is when you deliberately stop the thoughts that do not serve you well and deliberately replace them with thoughts that serve you better. This might simply be that when the negative thoughts come into your mind that you stop them, deliberately dismiss them and replace them with something like “I choose not to be angry. I choose to take a deep breath and allow myself to respond and not just react”.

### **Fake it to make it**

Often when we begin reframing the inner conflict between thoughts and feelings leads us to doubt. So, I change the inner thought to “how does that make me feel less angry?” This is an important point in the reframing process when we refuse to engage the negative feeling. All angers are habits, all habits are learned and the learning comes from repetition. How many times do I have to repeat something until it becomes the new habit as the old one fades and dies. Remember...

**...what you feed grows and what you starve dies**

Say it even if you don't believe it. Once the new habit is established you will believe it.

### **5: Using distraction to starve a habit**

Because we know that all forms of anger are habits and we know that habits only exist because we keep feeding them it follows clearly that if we starve a habit it will diminish and finally fade away. One way of starving a habit is using distraction so that you stop feeding the habit.

When using distraction as a strategy to overcome anger habits it is good to have a plan in place. Having something that you might use as an alternative to feeding the unwanted habit or anger. Breath focus can work here, using a sound focused meditation, perhaps finding a song to sing or do something more active, take a walk, have a bath, go for a run, phone a friend, watch the television, make a cake. Whatever your strategy work it out in advance and try not to think of it as avoiding the problem more of starving the negative habit.

### **Recording four: Sounds focus meditation**

For some people focus on the breath does not allow them to let go thoughts easily. The introduction of a sound that works with the breath can create a stronger point of focus that is easier to stay with allowing thoughts to be left behind. Always remember that what we feed grows and what we starve dies. Focus on the sound means that the focus is taken away from the thoughts. The sound is repeated in your head you do not say it out loud

In this exercise you simply pick a sound to repeat inside your head, you do not say it out loud. The only requirement of the sound is that it can be split into two halves. Although sound based meditation has been with us for thousands of years the main proponents of sound or mantra meditation in the modern world are T.M., or transcendental meditation. Their sounds were mainly Ah Hum or Ay Ing. The sound is used by using the first half of the sound on the in breath and the second on the out breath. Originally the sound that was taught to me was Ananda split An Nanda. Ananda in Sanskrit means bliss so this was known as bliss meditation. The sound is actually unimportant though many will attempt to tell you that some sounds are mystic or have great power, it is simply a sound to focus on:

<b>Breath</b>	<b>In</b>	<b>Out</b>
<b>Sound</b>	Ah	Hum
	Ay	Ing
	An	Nanda
	Re	Lax
	Let	Go

**Practice:** Simply sit. Take an in breath and at whatever rate your breath is coming use the sound, half on the in breath and half on the out breath. As your rebate of breath slows allow the sound to elongate and become whatever it needs to.

## **6: Changing your behaviour - do something different**

Because you are a habit forming mechanism you almost certainly do similar things each day and each week. Learning to be different is exercising parts of our system that empower personal change. Get into the habit of change, of doing things differently. This is not simply related to the behaviours related to your anger, experiment with change generally. Try driving to work using a different route, or take a different bus and walk a bit. Try shopping in a different store. Try's something new for dinner. The more that we realise that change is not only possible but might even be fun the easier it is to overcome the habit of anger disorder.

## **7: Creating a safe place in response to a real threat**

There may come a time when the angry response to a threat is very real. It could be that you do actually have a serious illness that may even be terminal. Or that a serious operation is about to take place. Perhaps someone else close to you is dying or very ill. Or that you or those close to you are under threat. Well, the same principles of mindfulness still apply. If a potential disaster is imminent, it is not happening right now and if we are living in the now we are not with the disaster.

For many people in this situation the best thing to do is to create a safe place. Somewhere inside your self where you are able to go and be away from any fears or anxieties,

frustrations and angers, about the current situation so that, however bad it gets, there is always somewhere to go where it is all alright. The Beach recording is designed to do just that and is often used by oncology patients and their relatives.

### **Recording five: The beach - creating a safe place**

A safe place means an internal visualised space that you can retreat to. A place where nobody wants anything and nobody needs anything. A place where you are completely safe and completely secure, where nothing can hurt you and nothing can harm. A place where you can face any issues, a place where you can deal with any issues.

In this recording you create your own beach in exactly the way that you need it to be. You develop a relationship with your beach so that when you are in anyway upset or overwhelmed, when symptoms or pain are becoming too difficult you have somewhere to go somewhere to be.

**Practice:** This exercise may be done lying or sitting, whichever is most comfortable. All you need to do is to settle down and follow the recording. This is visualisation where you are guided though you may get to the point where you are able to do the exercise without the recording.

### **8: Mindfulness Exercises - Practice**

The common point of all states of frustration and anger, from mild to severe, is the habit of focussing on what will be rather than what is. In all cases overcoming anger is about being in the present moment, living in the now and not in the future. Mindfulness practise teaches us just that by using the breath as the immediate point of focus in the present moment. All the recordings in this guide are using mindfulness. However there are two sides to mindfulness. The first is the sitting breath focus practise that, to be effective in overcoming anger, needs to be at least thirty minutes everyday. The second is to live mindfully every minute of everyday. That means to be aware of what you think, feel and do and to become responsible for who you are, what you do and the effects that you have on yourself and others. It is now time to reinforce those habits of mindfulness that serve you well and enable you to change those that do not serve you well.

For the breath focus mindfulness exercise go back to...

### **Recording one: Mindful breath focus**

**Anger is a choice - not being angry is a choice - to be calm is a choice**