

Sixth Grade, Session 5

Anger and Your Brain: What Is Happening in There?

Step 1: You Experience Emotions

Your brain experiences an event and begins to process it. Anger is usually the result of feeling an emotional or physical threat. Did you know your brain processes getting punched and having your feelings hurt the same way? Your brain thinks physical threats are just as intense as emotional ones.

Fun Fact! ANGER is an iceberg emotion, meaning sometimes you are feeling lots of other emotions, but your brain decides anger is the easiest one to manage. So, anger comes to the surface even though there are lots of emotions underneath.

Step 2: Amygdala Turns on and Starts Processing

Your amygdala is part of your limbic system, the part of your brain that controls basic functions like breathing. Sensing a threat, the amygdala starts making chemicals to signal your body to get ready.

Step 3: Chemicals Send Signals to Your Body and You Feel Angry

The chemicals that the amygdala makes get sent out to your body and tell it to be on high alert. These chemicals tell your body to focus on anger to deal with the threat and limit other thinking parts of your brain from being in charge. You feel pumped up and ready to go because your brain wants to be sure you can protect yourself.

Fun Fact! Your brain's reaction to fear and anger are super similar.

Anger is super normal. It tends to happen when:

- We feel our expectations are not being met
- We see something as a threat
- We are trying to cover up other emotions that feel scary, like shame or fear

Your feelings are your feelings, and you get to have them. It is also good to understand how they work and how you can help control them if they are hijacking your brain and hurting you or others around you.

Processing Anger:

- Try to stop and think about your anger.
- What is causing it? Is it a mask for other emotions? Are you safe?

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- Take a few deep breaths and say out loud, “I am angry.” If you realize you are not actually feeling anger, name what emotion you are feeling.
- If you can, walk away from the person or situation that is causing you to feel upset. Rip up some paper or find a private space to make a loud noise.
- If you are angry because you feel very unsafe, find someone with more power and tell them.
- Write it down. Expressing your emotions is the first step to processing them.
- Make a list of what is making you upset; be as specific as possible. When you are done, go back and label what emotions each item on the list made you feel.

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