

I Give Myself Permission to Be Angry

Understanding anger without shaming the emotion

Anger is an emotion, not a character flaw.

Anger can signal that something matters. It may appear when a boundary has been crossed, something feels unfair, sensory input becomes unbearable, communication repeatedly fails, demands exceed capacity, or a person feels trapped, dismissed or misunderstood.

Accumulated pressure

For neurodivergent people, anger can arrive at the end of a long chain of processing demands. The final event may look small while the nervous system is responding to hours of noise, masking, uncertainty, executive effort, interruption, pain and unmet needs.

Anger is not aggression

Feeling angry does not automatically mean shouting at somebody, threatening them or causing harm. Emotion and behaviour are different. The aim is not to eliminate anger; it is to understand the message, recognise escalation and create safer ways to express it.

What might my anger be saying?

Stop. This is unfair. I am overloaded. I need space. I have said no. I am not being heard. Something hurts. I need control over my own body. I cannot process another demand. I need this situation to change.

Permission with responsibility

I can validate the emotion and still take responsibility for my actions. I can learn to recognise the point where I need distance, fewer words, movement, sensory reduction or support.

I am allowed to feel anger. I am responsible for what I do with it, but I do not have to be ashamed that it exists.

Why neurodivergent anger can feel intense

Sensory overload

Repeated or intense sound, light, smell, touch, temperature or visual input can move the nervous system towards fight-or-flight. Irritability may be an early sign that sensory capacity is disappearing.

Demand and executive load

Too many instructions, transitions, choices, interruptions or unfinished tasks can create pressure. When processing capacity drops, one additional request can feel physically impossible rather than merely inconvenient.

Being misunderstood

Having intentions misread, being told your tone is wrong, having literal communication interpreted as rude, or being expected to explain yourself while already overloaded can produce intense frustration.

Injustice and inconsistency

Unfairness, hypocrisy or inconsistent rules can produce a strong emotional response. Anger may be protecting an important value.

Masking

Suppressing reactions all day can mean anger appears later in a safer environment. The safe person may not have caused the whole reaction; the nervous system may finally have stopped containing it.

Physical load

Pain, poor sleep, hunger, illness, hormonal changes or prolonged stress can reduce available capacity and make regulation harder.

Rejection and social pain

Criticism, exclusion or perceived rejection can trigger a rapid surge of emotion. Creating time before an important response can protect relationships and allow clearer communication.

Before anger reaches the top

Learning my early warning signs

Body signals

Jaw clenching, heat, tight chest, fists, pacing, headache, shaking, shallow breathing, restless legs or an urgent need to move.

Sensory signals

Sounds become sharper, touch feels intolerable, light hurts, smells become stronger, or you urgently need to cover your ears or leave.

Thinking signals

Thoughts become rigid, you repeat the same point, lose words, struggle to see alternatives, or feel unable to process another instruction.

Communication signals

Answers become shorter, voice volume changes, speech becomes harder, you go silent, or explaining feels impossible.

Emotional signals

Frustration, injustice, panic, tears, feeling trapped, humiliation or fear may sit underneath the anger.

My anger scale

0–2: settled or mildly irritated. 3–4: frustration building. 5–6: processing becoming harder. 7–8: urgent need to reduce demands or leave. 9–10: crisis-level overload; prioritise safety, low language and recovery.

My first physical sign: _____

The sign I usually ignore: _____

What other people may notice: _____

At this point I need to stop pushing through: _____

MY ANGER PAGE

Get the emotion onto the page without hurting yourself or somebody else

I AM ANGRY BECAUSE...

WHAT FEELS UNFAIR?

WHAT NEEDS TO STOP?

WHAT BOUNDARY WAS CROSSED?

WHAT AM I NOT BEING HEARD ABOUT?

WRITE IT BIG

Use huge letters. Scribble. Cross things out. Repeat one word. Draw the pressure. This page does not need to be tidy, reasonable or shown to anybody.

WHAT DOES MY BODY WANT TO DO?

Move / pace / shake / cry / make sound / be alone / reduce noise / stop talking / something else:

Right now I need LESS of: _____

Right now I need MORE of: _____

The safest way I can release energy is: _____

The sentence I need is: "I am angry because _____."

Safe ways to release the pressure

Movement

Walk, pace, shake out hands, stretch, push palms together, dance, use repetitive exercise, stamp safely, or use another familiar movement that gives activation somewhere to go.

Sound

Use words in private, sing loudly, hum, vocalise, or make sound into open space or a pillow while keeping the airway completely clear. If sound increases activation, choose a quieter release.

Writing and marks

Write an uncensored page you do not need to send. Use huge letters. Repeat a sentence. Scribble. Draw the pressure. Tear up the private page afterwards if that feels releasing.

Reduce input

Leave competing sound, dim lights, stop conversation, change uncomfortable clothing, use familiar sensory supports, or ask other people to pause demands.

Delay the response

When possible, do not send the message, make the decision or continue the argument at the peak of anger. Regulation first can make it easier to communicate what actually matters.

When behaviour could become unsafe

Increase distance from other people, move away from objects you might throw or damage, reduce language and seek support. If you believe you may hurt yourself or somebody else, seek urgent help.

The goal is not to make anger disappear quickly. It is to create enough safety and capacity to choose what happens next.

Anger, boundaries and communication

What does the anger need me to protect?

A boundary is not a punishment

A boundary describes what you will or will not participate in, what you need, or what action you will take to protect wellbeing. It does not require another person to agree that your need is reasonable.

Low-language phrases

'Stop, please.' 'I cannot process this now.' 'I need space.' 'Do not touch me.' 'One question at a time.' 'I need this in writing.' 'I am too angry to discuss this safely yet.' 'I will come back to this later.'

When anger contains important information

Was I repeatedly interrupted? Was a clear no ignored? Was I overloaded? Was something genuinely unfair? Was I expected to tolerate sensory pain? Was I being asked to explain myself while dysregulated? Was I frightened underneath the anger?

Repair without shame

If anger led to behaviour that affected somebody else, accountability and self-understanding can exist together. You can acknowledge impact, apologise where appropriate, and still examine the overload, boundary or unmet need that contributed.

A clearer boundary for next time

Think about what you need to say earlier, what action you can take if the boundary is ignored, and which people may need a simple explanation of your overload signs.

The boundary I wish I had expressed sooner: _____

What I want the other person to understand: _____

If the boundary is ignored, I can: _____

After anger: recovery and learning

The body may need time

After a strong surge of anger, activation does not vanish immediately. You may feel shaky, exhausted, tearful, numb, headachy or unable to tolerate conversation. Low-demand recovery can be appropriate.

Do not interrogate yourself immediately

Trying to explain every detail while still activated can restart the cycle. Hydrate, rest, reduce input, eat something manageable if you can, allow safe movement and return to reflection when language and perspective are more available.

Look for the chain

What happened in the hours before the anger? How much masking had already happened? Were you hungry, tired or in pain? Had several boundaries already been crossed? Was the final event simply the last demand?

My pattern

Before: _____ During: _____ What helped: _____ What I needed: _____

Earlier intervention

The useful goal is not 'never become angry'. It is recognising the earliest point where a sensory adjustment, boundary, break, explanation, movement or reduction in demands could change the direction of the experience.

One thing I can change earlier next time: _____

One support I can ask for earlier: _____

I know I am beginning to recover when: _____

A message from me

If you have been told that your anger makes you difficult, you may have learned to fear the emotion itself. You may swallow it until you explode, apologise before you have even understood what happened, or turn the anger inward because expressing it never felt safe.

I want you to become curious about it. What is the anger protecting? What feels unfair? What has been ignored? What sensory input has become unbearable? What have you been tolerating? What boundary is your body trying to draw?

You are allowed to feel angry. You are also allowed to learn ways of expressing anger that protect you and the people around you. Those two things belong together.

Your anger does not have to be your enemy. Sometimes it is the part of you saying: enough — something needs to change.

Books and useful reading

Luke Beardon — *Avoiding Anxiety in Autistic Adults*. Devon Price — *Unmasking Autism*. Barry M. Prizant with Tom Fields-Meyer — *Uniquely Human*. These offer useful context around autistic experience, masking, anxiety, environment and understanding behaviour.

Evidence-informed sources

NICE CG142: Autism spectrum disorder in adults: diagnosis and management. NICE CG170: Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and management. National Autistic Society information on sensory differences, meltdowns, shutdowns and autistic wellbeing.

Important

This guide is educational and supportive rather than individual clinical advice. Sudden changes in behaviour, severe distress, persistent self-injury or aggression, or concerns about safety deserve appropriate individual assessment. If you believe you may hurt yourself or someone else, seek urgent help.