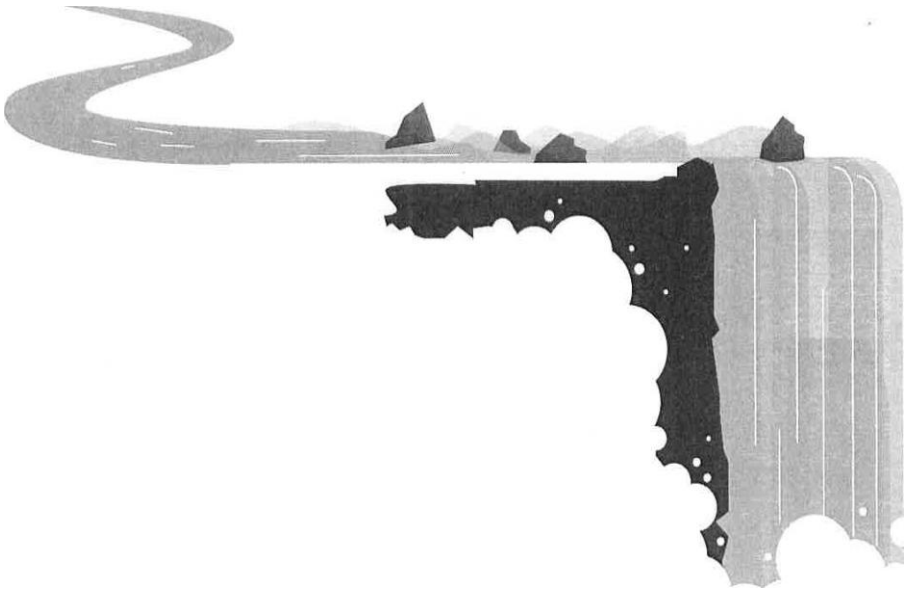
The Angry River

Getting angry and losing our temper is a bit like being pushed into a river. We'll call this the Anger River.

If we don't get out quick, we find ourselves getting swept along into deeper and deeper water, then into the rough and choppy white water that hurtles us right over the edge of the waterfall.

What we need are some strategies to stop us falling into the Anger River in the first place (or to get us out when we are already in it!).



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Keeping out of the river

Stress and anger are closely linked. The more stressed we feel, the more likely we are to lose our temper.

We can reduce the likelihood of falling into the Anger River by being aware of our stress level and keeping it as low as possible. Some things will increase stress, while others reduce it.

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Family Solutions™

Your Solution, Your Way

Put a cross in column A next to any stressors that apply to you and put a tick in column B next to any strategies you use to try and combat it

Stressor	A	Solution	B
Taking on too much.		Learning to say no.	
Discussing important or difficult issues when tired.		Not having these conversations just before bedtime or after a hard day	
Being cooped up at home all day.		Getting out during the day at least once.	
Feeling tired and lethargic.		Doing some exercise, even if it's scrubbing the floor or washing the car.	
Children whingeing or fighting		Taking time out, e.g. if necessary, sticking the kids in front of the TV for a short while	
Having too much spinning around in your head.		Finding someone you can talk to.	
Always feeling there is too much to do and no time to do it.		Having some 'me time' without feeling guilty about it, even if it's only having a cup of tea or a bath.	
Not feeling in control.		Finding a safe space where you will not be interrupted, even if it's only for a few minutes.	
Feeling something isn't fair.		Listening to relaxing music.	

Are there more crosses than ticks on your chart? Try experimenting with new strategies and see if they help.

Strategies like these can help us reduce stress in the short-term only. If you constantly feel bleak or suffer a low mood for more than 14 days without any relief, then you should talk to your GP as you may need additional help.

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Recognising when we are in the river

The next stage in the process is to recognise that we are angry - sometimes this happens without us consciously realising it. At such times our anger can get worse because we haven't dealt with it straight away.
So how can we know when we are angry? Well, we need to spot the signs.

When something triggers our anger, the emotional part of our brain that is very quick to react sends a message to our adrenal gland to increase the level of adrenaline in our body.

We call this the fight or flight mechanism. It gives us lots of energy, but it can also cause some uncomfortable physical reactions like sweating, going red, a dry mouth, or tense muscles in the face, hands, or chest.

These are warning signs that will help us recognise when we are in the Anger River. We might, at first, recognise them more easily in other people than we see them in ourselves.

Tick the anger warning signs below that you experience yourself. Write any others you have in the box.

- Shaking
- Crying
- Churning stomach
- Pounding heart
- Headache
- Feeling strong or weak
- Feeling hot
- Wanting to run or fight
- Tense hands, face or legs

- Dry mouth
- Others :

Getting out of the river

The way we think about the event (i.e. what we tell ourselves about it) makes a big difference to how angry we get.

Negative automatic thoughts

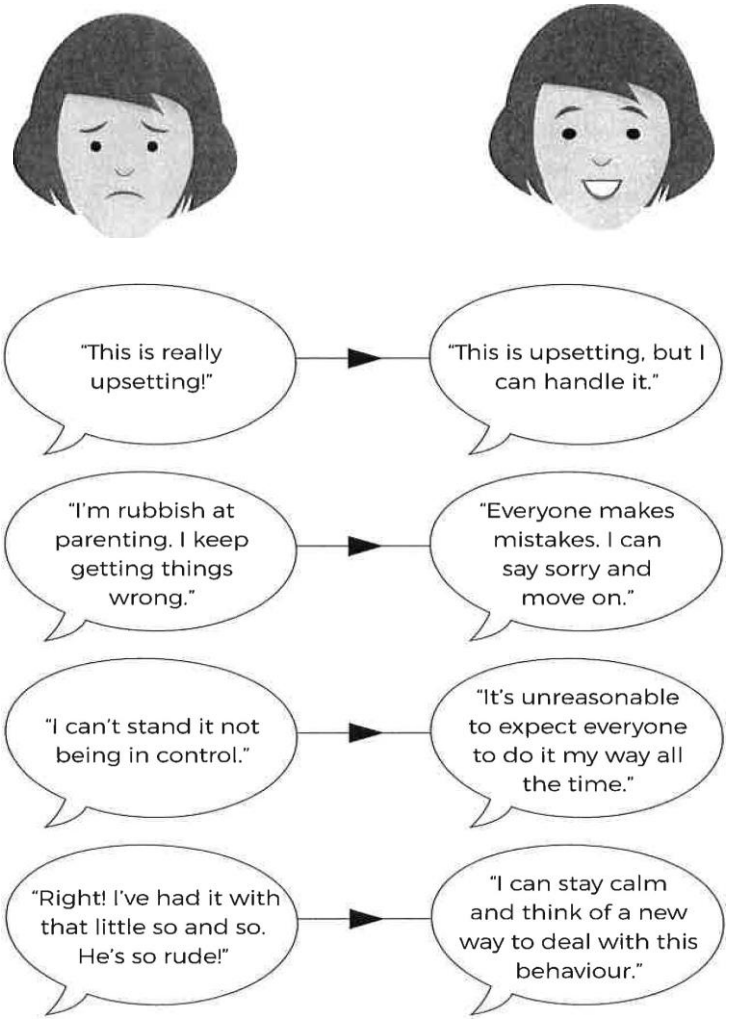
This stressed out mum has been on a shopping trip. Her child is kicking off. A passing stranger starts tut-tutting.

What might the mum be saying to herself in this situation?

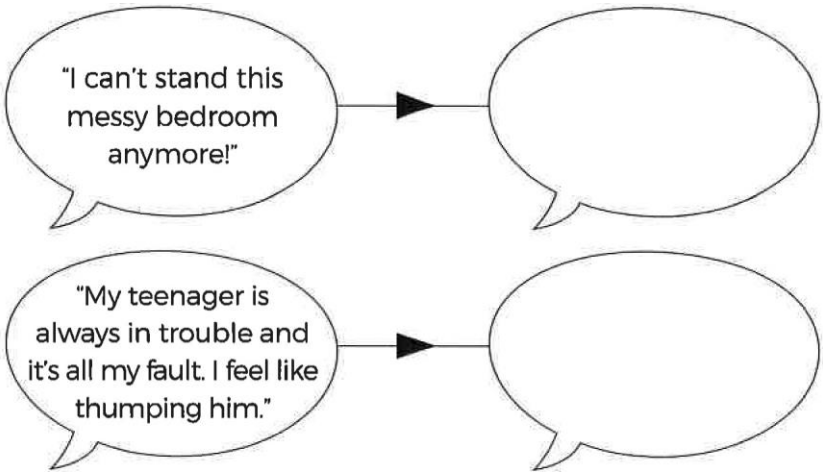
These thoughts are examples of negative automatic thoughts. At the start of the session we talked about cutting a new path through the jungle - these negative thoughts are like the old wide jungle path that we talked about earlier. It's easier to follow that familiar, easy path than battle to cut a new one through the jungle. But the trouble is that old path leads down to a swamp of anger, despair and regret.

Positive self-talk

If the mum can change her negative thoughts to more positive ones, she stands a greater chance of staying reasonably calm. This is called positive self-talk. It can be tricky to do at first, but it becomes easier with practice.



What positive self-talk can the parent use here?



It's sometimes easier to think of something to say if you imagine what you would suggest to a friend in this situation.

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What to do when we have gone over the edge

So it's all got too much and we've really lost our temper in terms of the Anger River, we've hit the rapids and gone right over the waterfall!.

The damage has been done, but there are things we can do to repair it.

Say sorry - for example, "I was out of order." It's not always easy to apologise, but it's a very important skill and we need to model it to our children.

With younger children you could say, "I'm sorry I was so cross. What you did was naughty up to here" (show level with your hand), "but I got cross up to here" (show a higher level).

Don't expect your child to make you feel better when you have just lost it with them. You are the adult and they are the child.

Give yourself and your child plenty of time before trying to resolve the conflict.

Extract from 'Time Out for Parents - Handling Anger in the Family'