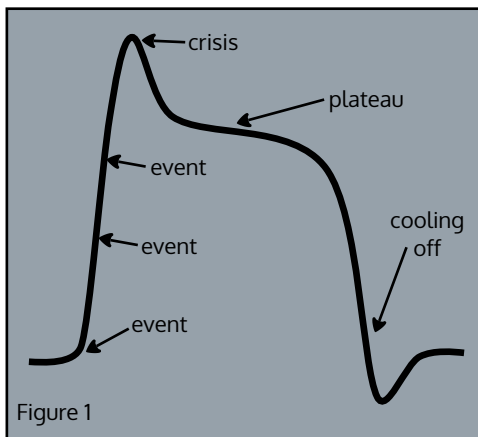


Understanding Anger

One of the first steps to gaining more control when angry is understanding it. People I have seen found this model helpful in making sense of their anger. It is based on Breakwell's 5 stage model (1).

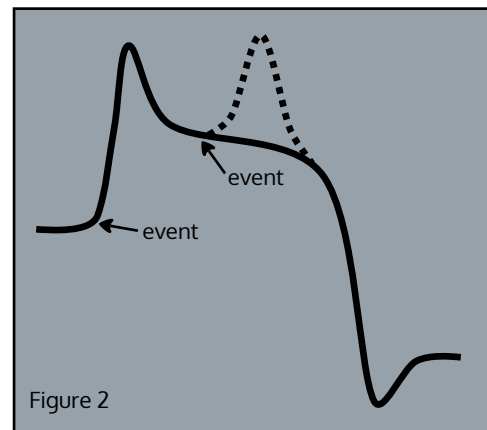


This model represents how we typically react; however each of us is an individual so your reaction may not quite look like this. The black line represents the level of anger, and **Figure 1** is how someone will react during a prolonged event such as an argument. The person starts initially at a low level, and responds to an,

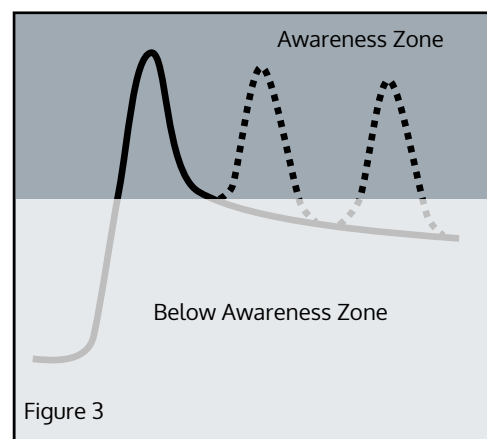
- **event.** Anger is *always* a response to something, and it is *not the event itself*; it is the *meaning we make of the event* that gets us angry. People can get angry at internal events such as thoughts or memories as well as external ones such as being shouted at. With each event the level of anger rises until,
- **crisis.** The person loses control. How someone behaves in crisis is very individual to them, and will usually last from a few seconds to a minute or two. They then,
- **plateau.** In this stage we are still very angry, and can easily enter **crisis** again. Outwardly the person can appear to be calm. Inwardly, we can feel as though we are holding on to our anger, or some people can feel quite calm. This stage typically lasts around 45 minutes, until we get a hormonal response, and we begin,

- **cooling off.** We usually experience this as a dip where we can feel tired, and/or tearful, and may be accompanied by feelings of remorse and guilt.

Sometimes a single event can set us off. This is because of something known as a **setting event**. This is something going on in the background that pushes our level of arousal much higher than normal. This can be caused by things like stress at work, or feeling unwell. **Figure 2** shows what this looks like with a second crisis as a dotted line.



One of the effects of repeatedly becoming angry, is that over time our awareness of anger can diminish. Inwardly we can feel calm, although we may still be exhibiting the outward body language that accompanies anger. This can lead to an experience of anger where we jump straight from feeling calm into crisis, as shown in **Figure 3**.



(1) Breakwell G M (1997) Coping with Aggressive Behaviour
Leicester: British Psychological Service.