

# I Just Get so ...ANGRY!



## Discussion Guide and Questions for Parents and Carers

We appreciate that some parents and carers may not feel as if they are well equipped enough to discuss some of the issues in **I Just Get So...Angry!**, especially if the ideas are very new to them.

We would say, thank your mind for that thought, make space for those feelings – and do what is important to you!

The following questions are not prescriptive, but provide some guidance as to the kind of things a parent/carer *could* talk about with their teen. Some answers have been provided, too, where you may need to prompt. These are not the only answers – young people are creative, and may see things that we didn't.

These questions are best discussed *after the story has been read through at least once in its entirety*. We recommend, however, that you don't just go through each question one after another! Ask your teen to pick a page/picture that caught their attention in some way, or pick a page that you think is important - and let the discussion flow from there.

There are some **challenges** for you, the parent or carer, too – the purpose of these is to help children and adolescents understand the universality of some of these issues. Any question with **challenge** at the start is for you to answer.

Hopefully you will find these questions open up some interesting and useful conversations between you and your teen.

Of course, if at any time you become concerned about what your teen is saying, or if you feel that there are issues coming up that are more complex, we recommend that you seek advice and support from a professional- either your local doctor, the counsellor at your teen's school, or another mental health professional.

***These discussion points are not intended to replace therapy for more complex mental health issues.***

**Page 5** – When you feel angry, do you have any thoughts like these?

[Often, seeing thoughts written down like this helps teens recognise which ones they share. If they say they are unaware of their thoughts at such times, that provides an avenue for



further investigation – you could ask them to start paying more attention to their thoughts at such times and try writing them down, or drawing them]

**Challenge:** When I'm angry I think things like \_\_\_\_\_

**Page 6** – What does Andy first think of when he wakes up? Why the sudden change to “everything sucked?”

[He remembers previous birthdays that seemed much happier. He makes a comparison with where he is now and starts dwelling on what he thinks is wrong. This is a very human ability – to change our mood (often for the worse) with a single thought]

**Page 8-15** – What is Andy doing on these pages?

[He is acting based on his anger, which is causing others to react to him in turn. To him, it seems like everyone is making things worse for him, but it is his angry behaviour that is triggering it]

**Page 17** – What does this page show?

[Andy's view of the world is different to what is really happening. He is so caught up in his head that his perception of the world is skewed – everyone seems more hostile. This is also reinforcing his angry, defensive mindset]

**Page 23** - When confronted by the overwhelming Beast, Andy tries the two things we all normally fall back on: try to fight it, or try to get away from it. Can you think of times you have tried either of these in a difficult situation?

**Challenge:** A time I tried to fight/escape from a situation was \_\_\_\_\_. The effect was \_\_\_\_\_.

**Page 27-29** – What is causing the rocks to give way more? What is the answer?

[Rushing to act without thinking, acting impulsively – this often makes things worse, buries us deeper in trouble. The answer is to slow down and pay attention to your surroundings, then you might be able to see a way out of the situation]

**Page 33-34** – What do we see happening on these pages?

[Andy summons the Beast by getting angry again. His anger starts to affect his behaviour – he starts to get aggressive towards the sea eagle, thus unleashing the Beast]

**Page 36** – What do you think the armour represents?

[The armour represents the way Andy has been living his life. He thinks he needs it. He has been trying to protect himself from being hurt, but all he has done is weigh himself down]



**Page 42** – The eagle says that Andy has been hurt. Andy thinks he means his hand, but the bird points to his chest. Why?

[The “hurt” is actually the emotional pain Andy is carrying around]

**Page 43** - Where has this hurt come from?

[A range of sources: his parents fighting when he was younger, his father leaving, arguing with his girlfriend, best friend and mother, feeling jealous when his sister was born]

Notice Andy’s reaction when the sea eagle tells him the only way to heal the wound is take the armour off.

[Andy feels great distress. He doesn’t think he can handle acknowledging all those hurts. But by carrying them around, and not dealing with them, they are still having an unpleasant effect on him anyway]

**Page 44** – The sea eagle suggests that anger is easier to express than a lot of other unpleasant emotions. What do you think? Do you think it is easier for guys in particular to express anger rather than anxiety or other unpleasant feelings?

**Page 45** – Why is it worth facing up to the hidden pain?

[because it is there anyway, and acknowledging it is a step towards having choices about how you act, rather than feeling like you are driven to act in certain ways by how you are feeling]

**Page 48** – Andy gets blinded by the fog of his thoughts. They get in the way and stop him seeing things clearly, so he has no idea whether the best choice is to keep going, or change direction. Do any of his thoughts look familiar? Do you have some different thoughts that get in the way for you sometimes?

**Challenge:** Some thoughts that I get bothered by sometimes are \_\_\_\_\_

**Page 50** – Andy starts to get angry when he thinks the bird is going to suggest that he should just think positive thoughts, or stop thinking these unpleasant thoughts. Have you ever received advice like this? It is pretty common. The problem is that we don’t have that kind of control over our minds: a lot of thoughts just seem to pop up on their own.

**Page 51-52** – Why not try this technique? Pick a thought that bothers you and add “I notice I am having the thought that...” to the start of it. You may notice the thought doesn’t seem so bad. If you don’t notice any difference, don’t worry – different techniques work for different people. Sometimes you need practise, too.

**Challenge:** (Have a go, too, with one of your thoughts)



**Page 54-55** – But what if the thought is true?? Then we can apply the question about whether or not it is helpful, whether it helps us do the things we really care about. What extra thoughts is Andy adding on to his true painful thought? Do you ever add extra thoughts that make things worse?

**Page 57-58** – This ability to notice what we are thinking, and not get hooked by unhelpful thoughts, is called ‘defusion’: it means changing from a situation where it is like we are welded on to our thoughts, to having a gap between them and us, so we can see them better for what they are, and notice the effect they have on our behaviour. It frees us up so we can choose how to act. There are many different ways of practising defusion, limited only by your imagination. Here, the sea eagle suggests seeing your thoughts like fog, and letting them drift around your ankles.

Can you come up with your own version (eg thoughts like waves that wash past you, thoughts like clothes you can hang back in the wardrobe)?

**Challenge:** Come up with your own defusion activity to try with your own thoughts.

**Page 61-63** – “Everyone’s got their own mountain to climb” – what does that mean? [Climbing a mountain is a metaphor for trying to get where we want in life, to be who we want to be. It can be tough, and not always enjoyable. But approaching it in an open manner can be helpful]

**Page 64** - Do you give yourself credit for how far you have come? What you have done? That you can choose how you want to be in your relationships and don’t have to be driven by your past?

**Page 66-68** – Here is a different take on anger – the cold kind that cuts us off from others. Does this kind of anger get in the way in your life?

**Page 69-72** – How does the icy lake symbolise Andy’s view of his relationships with others? [Even though others are on the ice, he doesn’t trust it. He doesn’t trust his relationships either. Deep down, he worries about people rejecting him. But the very nature of being close to others means having to accept vulnerability – it is a part of being human]

**Page 73-74** – Here is a tricky idea, because it is different to what a lot of people think. A lot of people, like Andy, say they can’t help but act a certain way because of their anger. What do you think? The sea eagle suggests that we can’t help feeling angry, but we can still choose what we do with our hands, feet and mouth – basically, we can use them in the service of the anger, or we can choose to use them based on what we want to be about. How about you? Can you think of sometimes you have used them in one way, when you could have chosen differently?



**Challenge:** How about you?

**NB** We should add here that there is nothing “bad” about anger itself. It is a normal emotion, part of everybody’s life. In fact, anger can be incredibly useful, giving us the determination to take necessary action. It is the actions we take when angry that are either helpful or unhelpful.

**Ask your teen what they think – is anger “bad”? Can they think of some examples when it is useful?**

**Page 80-84** – What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of family member? What kind of friend? What kind of student? What could you do more of, or less of, to be more like that?

Why not draw up a life circle like Andy, and fill it in. You can add as many extra lines as you like, if there are more domains of your life you would like to include (eg work, health, spirituality, leisure). You can mark on the line to show how far towards the outside of the circle (‘10/10’) you feel you are, how close to living that aspect of life the way you want. If you feel like the space you have drawn is small, that’s ok – now that you are aware of that, you can choose to make some changes.

Which is a domain you would like to see move out one more step?

What can you do to help that happen (pick an action you can take – make it as specific as possible, rather than general statements like ‘be nicer’)

**Page 85** – now that you have chosen a life domain to act on, and some actions you can take, let’s prepare for the things your mind might throw up that get in your way. Can you think of some thoughts/feelings/urges/sensations that may come up? Have a look at Andy’s, and see if you think yours would be similar or different.

The next important thing to do is remember that none of these has to act like a STOP sign – they might make it harder, but you can still choose to take the action you want. It may help to keep asking this question: *What would it be useful to remind myself of when the going gets tough?*

You may have a similar answer to Andy – that it is in line with his value of caring about his relationships. What value are you acting in the service of, by taking the action?

**Page 88** – Why is this page included?



[This page is here because all of us – Tim and Sandra included – are human and make mistakes. The key is to notice when you have gone off course and gently bring yourself back in line with what you want to be about]

**Page 92-93** – Does it change things, when you see what the Beast is hiding inside?

[We hope you might feel some compassion for it: that’s the same compassion we would like you to show towards yourself]

**Page 94-95** – Why does Andy have to go through the swamp? What is it? What’s his reaction to it?

[To head in the direction he wants, symbolised by the last mountain. The swamp represents all the unpleasant things that come up when he tries to do something important. He doesn’t want to experience them, which is only natural, but if he isn’t willing to make contact with them, he can’t move forward.]

**Page 96** – Can you think of something in your life you would like to try, but that fears or worries have been holding you back from, because you haven’t known if you will be able to succeed or not? Could you, like Andy, take some action, even if you don’t know how it is going to turn out, with the idea that by making the attempt you are living in line with your values?

**Challenge:** How about coming up with something yourself, too? Maybe you could both make a plan to try something new together.

**Page 99-100** – People make mistakes. They do things and say things they regret. We have all been hurt by the actions of others. We have a choice – we can hang on to our anger and resentment, and stew in it, or we can give ourselves permission to let go and get on with our lives. This doesn’t mean forgetting the past, or pretending it was ok to be treated that way – this is actually a gift to ourselves. Are there people in your life you would be willing to forgive, so that you can move forward? If you are unsure, maybe you could imagine what it would be like if you let go of that anger, what life might be like... However, if now isn’t the time, that is ok – just keep the idea in the back of your mind for when it does seem right.

**Page 101-102** – You’ve made some mistakes too, because you are human. What if you forgave yourself? What if you gave yourself permission to get on with your life?

Why not try your own version of the “compassion parade”? Bring to mind the people who mean the most to you (you can add pets, too, if you want), and imagine them standing with you. *This is a useful activity at any time you are feeling stressed or uncertain. It can be a source of strength and comfort.*



**Page 103** – What does it mean that when Andy gets to the top of the mountain, and he sees more mountains and rivers and forests ahead of him?

[Life goes on. We achieve one goal, and another takes its place. Living by our values is an ongoing action. And life is full and rich – there are not just mountains to climb. There are easy patches. Fun patches. It is ever changing.]

**Page 104-105** – When Andy first met the Beast, he thought he had to fight it or escape it: what did he really have to do?

[Accept it]

If you were going to stop reacting, and start acting instead, what would you do?

**Page 106** – What is the difference with Andy on this page? What is the same?

[He still feels angry – he hasn't magically got rid of the feeling. But he slows down, thinks about the person he wants to be, and acts in line with his values. There are no guarantees how others will treat you – he may or may not get back together with his girlfriend – but we give ourselves the best opportunity.]

**Page 108** – So what do we see him choosing to do now? What effect do you think that has?

[He acts with kindness towards his mother and Erin, and they react accordingly. He also spends some time with his dog, who is important to him. As a result, he is feeling better too]

**Page 109** – It may or may not be your birthday – maybe there is a present you can give yourself anyway. Maybe you can give yourself a life worth living, in which you can get on with what matters to you, no matter what.