

# Understanding Anger

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion, neither good nor bad. It's perfectly acceptable to feel angry when you've been mistreated or wronged – but anger becomes a problem when you express it in a harmful or counterproductive way. Like any emotion, it conveys a message such as that someone is upset. However, if the anger is explosive or out of control, that message never has a chance to be conveyed.



## Why Is Anger an Issue for Firefighters?

While on the job, you have to be calm and level-headed as you face dangerous and potentially life-threatening situations, which can lead to suppressing your emotions after the fact. Containing your emotions may be critical when fighting a fire but not dealing with your feelings can have very serious consequences for your mental health.

It is especially important to find ways to handle emotions like anger, because the psychological strain and stress that you face as a firefighter puts you at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Not only is anger a common symptom of PTSD, but it is also one of the symptoms that most affects your quality of life. Anger can lead to divorce, strained relationships with friends and family, self-harm, legal problems, and more.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**International Association of Fire Fighters**

[www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/](http://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/)

**Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance**

[www.ffbha.org/](http://www.ffbha.org/)

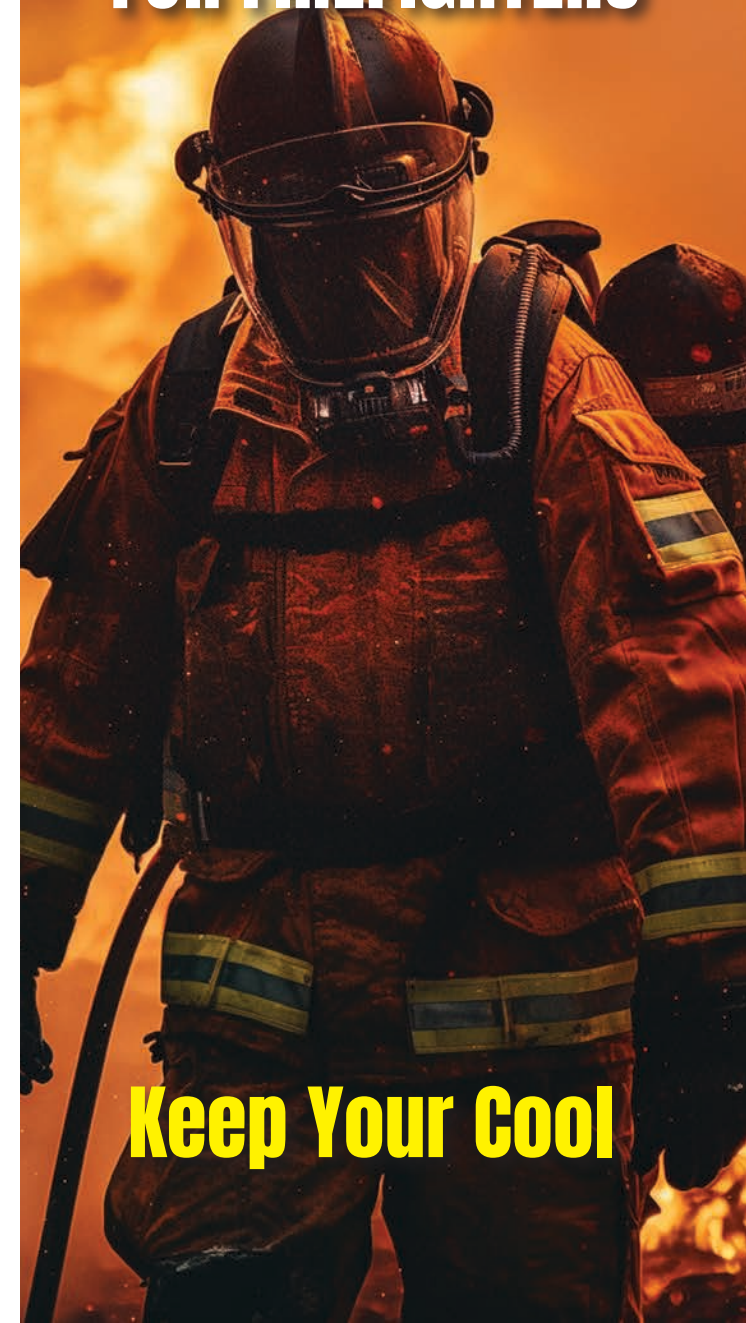
**American Psychological Association**

[www.apa.org/topics/anger/control](http://www.apa.org/topics/anger/control)

*in the know*

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# ANGER MANAGEMENT FOR FIREFIGHTERS



**Keep Your Cool**



## Types of Anger Issues

Anger and anger issues can take many forms and can vary in intensity.

### *Inward-directed anger*

This type of anger is directed internally. It can include dark and depressing thoughts and negative self-talk. Some consequences of this kind of anger are increased rates of self-harm and self-punishing behaviors.

### *Outward-directed anger*

This involves expressing your anger verbally or physically toward other people and things. It can include breaking things and attacking other people, as well as shouting and cursing.

### *Passive anger*

Also known as passive-aggressive behavior, this can include actions like being sarcastic or degrading toward others, giving others the silent treatment, and sulking.



## What Are the Signs of Anger Issues?

You may be experiencing anger-management issues if you:

- Hurt others verbally or physically
- Find yourself feeling angry much of the time
- Feel that your anger is out of control
- Frequently regretting something you've said or done when angry
- Notice that small or petty things make you angry
- Experience road rage
- Throw or break objects
- Engage in self-harm

## What's at Stake?

- **Physical health:** high blood pressure, insomnia, weakened immune system, and heart disease
- **Mental health:** clouded thinking, difficulty concentrating or enjoying life, stress, and depression
- **Career:** conflict with colleagues, job loss, and failure to get promoted
- **Relationships:** lack of close friends or intimate partners, divorce, lack of trust or honesty, and physical or emotional abuse



## How to Help Yourself

There are a number of things you can do to keep your anger from being explosive. First, focus on the physical sensations of anger, such as increased heart rate and rapid breathing. Second, take deep breaths. Third, slowly count to ten. This lets your rational mind catch up with your feelings. If you still feel out of control by the time you reach ten, start counting again. Finally, get moving because physical activity releases pent-up energy.

If you are struggling to control your anger, you do not have to do it alone. Many departments and firefighter organizations have resources that will help you reduce the negative impact of anger on your life.

## How to Help Others

- Stay calm. Don't escalate.
- Help them identify triggers.
- Set boundaries and rules for communication.
- Urge them to seek professional help.
- Locate anger-management support groups online and in person.
- Look after your own well-being.

