

# Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Course: Managing Anger  
Level: Elementary



**Objective:** Students will be able to describe the term anger, identify anger as a secondary emotion, and practice techniques for managing anger in a positive way.

**Course Intent:** Provide information and exercises for students to understand, control and consistently practice the skill of managing anger, from slight to severe levels.

## Applications & Benefits:

Prevent minor student disagreements from becoming classroom disruptions, enable students with a skill that prevents violence, Preserves relationships and maintains a positive school culture.



## Course Snapshot

This course incorporates the following lessons.

LESSONS	ACTIVITY	TIME REQUIRED	RESOURCES & MATERIALS NEEDED
<b>#1</b> Introductory Lesson: Identifying and Understanding Anger	Whole group Discussion	15 – 20 minutes	Lesson definitions Chart paper or white board
<b>#2</b> What Causes Anger?	Whole group Discussion	15 – 20 minutes	Lesson information White board or chart paper
<b>#3</b> Exercises: Set 1	Whole group Partners Independent writing	Various exercises, 10 – 15 minutes each	Lesson information Balloon Student journals
<b>#4</b> Exercises: Set 2	Independent writing Partners	Various exercises, 10 – 15 minutes each	Lesson information Chart paper, art supplies (optional) Student journals

## Lesson Rationale



Feeling angry is a natural emotion that all individuals experience. An inability to effectively and appropriately express feelings of anger can lead to behavior problems, aggression, bullying and other disruptive and unhealthy behaviors. However, meta-analyses of anger management programs for young children have shown to increase social-emotional outcomes. Since we can't, and shouldn't, shelter children from feeling angry, it's vital that we guide children to adopt healthy anger management skills. Anger, when effectively managed can even be used for positive change.

For example, anger about seeing someone being bullied can be a catalyst to speak up or even create Stop Bullying posters at school. The message to children should be that anger is a valid feeling, but how you react to the feelings of anger is most important.



### **Points to Cover**

Everyone feels anger at some point and the goal of this exercise is for everyone to learn how to spot anger, reduce it, and control anger before it grows into a problem.

Anger does not benefit you or anyone in your life, unless it is converted into positive motivation to fix a problem. Focus today on learning how to melt and convert anger.



# Introductory Lesson #1: Identifying and Understanding Anger

## What to Know Before You Begin

### Definitions

#### What is Anger?

Anger is a natural emotion and is often characterized as a “secondary” emotion because it is most commonly a reaction to another emotion. Pain, loss, disappointment, frustration, annoyance, and other vulnerable or “primary” feelings tend to start before anger is present. Our anger can be directed towards other people, objects, and situations or events. Sometimes we feel as though we have been wronged, or we feel angry for someone or something we care about.



Anger can be felt in different amounts. It can be felt in a small amount, feeling agitated or bothered, or it can be felt more intensely, such as outrage or mania. Anger can grow and fester inside of you, or it can shrink or diminish. Think of anger in the form of a balloon that can change in size depending on how much air you add into it, or how much air you let out of it. It’s important to remember that you have the power to control how much anger you keep in, and how much you let out. You control your anger; not the other way around.

Anger can sometimes be beneficial. It can give you a way to express negative feelings or motivate you to find solutions to problems that you might otherwise have endured for longer than desired. It can act as a motivating force for change, if harnessed in the correct manner.



## Activity

It is important for students to understand that anger is an emotion, just like joy or sadness, that is normal and okay to feel.

Start with a discussion about emotions. Using chart paper or a white board, ask students to name some emotions. Try to challenge students to come up with as many as they can. For older students, you may choose to challenge them by asking them to write down as many as they can in one minute, and then sharing as a group.

If anger wasn't an emotion listed by students, make sure to include it. Ask discussion questions that guide students towards an awareness that all the emotions, including anger, are natural and are ok to feel; it is essential for us to effectively manage how we react to the feelings we have.

- How do you know when you are feeling joyful/guilty/angry/etc.?
- What might cause us to feel happy/sad/angry/disappointed/etc.? Is it ok for us to feel this way?
- How do you react when you feel sad/angry/anxious/etc.?
- What does your body feel like when you are angry?
- How might those around us react when we feel happy/sad/angry/frustrated/etc.?
- When do our emotions become unhealthy to ourselves or others?

Focus on discussing anger, but reinforce that anger is one of many emotions that we feel. Try specifically asking students to describe what anger is. After listening to responses, remind everyone that emotions are easy to feel, but may not be easy to describe to others.

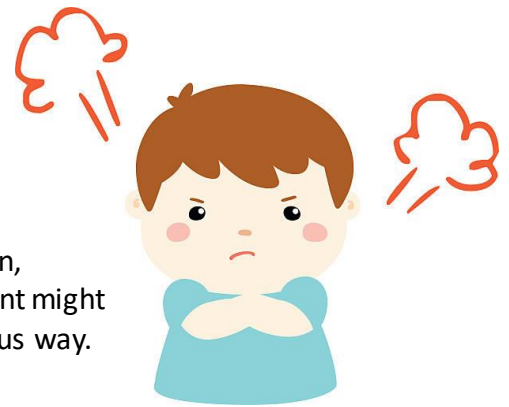
Continue to focus the discussion on anger by asking students to be open minded about this sensitive topic. Encourage the group to share their thoughts about the dangers of anger that they have seen in movies and in their own lives.

## Lesson #2: What Causes Anger?

### What to Know Before You Begin

#### Causes of Anger

As discussed previously, anger is often characterized as a secondary emotion, triggered by an initial or primary emotion. For example, fear of a car accident might cause a passenger to feel angry at the driver for driving fast or in a dangerous way. Fear, in this example, is the primary emotion and anger is secondary to it.



Fear, pain, frustration, disappointment, hopelessness, and resentment can all lead to feelings of anger. Emotional hurt from relationships, perceived failure, disappointment or lack of control may also lead to feelings of anger. Feelings of anger may arise due our interpretation and reaction to certain situations. Everyone has their own triggers for what makes them angry based on their past relationships and experiences. Common situations that invoke anger include those in which we feel threatened or attacked.

If you feel as though a certain situation is out of your control, or you have no way to change the circumstances of your situation, it is hard to stay positive.

In this way, the term 'anger iceberg' emerged, depicting anger as the emotion that is seen on the surface, with one or more emotions hid underneath. Often, the feeling we express and how is anger, but the primary emotion causing the anger is hidden. A goal of anger management is to recognize feelings of anger and take a step back to consider the root causes of your angry feelings.





## Activity

Draw the outline of an iceberg on the white board, with a small piece above the sea level line and a large portion below (just like a real iceberg!). An erasable surface would work best, but you can also adapt and use chart paper.

Write the word “Anger” in the top portion of the iceberg and another emotion or emotions, depending on your example, in the bottom portion. Tape a piece of paper over the bottom portion to hide the primary emotion on the bottom.

Start the conversation with a personal (real or not, age depending) example of a time you were angry. Focus on three points of your story: what triggered your anger, how you reacted, and what emotions were hidden in your anger.

For example, “The other day, my dog got into a bag of treats while I was gone. I felt so angry at her for making a mess and being disobedient. I raised my voice at her and sent her outside to the yard while I cleaned up. Once I was done, I realized I wasn’t mad at her. Really, I was feeling overwhelmed from a long day at work and disappointed that I couldn’t sit down and relax. My dog making a little mess was an easy problem to fix, and I learned to make sure her treat bag was on a higher shelf.”

Point the students towards the iceberg during your example. Explain that “anger” was the emotion that you showed but there were other emotions (overwhelmed and disappointed) that were hidden underneath. Pull the paper up to show the hidden emotions. Explain that often, our anger is caused by other emotions that have been sitting under the surface.

Continue the discussion by exploring a few examples together and try to find the hidden emotions. The situations below are general, providing students the opportunity to look at the situation from multiple perspectives. If students are willing, you could also ask them to share some examples. For each example, write the hidden emotions on the bottom portion of the Iceberg.

- Your older sister ate the rest of the ice cream that you wanted for dessert.
- You got your spelling test back and you saw that you spelled 4 words wrong.
- The baseball game this weekend was cancelled because of rain.
- Your family is having a lasagna for dinner and you don’t like lasagna.
- The person in front of you at the water fountain is taking a very long time getting a drink.
- You want to go home and play a video game but your family has to stop at the grocery store.
- Your brother pushes you into the pool and you don’t have your swim floats on.



## Lesson #3: Exercises: Set 1

### What To Know Before You Begin

#### **Capturing Anger**

Anger can grow much like a balloon. If too much air is added to a balloon, it might pop. Air can also be captured and released from the balloon before it pops, just like we can release anger before it hurts us or others.

#### **Why capture anger?**

Anger can lead people to say mean things, to act out irrationally and to hurt other people, whether they mean to or not. The more we control our own anger, the safer everyone is. Plus, when anger adds up, it leads to a lot of other big emotional problems, such as sadness and tiredness.

The exercises described in Lessons 3 and 4 provide students with tangible ways to capture their anger, like air in a balloon, and begin healthy anger management practices within their daily lives. Look ahead to the exercises below and choose those that are age and developmentally appropriate for your group of students. Plan to spend 5 – 10 minutes each day over the course of one or two weeks to introduce and allow students time to practice each exercise. Review the lesson details for ideas to revisit and reinforce the exercises.

#### **Activity**

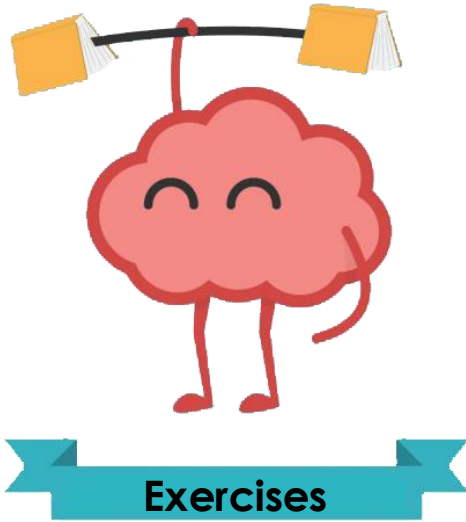
Begin by demonstrating the metaphor of anger as the air inside of a balloon. Blow up a balloon and, without tying it, ask students, “What will happen if I keep blowing air into the balloon?” (it will pop or burst). Then ask, “How would you react if the balloon popped?” Students might say they would jump because it scared them or make a loud noise and hurt their ears. Then ask students, “How would you react if I just let the air out of the balloon?” Hopefully, the students respond by saying it wouldn’t bother them or it wouldn’t make them jump.

Share the metaphor with the students and explain that the air is like anger. Anger can either be let go to pop and burst, or it can be managed and slowly released as to not hurt anyone around you, including yourself.

Explain to students that over the course of the following week or weeks that they will be practicing some exercises. These exercises will give them tools to help manage their anger so that it doesn’t burst like the balloon.



As a follow-up before moving on to the next set of exercises, spend some time discussing the exercises. Ask students to share the exercise they felt was most helpful to them and why. Ask students if they have felt angry and had the chance to use any of the skills. Ask students to write in their journals about the exercise that they found most helpful.



Look at the exercises below and depending on the age of your students, choose a few or all of the exercises to incorporate over the next week. The exercises themselves can be adapted for various age ranges. For example, instead of writing down a list, younger children can draw pictures or share with a partner. Spend 5-10 minutes each day allowing students time to practice each skill.

Throughout the week, if disruptions occur and you notice children are look or sound angry, be sure to follow through and have students practice using one of the exercises. It is important to note that, the moment of anger is not always the most appropriate time to rationalize with a child, especially a very young child. Help children to replay a situation using the skill after they have calmed down.

## 1) Self-Talk

Self-talk involves telling yourself, "I am not going to allow this to make me angry." It is the ability to coach yourself to lower your own anger and is a great way to prevent anger from becoming a problem. Remind students that they are in control of their own emotions. You can stop allowing things to make you angry by taking steps to reduce the anger.

**Exercise:** Ask students to make a list of the things that make them angry and next to each item write, "I will not allow it to make me angry."

## 2) Talk to Others

Tell people what makes you angry. Sometimes your friends and family do not know what you until you tell them in a very clear, direct way. Being bothered often times can lead one to feel angry, but it is better to prevent both, simply by talking about it.

**Exercise:** Break students into groups of two. For this activity, possibly allow students to choose a partner that they will feel comfortable with. Have students talk to each other about something that makes them angry (in general, not directed at their partner). Have students write a list of the things that make them angry and share their list with their partner. Remind students to share their list with their friends and family in which the situations occur.





### 3) Convert Anger into Problem Solving Energy

This exercise helps students work to train their brain so they can capture anger and convert it into positive problem-solving energy. Rather than focus on what makes you angry, focus on how to resolve the problem that bothers you.

**Exercise:** Break students into groups of two. Have students talk with a partner about how they can capture their anger by concentrating on a certain positive idea or a memory. Tell students to plan to think of these positive thoughts the next time they are in a situation that makes them angry. Learn what others might think of, and brainstorm together to come up with a full list of positive and discuss solutions.

### 4) Take a Deep Breath and Count

This method has been used for hundreds of years and has proven to work for people of every age. Focus on being calm and happy. Anger can get in the way of happiness if you allow it, but always remember that it is your job to control your emotions, it's not someone else's job. The moment you realize you feel angry, take a deep breath in, and slowly let the air out. Count to ten and focus on being calm. This is a simple, easy method.

**Exercise:** First, as a class, practice breathing slowly, focusing on inhaling and exhaling, and counting to ten. Then, ask students to imagine in their mind and think of a topic that makes them angry. Have students take a few slow deep breaths, and count to ten while they are breathing. Have students imagine themselves breathing slowly in that situation.

### 5) Ask Why?

Anytime we find ourselves or others feeling angry, asking why can help us to focus on the root cause of that anger and why it's happening. Why do you feel overwhelmed with anger? Is there a specific reason this situation is upsetting to you? It's not always easy to dwell on the past, especially a negative experience, but if you approach it asking why, to better yourself and control your emotions, it can be an enlightening and healing experience.

**Exercise:** Have students revisit their journals and the list of situations in which they have felt angry. Next have them step back and reflect on the situation and try to find the why. Partner students or have them discuss in small groups their "whys." Have students ask each other about the experiences to help find the core of the anger.

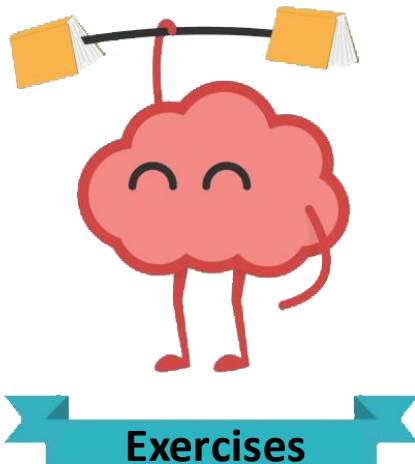


## Lesson #4: Exercises: Set 2

### Activity

Review the exercises from the previous week and explain to students that there are even more exercises that they will be practicing. Again, explain that these exercises will give them tools to help manage their anger so that it doesn't burst like the balloon.

After the class has had an opportunity to practice each exercise, ask students to work in pairs or small groups to create classroom posters explaining the different exercises. These can be as big or as small as you'd like and can serve as reminders for students to use the strategies daily. Posters can include a quick title, for example, Take a Breath and Count, a few written steps, and a visual. In the Take a Breath and Count example, students might write, "Stop, Breathe Deep, Count to 10" and draw a visual of a stop sign.



Look at the exercises below and depending on the age of your students, choose a few or all of the exercises to incorporate over the next week. The exercises themselves can be adapted for various age ranges. For example, instead of writing down a list, younger children can draw pictures or share with a partner. Spend 5-10 minutes each day allowing students time to practice each skill.

Throughout the week, if disruptions occur and you notice children are look or sound angry, be sure to follow through and have students practice using one of the exercises. It is important to note that, the moment of anger is not always the most appropriate time to rationalize with a child, especially a very young child. Help children to replay a situation using the skill after they have calmed down.



## 1) Set a Happiness Goal

Would you rather be happy, or angry? If you answered that you want to be happy, then write that down as a goal. You can't feel angry and happy at the same time, because anger gets in the way of happiness. When you feel anger, realize that it gets in the way of what you really want, and focus on being happy. Remind yourself, "I want to be happy, I don't want to be angry, so I'm just going to be happy."

### Exercise:

Writing is a powerful exercise and helps to clarify things.

- 1) Have students take out their journal or a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle.
- 2) On the left side of the page, write the word "WANT" at the top, then write out a list of all the feelings you want to experience.
- 3) On the right side of the page, write the words "DON'T WANT", then write out all the emotions you don't want to experience on the right side of the line.
- 4) The next time you are in a situation that brings you to the right side of the page, simply think of your list on the left side of the page. Focus on one of the desired emotions, then simply tell your mind to feel one.

## 2) Accept and Overcome

Things will happen that make you angry. When you prepare yourself to not be angry when bad things happen, you will overcome the anger. It's easier to control anger when you expect it, plan for it and prepare to control it.

**Exercise:** In small groups, provide students with various role-play scenarios (or ask students to describe something that might make them angry). In small groups, have students brainstorm ways they can prepare for some anger producing situations. For example, preparing for a sibling that takes their toy.

## 3) Don't Pass the Blame

Blaming someone else for how you feel is a bad habit that does not solve problems and often makes people feel that someone else is in control of their emotions, which is not true. Create a habit to call out people who use blame in their language and make it a point to not practice that bad habit. It's fine to discuss things that go wrong but discuss ways to prevent it from happening again rather than focusing on a person's mistake.

For example, you may be having lunch with a friend and they accidentally spill their drink on you. You begin to cry and say, "Now I look ridiculous, you're making me feel so embarrassed."

A better way for you to react is to take a moment to relax (take deep breaths and count to ten), then accept that a mistake was made, realize that your friend is now in a tough situation and try to make the best of the situation. Instead, you might say, "Oh my goodness, this is awful. I know you didn't spill your drink on purpose, but I'll live, crying about it won't make the situation any better and this is not the end of the world."

**Exercise:** Ask students to write in their journals about a time that they were angry with someone and placed the blame on the other person. Ask students to reflect on they could recognize that a mistake was made and suggest a solution instead.



## 4) Walk Away

Not every problem can be solved immediately and sometimes it's better to walk away from a situation until your mind has time to shrink the anger balloon, and deal with the situation in a calm way. Find a place that makes you feel calm and safe, and breathing and counting for as long as it takes to feel calm and relaxed.

**Exercise:** Ask students to break into groups of two and role play. Have the students recite a role-play and practice walking away from the situation in a calm and respectful manner.

## 5) Focus on Improvement

Many times, we grow angry at ourselves for making a mistake or for what we might interpret as failure. Recognize when you are doing this and instead, focus on ways to make meaningful improvements regarding how you handle the disappointment. Do not focus too much on the error or shortcoming, instead, think about solutions. Every negative situation we encounter can be a lesson, if we change our mindset. After an activity, focus on the things you did well rather than your mistakes. When you focus on improvement, you will improve. If you focus on your mistakes, you might create more mistakes.

**Exercise:** Create a large circle and have students share times that they have gotten angry at themselves for making a mistake or for not performing as well as they expected. Be sure to also share positive solutions to the situation. Ask, how can you improve? Can you recognize how well you did perform even if you didn't meet your own expectations? Work with the group to come up with answers to these questions. Revisit the Growth Mindset course or introduce it here.

## 6) Apologize

An apology is a powerful act of kindness. If you lost control of your emotions and yelled at someone or treated someone the wrong way while you were angry, try to make things better. Sometimes the anger balloon fills up and we need to practice lowering anger, but sometimes the balloon fills up quickly and you explode. Catch yourself as soon as possible and apologize as soon as possible. The sooner you clean up the exploded balloon, the sooner everyone will return to feeling happy and safe.

**Exercise:** Have students break into small groups and brainstorm different reasons they might need to apologize to someone in a moment of anger. Have students practice saying the apologies out loud. Some examples are listed below.

- I'm sorry, I didn't realize I was yelling. I should not have raised my voice at you.
- I apologize, next time I get angry I'll let you know that something is bothering me before it turns into a problem.
- I'm sorry I said you were cheating. I was feeling jealous because you beat me in the game. I don't really think you were cheating.



## Quick Quiz

1. How can we best describe anger?

- A.) The opposite of being happy
- B.) An emotion that always causes aggressive behavior
- C.) A natural emotion that is commonly a reaction to a different emotion
- D.) An emotion that should be avoided at all costs

2. What feelings can make us feel angry?

- A.) Hurt Feelings
- B.) Hopelessness
- C.) Fear
- D.) All of the above

3. How is anger like the air in a balloon?

- A.) We can control how much anger we let in and how much we let out.
- B.) We have to just let anger float away and forget about it.
- C.) If we ignore anger long enough, it will fade away.
- D.) It always takes a long time for anger to build up.

### Teacher Feedback

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content above.  
Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, constructive criticism.  
Email your feedback to: [info@mylearningtools.org](mailto:info@mylearningtools.org)