

Handling Strong Emotions at Work

Respond rather than react when anger, frustration or anxiety take hold

Everyone feels frustration, anger, anxiety and disappointment at work. Emotions are information: they tell us something matters. The difficulty comes when we act on them before we have thought, and say or send something we cannot take back.

The aim is not to stop feeling. It is to create a gap between the trigger and the response.

IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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Know your triggers and signs

EMOTION	TYPICAL TRIGGERS FOR ME	EARLY SIGNS IN MY BODY AND BEHAVIOUR
Frustration or anger		
Anxiety or fear		
Disappointment or sadness		
Embarrassment or shame		

Common triggers include feeling stuck, being treated unfairly, things not going as expected, criticism, and a sense of losing control or status. Early signs might be a tight jaw, a hot face, a racing heart, typing faster or going quiet.

Pause, check, choose

Pause

Notice the signs. Take a slow breath, step away, or delay your reply.

Name it

Put a word to what you feel. "This is frustration."

Check the facts

What actually happened? What am I assuming?
What else could explain it?

Choose

What response would I be glad of tomorrow?

Checking the facts is a technique from dialectical behaviour therapy. It works because strong emotions tend to fill gaps with the worst interpretation.

Try it on a recent situation.

WHAT HAPPENED (FACTS ONLY)	WHAT I ASSUMED	OTHER EXPLANATIONS	WHAT I WILL DO

Good rules of thumb:

- Do not send an email written in anger. Draft it, then wait an hour.
- Venting repeatedly tends to strengthen anger rather than release it. Talk it through with someone, then move on to what you can do.
- If you are dealing with someone you find difficult, stay courteous and stick to the work. You can be assertive without being hostile.