

# ANGER AND TS

IN ADDITION TO TICS, MANY PEOPLE WITH TOURETTE SYNDROME (TS) EXPERIENCE OTHER CHALLENGES AND SYMPTOMS. THIS CAN INCLUDE ANGRY AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOURS, WHICH MAY CAUSE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS FOR PEOPLE WITH TS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS FACTSHEET LOOKS AT WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT ANGER IN PEOPLE WITH TS AND CONSIDERS STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT THAT MAY HELP.

Anger is a natural emotion that can guide our responses to certain situations. However, if uncontrolled, anger can take over and have negative consequences on ourselves and the people around us. These strong responses may manifest as disruptive behaviour or anger outbursts, sometimes called 'rage attacks'.

Often affected by having other co-occurring conditions, such as attention disorders or anxiety. These can sometimes cause more strain than the tics themselves and therefore treatment for other difficulties could be helpful indirectly to anger problems.

Anger symptoms can deeply affect people with TS and is worthy of understanding, empathy and support. Occasionally or, once something difficult has happened, is something everyone can experience. However, when these feelings persist for a long time, it could be a sign of depression.

## WHY IS ANGER COMMON FOR PEOPLE WITH TS?

Anger can result from being in a situation or environment where the same triggers occur repeatedly. Anger outbursts in people with TS are usually:



Sudden and quick, rapidly increasing to a peak



Triggered by uncomfortable physical, mood or thought sensations – more likely to occur when the person is tired



Most likely to occur at home and directed towards family, causing disruption on family life



Followed by a feeling of relief



Different people have different triggers



People are usually remorseful for hurtful things they have said or done when they were angry. →



Research has found certain thought patterns and feelings that can contribute to anger outbursts. People with TS may struggle with:

- Rigid thinking
- Changes in planned activities
- High frustration levels
- Feeling overstimulated and overwhelmed
- Feeling embarrassed

These traits can make anger outbursts more likely to occur and difficult to control in situations that may seem less important to other people.

## DID YOU KNOW?

*It is common for people with TS to have co-occurring conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or anxiety disorder. Co-occurring conditions can also contribute to heightened emotions, which may increase anger outbursts.*



## THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

There are various ways in which the family can support people with TS who struggle with anger:

- **Understanding:** Take time to understand your loved one's TS and any co-occurring condition(s), especially attention and learning disorders
- **Reduce triggers:** As much as possible, reduce or limit triggers associated with anger outbursts
- **Build inner resilience:** Develop strong parental and relationship skills, providing stability and predictability in the family
- **Self- and family-care:** Encourage your loved one with TS and any family members to take regular time for themselves to decompress
- **Exercise and relaxation:** Support your family member to be healthy, exercise often and take time away from stressful or busy activities



## WAYS TO KEEP COOL AND MANAGE ANGER IN TS

Although anger outbursts are common for people with TS, you don't need to accept it as something that is 'out of your control'. Drawing on clinical and community experience, there are a variety of strategies and approaches to help manage and control anger:

### GETTING TO KNOW YOUR/ YOUR LOVED ONE'S TS AND ANGER TRIGGERS

- Define personal strengths (e.g. the person is good at explaining information) and acknowledge difficulties (e.g. but they really struggle with handwriting/concentrating)
- Identify triggers of anger outbursts (e.g. certain situations such as losing something or being asked to stop a favoured task)
- Keep a diary/note on your phone to help identify patterns of triggering places or situation

### CREATING CALMING ENVIRONMENTS

- Increase structure and predictability of events and day-to-day life
- Try to reduce the physical and emotional effect of tics where possible
- If you are the parent or loved one of someone with TS, build the skills to show calming behaviour yourself (e.g. deep breathing, leaving frustrating situations, self-care)
- Making available a 'chill-out' place or plan (e.g. space in a person's bedroom or recreational place, such as on a trampoline)

## RESPONDING WHEN ANGER BUILDS

- Go to the 'chill-out' place, if possible
- Try distractions – use calming music, encourage a favourite activity or hobby, count to ten slowly
- Allow 'time-out' that the person chooses to do, such as go into the garden, another room
- Leave time for anger to pass, avoid quarrelling or lengthening discussions, maybe as a carer or partner, you leave the room yourself
- Positively reinforce the time without anger outbursts and try not to (accidentally) reinforce the outbursts
- Acknowledge and reward positive steps toward controlling anger outbursts, even when not handled perfectly (e.g. becoming aware of feeling angry and taking time out, overcoming unfamiliar situations)

## BUILDING GOOD HABITS

- Prioritise good sleep
- Get exercise every day
- Eat healthily
- Build in time and space for relaxing
- Create routines that encourage feelings of calm
- Choose friends who make you feel good

## TAKING TIME TO TALK

- When everything is calm, talk through emotions and situations
- Build in regular check-in time, to talk about tics and any co-existing difficulties in a healthy and supportive way

## SEEKING SUPPORT

- Consider working with a therapist who can help understand the situations that tend to be associated with anger and develop cognitive/behavioural strategies to cope with angry feelings
- Join a TS support group or forum to connect with other families and people with TS – have a look on our **Find Support** pages



# HOW TO ACCESS TALKING THERAPIES TO HELP WITH ANGER OUTBURSTS

Talking therapies for anger are usually practiced by **clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, nurses and other professionals. NHS referral to a Clinical Psychologist is mainly from professional sources including hospital consultants, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, nurses, physiotherapists and GPs.**

The Tourettes Action's **Behavioural Therapist List** includes UK clinicians working in both the NHS and privately who may offer talking therapy for anger.

If you wish to access a Clinical Psychologist privately then it is advised that you request a referral from a qualified health professional (such as your GP) or make contact with a clinician directly using a website which lists only qualified members, such as [www.achipp.org.uk](http://www.achipp.org.uk) or [abcp.com](http://abcp.com) who may have a specialist interest in working with people with tics as required.

## SUMMARY

Everyone experiences anger, but people with TS may struggle with intense and sometimes frequent anger outbursts. Although common, there are strategies for people with TS and their families that can help control and contain anger outbursts. It is important to find routine and calm that works for you and your family and to seek support when needed.



## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Mind (2025). *Understanding anger – for 11–18 year olds*. Available at [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk). Accessed January 2026.

NHS inform (2025). *Problems with anger self-help guide*. Available at [www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot). Accessed January 2026.

Whitehouse, E and Pudney, W. A. *Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger*. New Society Publishers, 1996.

Plummer, DM. *Helping Children to Manage Anger*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2022.

Hills G. *Second Chances: A young person's guide to emotional resilience*. ICC Press, 2015.

*A Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Uttom Chowdhury and Tara Murphy

*The Tourettes Survival Kit: Tools for Young Adults with Tics* by Tara Murphy and Damon Millar

**Author:** Tara Murphy, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, London

### TOURETTES ACTION

The Meads Business Centre  
19 Kingsmead  
Farnborough, Hampshire  
GU14 7SR

Registered charity number: 1003317

W // [www.tourettes-action.org.uk](http://www.tourettes-action.org.uk)  
E // [help@tourettes-action.org.uk](mailto:help@tourettes-action.org.uk)

