

Anger

Anger is a common, but often stigmatized, emotion. It is a natural response when there are **things that feel hurtful, harmful, or unfair**.

related emotions: irritability, impatience, frustration, rage, fear, sadness, grief

What it feels like

Out of all the emotions we experience in the NICU, **anger is one of the most complicated and problematic**. It's understandable if there are times when we **feel like we've reached our limits**. But there's no place safe to direct our anger. Who can we be angry with? Being angry at ourselves isn't helpful. Being angry at providers feels dangerous. Parents and partners need each other. And we can't be angry at our babies.

Why you might be feeling it

Being in the NICU is stressful - and it can bring out complicated emotions. We know that anger is a normal, expected response to stress - and most parents feel it.

After birth, **pregnancy hormones plummet and stress hormones rise**. It's meant to help us protect our babies.

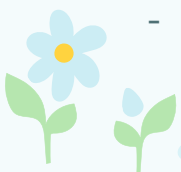
Other people are caring for our babies - while we're grateful for the care that the NICU team provides, we lose some of our roles as our babies' parents and caregivers



Anger is
loaded with
information
and energy



- Audre Lorde



What it looks like

- **Losing patience** - getting frustrated more easily or feeling impatient with those around us
- **Being critical** - blaming ourselves or others
- **Feeling resentful** - feeling like people who have "normal" pregnancies and births don't understand
- **Becoming angry, defensive, or regretful** - feeling upset, guilty, or ashamed of how we're reacting

How common is It?



- **All parents** feel **some frustration, anger, and resentment**.
- **Many of us** feel **agitated, exhausted, angry, and out of control** sometimes.
- **Some of us** are surprised by **overwhelming feelings of anger** and **uncontrollable rage**.

4-7-8 Breathing Tool

- **Inhale** through your **nose** for **4** seconds.
- **Hold your breath** for **7** seconds.
- **Exhale** through your **mouth** for **8** seconds

Things that contribute to anger

Anger is often made worse by past experiences - and not just current stressors.

Trauma - feeling overwhelmed by what's happening and unprepared to cope with it

Grief - our hopes and expectations have been violated - and we've lost things that are important to us - that's not fair

Powerlessness - we feel like we can't protect our baby & family and keep them safe, we're not able to contribute the way we want to

Uncertainty - things are unpredictable, unknowable, and often unfair

Neglect - our basic needs are not being met

Disrespectful treatment - caregivers, medical providers, or family members might ignore our needs or disregard our feelings

Things that help

Getting enough sleep - being tired and exhausted can make us more vulnerable to strong emotions and "remove our filter"

Moving our bodies - we don't need to go for a long run or do an exhausting workout (although you can), we just need to get some of that energy out of our system

Naming it - When you feel the anger coming on, stop, name it, and pay attention to what it feels like

Self-compassion - being curious about the anger and rage, and not judgmental about why it's there

Medications and therapies that can help

- SSRIs, SNRIs, and mood stabilizers
- cognitive restructuring and reframing
- Psychodynamic therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

Talking about ANGER

Anger is a natural part of grief and loss. And **most parents feel it** - but how we express it matters. It can be helpful to **talk through our feelings of anger** with someone we trust and who can **accept and tolerate our frustration**. When people around us get angry, we show them empathy.