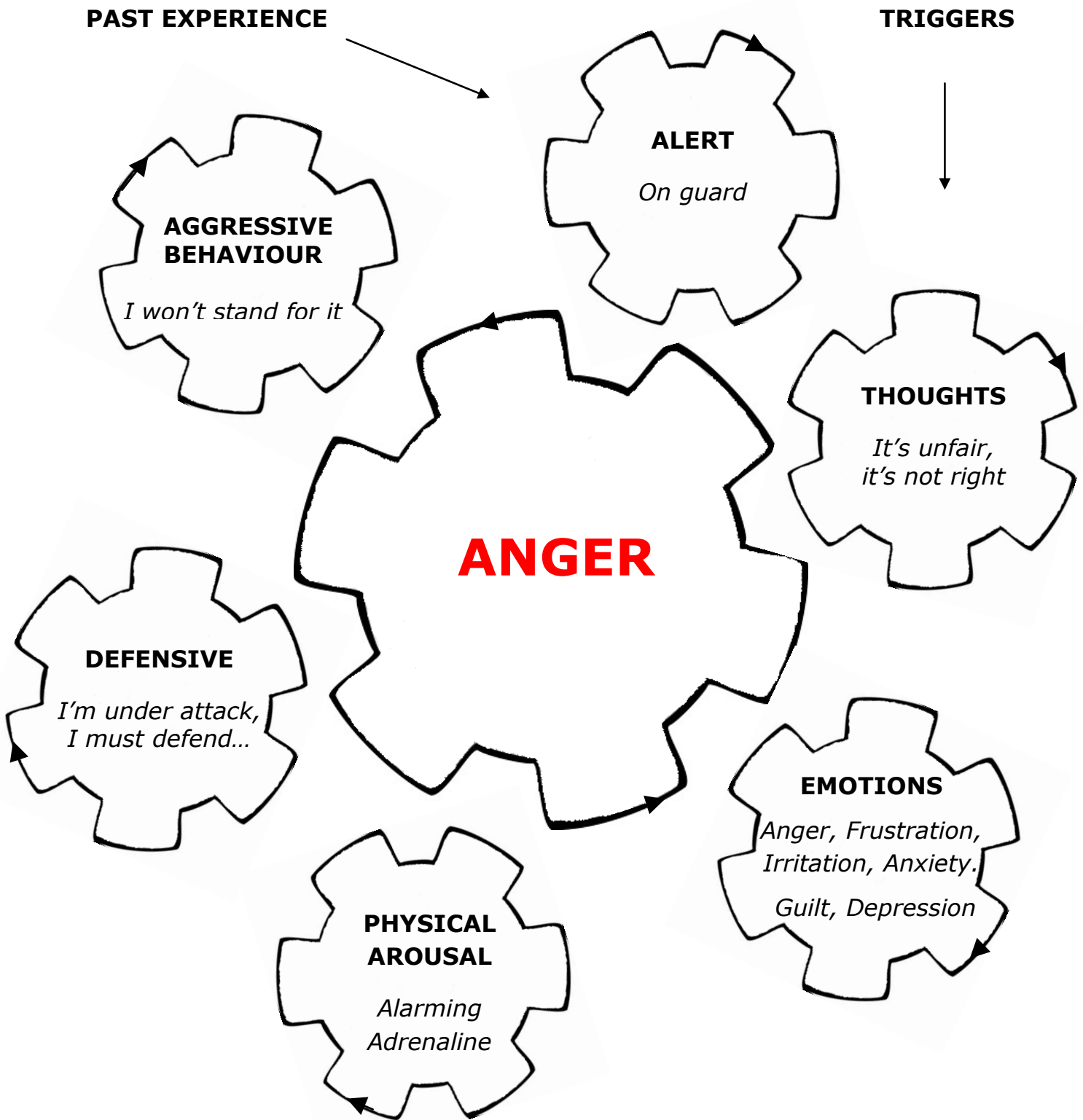


Vicious Cogs of Anger



'Cogs' is a variation of the 'Vicious Flower': The main central cog may be the distressing emotion, or an unhelpful belief. Smaller cogs are the 'vicious cycles' which keep the central cog going – and help maintain the problem.

Anger is a very energising and motivating emotion. It's a natural and normal response to feeling threatened, or thinking something is unjust, unfair. Sometimes we're right to think and respond in that way. It can be a very appropriate and healthy response. For instance, we see a crime being committed, someone being attacked, we might instinctively react and rush to help the person being attacked, and stop the attacker.

However, there are times when, perhaps due to our past experiences, something around us, a noise, the way someone looks at us, the way someone says something, a gesture – anything – triggers this response. We can mis-interpret situations and believe others are having a go at us, that we're being criticised or attacked in some way, which then starts the angry cycle.

We can get into the habit of responding this way, and it can be a hard habit to shake. This vicious cycle though, is a cycle – and we can break cycles, particularly at the points where we think and act: we can learn to think and act differently.

ALERT: On guard

The super-scanner's on high-sensitivity setting, alert for anger-provoking situations.

- *We can learn to be aware of, and turn down that sensitivity setting.*

THOUGHTS

Tendency to add meaning to situations or in interactions with others. Perceive injustice or harmful intent. Thoughts may include: It's unfair, I'm being badly treated, Others are being badly treated, They're wrong, I'm under attack, I won't stand for it, They're having a go at me. There may also be anxiety-provoking thoughts about what might happen.

- *Use the STOPP acronym: **S**TOPP, **T**ake a Breath, **O**bserve – what am I reacting to? What am I thinking and feeling? What's pushing my buttons here? **P**ull back and put in some perspective: Is there another way of looking at this? Am I misreading this situation? How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months time? What would I tell a friend in this situation? **P**ractise what works – do the best thing, for you, for others, for the situation. What would help most? (consider both short and long term consequences)*

EMOTIONS

Anger, rage, frustration, irritation, anxiety? Depression, guilt, shame can follow the anger cycle, particularly as consequence of behaviours impulsively done in anger.

PHYSICAL AROUSAL

Adrenaline is the body's alarm system. It energises and motivates our bodies, providing a physical urge and readiness to deal with the situation in a physical way.

- *STOPP and Take a breath. Focus on your breathing, perhaps imagining you have a balloon in your belly, inflating the balloon on the inbreath, and deflating on the outbreath.*

DEFENSIVE

An automatic response when we believe we're being threatened, criticised or attacked in some way.

- *STOPP! Take a Breath, Observe, Pull Back, Practise what works.*

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The body's energising and motivating physical response means we're more likely to respond physically. Raised voice, sarcasm, shout, scream, put down, criticise, confront, tone of voice, facial expression, clench fists, make lots of noise, stamp feet, urge to hit out, violence, fight, harm others or self, other self-destructive behaviours, use drink or drugs.

- *STOPP and Take a breath. Practise what works: What's the best thing to do, right here and now? How can I change what I normally do? What would help most? What will I look back on and be pleased that I did? (Sometimes it might just be to walk away, and return later when calm).*