Understanding Your Anger Style

A Practical Guide to Understanding How You Experience and Express Anger

FREE Educational Guide

By Maria Shkreli, LMHC

Educational Disclaimer

This educational guide is intended for self-reflection and informational purposes only. It is not a diagnostic tool and should not be used to diagnose any mental health condition. Completing this guide does not establish a therapist-client relationship.

If anger is significantly affecting your relationships, work, emotional well-being, or daily functioning, consider seeking support from a qualified mental health professional.

What Is Anger?

Anger is a normal human emotion.

It can show up when something feels unfair, frustrating, disrespectful, threatening, disappointing, or outside of our control.

Anger itself is not the problem.

The bigger question is what happens **after** we become angry.

Some people react immediately. Others shut down. Some become defensive, raise their voice, argue, withdraw, hold onto resentment, or replay the situation long after it is over.

Two people can experience the same situation and respond very differently.

That is why understanding your anger style matters.

It can help you notice what tends to trigger you, how your body reacts, what thoughts come up, and what you usually do when the anger begins.

The goal is not to never feel angry.

The goal is to understand your pattern well enough that anger does not automatically take over your response.

How Anger Can Show Up

Anger does not always look like yelling.

Sometimes it is obvious.

Other times it is quieter and harder to recognize.

Anger can show up in different ways, including:

- Raising your voice
- Becoming defensive
- Shutting down
- Walking away
- Giving the silent treatment
- Arguing until the other person gives in
- Becoming sarcastic
- Holding onto resentment

- Replaying the situation in your mind
- Becoming physically tense
- Saying things you later regret
- Feeling irritated for a long time after the situation has ended

Some people express anger outwardly.

Others keep it inside.

Neither pattern automatically means someone is handling anger well.

A person can look calm on the outside and still be holding onto a great deal of anger internally.

What Can Sit Underneath Anger?

Anger is often the emotion we notice first.

But sometimes there is something else underneath it.

You may feel angry when you actually feel:

- Hurt
- Rejected
- Embarrassed
- Disrespected
- Ignored
- Powerless
- Afraid
- Overwhelmed
- Disappointed
- Unappreciated
- Misunderstood

For example, someone may say:

"I'm angry because they didn't call me back."

But underneath that anger may be:

"I felt ignored."

Or:

"I felt like I didn't matter."

That difference matters.

When we only focus on the anger, we may miss what is really bothering us.

Sometimes understanding the feeling underneath the anger helps us communicate more clearly.

Common Anger Triggers

Everyone has triggers.

A trigger is not an excuse for how we behave.

It is simply something that tends to activate a strong emotional response.

Common anger triggers can include:

- Feeling criticized
- Feeling disrespected
- Being ignored
- Feeling misunderstood
- Losing control of a situation
- Being told "no"
- Feeling embarrassed
- Repeated frustration
- Conflict with family or a partner
- Feeling blamed
- Feeling taken advantage of
- Feeling like someone is not listening

Sometimes the trigger is about what is happening now.

Other times, the current situation reminds us of something we have experienced before.

That is why one person's reaction can seem much stronger than the situation itself.

The reaction may be connected to more than just that moment.

The Anger Cycle

Anger often follows a pattern.

Something happens.

You interpret what happened.

Your body reacts.

The anger builds.

Then you respond.

For example:

Situation: Someone criticizes something you did.

Thought: "They don't respect me."

Body reaction: Your heart starts racing and your muscles tighten.

Emotion: Anger.

Behavior: You become defensive, raise your voice, or say something harsh.

Later, once you are calmer, you may wish you had handled it differently.

The more quickly you can recognize the cycle, the more opportunity you have to interrupt it before the reaction becomes stronger.

Sometimes even a few seconds of awareness can make a difference.

Anger Self-Assessment

Instructions

Rate each statement based on how you typically respond.

Try to answer based on what you actually do, not what you believe you *should* do.

0 = Never
1 = Rarely
2 = Sometimes
3 = Often
4 = Always

1. I become frustrated more quickly than most people. _____
2. Small problems sometimes trigger a stronger reaction than I expect. _____
3. I have difficulty staying calm during conflict. _____
4. I become defensive when I feel criticized. _____
5. I continue thinking about arguments long after they have ended. _____
6. I sometimes say things I later regret when I'm angry. _____
7. My anger feels difficult to control once it begins. _____
8. Feeling disrespected is one of my biggest triggers. _____
9. People have commented that my reactions seem stronger than the situation. _____
10. I often wish I had handled conflict differently after I've calmed down. _____
11. I notice physical changes when I become angry, such as muscle tension, a racing heart, or feeling hot. _____
12. I would like to respond more calmly during difficult situations. _____

Understanding Your Score

Total Score: _____ /48

0–12

Your responses suggest that anger is generally manageable and may not be interfering significantly with your daily life.

That does not mean you never become angry. Everyone does.

Continue paying attention to the situations that trigger you and the strategies that help you stay grounded during conflict.

13–24

Your responses suggest that anger may become more difficult to manage in certain situations.

You may notice that some triggers affect you more strongly than others, such as criticism, disrespect, frustration, or feeling misunderstood.

Increasing your awareness of those patterns may help you respond more intentionally.

25–36

Your responses suggest that anger may sometimes affect your communication, relationships, or emotional well-being.

You may already recognize situations where your reaction becomes stronger than you intended.

Look closely at the questions where you scored highest. Those areas may give you a better idea of what happens when your anger begins to build.

37–48

Your responses suggest that anger may be affecting several areas of your life or relationships.

You may find it difficult to calm down once you become angry, or you may frequently regret how you responded after the situation is over.

If these patterns are frequent, intense, or causing significant distress, consider speaking with a qualified mental health professional for additional support.

Reflection

Your score gives you information, but the number is not the most important part.

The important part is what you begin to notice about yourself.

Take a few moments to reflect.

What situations trigger my anger most often?

What happens in my body when I become angry?

What do I usually do when I feel criticized, disrespected, or misunderstood?

What feeling may sometimes be underneath my anger—hurt, fear, rejection, embarrassment, disappointment, or something else?

What is one thing I would like to change about the way I respond when I am angry?

Final Thoughts

Anger is not something you need to be ashamed of.

It is an emotion.

But emotions and behavior are not the same thing.

You can feel angry and still decide how you want to respond.

That is where self-awareness becomes important.

The more you understand your triggers, physical reactions, thoughts, and patterns, the easier it becomes to recognize anger before it reaches the point where you feel out of control.

Sometimes anger tells us that a boundary has been crossed.

Sometimes it tells us that we feel hurt, ignored, powerless, or disrespected.

And sometimes the reaction becomes bigger than the situation because something from the past is being activated too.

Understanding your anger is not about making excuses for harmful behavior.

It is about taking responsibility for what you do with the emotion once it shows up.

There is a big difference between saying:

"You made me act this way."

and saying:

"I was angry, and I need to take responsibility for how I responded."

That shift matters.

You cannot always control what another person says or does.

But you can continue learning how to slow down, recognize what is happening inside you, and choose a response that does not create more damage than the original problem.

Sometimes the first step is simply being able to recognize:

"I'm getting angry. I need to pay attention to what happens next."

Continue Your Learning

If this guide helped you recognize some of your anger patterns, you can continue your learning with the complete workbook:

Understanding Intense Anger: Educational Workbook & Self-Assessment

The full workbook explores anger in greater depth, including why anger develops, common triggers, anger myths, what may be happening underneath anger, emotional regulation, and patterns that can make anger more intense.

It also includes educational information about more complex anger-related patterns, including Intermittent Explosive Disorder, borderline splitting, and narcissistic rage, along with a comprehensive self-assessment, detailed score interpretation, reflection exercises, and practical tools for increasing self-awareness.

Thank you for downloading this educational guide. I hope it helped you better understand how anger may show up for you and gave you a place to begin looking at your triggers, reactions, and choices during difficult moments.

Maria Shkreli, LMHC