ASD Helping Hands

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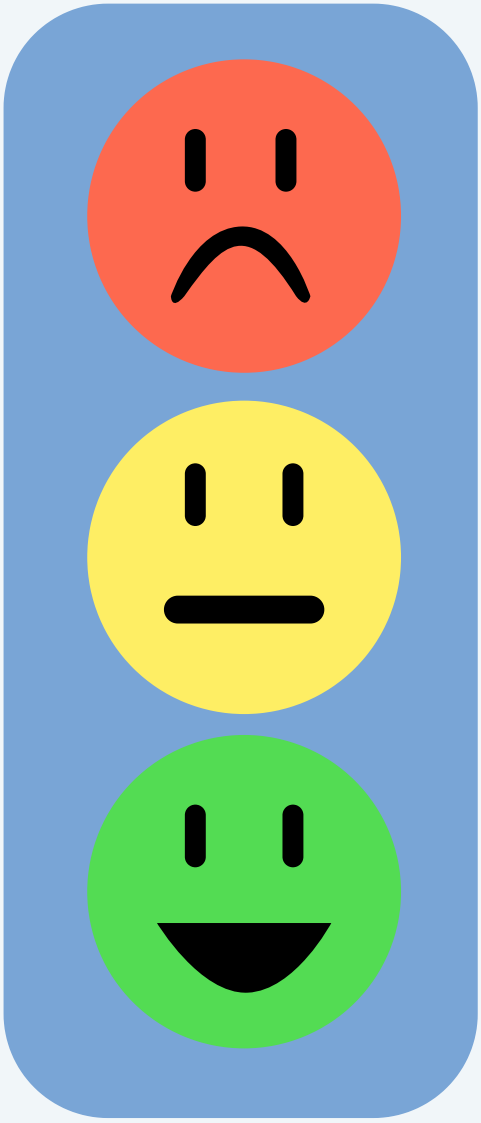
5 Point Anger Scale

Helping young people understand and manage strong emotions



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1. Introduction

Understanding the 5 Point Anger Scale
Many autistic children and young people experience challenges with recognising and regulating their emotions. Strong feelings such as frustration, anger, anxiety or overwhelm can build up quickly and, without support, may lead to emotional outbursts or shutdowns.

The 5 Point Anger Scale is a visual tool that helps break down emotions into smaller, more manageable steps. By identifying how they feel on a simple numbered scale, young people can begin to:

- Recognise what emotions feel like in their body
- Name those emotions with confidence
- Learn ways to respond before the feeling becomes overwhelming

The scale encourages calm conversations, builds emotional vocabulary, and helps adults and young people work together to reduce the intensity of tricky moments.

What is the 5 Point Scale?

Originally developed by Kari Dunn Buron, the 5 Point Scale is a structured approach to emotional regulation. It uses a numbered format (from 1 to 5) to represent increasing levels of emotional intensity—from calm and in control to overwhelmed and needing help.

> *"The 5 Point Scale is a visual system that helps organise a person's thinking when managing strong emotions—particularly those that affect social understanding."*
> *— Kari Dunn Buron*

Each point on the scale can be linked to how the child feels, what that might look like, and what they can do to help themselves feel better.

Why use it?

- Encourages self-awareness
- Builds independence
- Reduces meltdowns and shutdowns
- Supports communication
- Can be used at home, school or in the community

A Tool to Grow With

The 5 Point Anger Scale is highly adaptable. It can focus on:

- General emotional regulation
- Specific issues (e.g. anger, anxiety, transitions)
- Recognising and responding to others' emotions

This booklet will guide you step-by-step through how to create a personalised scale with your child or young person—empowering them to understand and manage their emotions confidently and safely.

2. Getting Strated

Creating a Personalised Scale

Every child or young person experiences and expresses emotions differently. That's why the 5 Point Anger Scale works best when it's created with the young person, using their own words, experiences, and interests.

The aim is to help them understand what anger (or another big emotion) feels like at different levels and what they can do to manage it before it becomes too overwhelming.

Step 1: Identify the challenges

Begin by exploring what the young person finds difficult. These may be situations, environments, or interactions that cause their emotions to escalate quickly. For example:

- Unexpected changes to routines
- Loud or crowded places
- Feeling misunderstood or told "no"
- Difficulties with friends or schoolwork
- Being asked to do something they don't feel ready for

Talk openly and supportively about what happens in these moments. Let them describe it in their own words.

Ask Questions Like:

- "What makes you feel calm and happy?"
- "When do you feel like shouting, crying, or walking away?"
- "What happens in your body when you feel angry or worried?"
- "Can you tell when you're starting to feel upset?"

They may not always have the language at first—and that's okay. Use facial expressions, emojis, visuals, or stories to help them identify feelings.

Step 2: Keep it simple and visual

Use clear, consistent visuals like:

- Numbers 1–5
- Colours (e.g. green = calm, red = angry)
- Emojis or cartoon faces
- Pictures of the young person themselves
- Their special interests (e.g. dinosaurs, trains, gaming icons)

The goal is to help the young person see their emotions and understand that different feelings can be managed in different ways.

> ***Remember: Start simple. Focus first on helping them recognise what "calm" feels like, then build from there.***

Teach when calm, not in crisis. Introduce the scale during a quiet, relaxed moment. Practise using it during everyday situations before relying on it during big emotional moments.

3. Building the Scale

Breaking Emotions into Manageable Steps

Once you've identified common emotional triggers, the next step is to break those feelings down into clear stages using a scale from 1 to 5. This helps the young person understand that feelings aren't all-or-nothing—they can build up over time, and different strategies can help at different points.

Step 3: Create the 5-Point Rating

The five levels can be described in the young person's own words, using visuals to make it more relatable. Here is a sample structure for an anger-focused scale:

Number	Emotion	Description
5	😡 Out of control	"I feel like I might explode or run away"
4	😠 Very angry	"I feel cross and want to be alone"
3	😐 Nervous or tense	"I feel unsure or annoyed"
2	🙂 A little bothered	"I feel a bit irritated or fidgety"
1	😀 Calm and happy	"I feel okay and relaxed"

Let the child/young person help choose what each number means for them—this makes it more meaningful and more likely to be used.

Step 4: Recognising What It Feels Like

Help the young person understand how each level might feel in their body and look on the outside. You could explore:

- Physical clues (e.g. tense hands, fast breathing, red face)
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Actions (e.g. pacing, going quiet, shouting)

Use tools such as:

- Drawing a body map or gingerbread figure
- Talking about characters in stories or TV
- Playing games like emotion charades

🎨 **Visual Tip:**
Include pictures, drawings, or emotion faces on the chart. Some young people find it helpful to colour each level of the scale—for example:

- 1 = green (calm)
- 3 = yellow (warning signs)
- 5 = red (danger/overwhelmed)

🧠 **Practice Ideas:**

- “Let’s look at your scale—what number do you think you are right now?”
- “Your fists are clenched. Could that mean you’re a 4 or 5?”
- “You’re smiling and playing—maybe you’re at a 1!”

Helping the young person notice and name their emotional levels is a key first step toward learning how to manage them.

4. Finding Strategies

Once the young person can recognise how they're feeling, the next step is to help them decide what to do about it. Every stage of the scale should have simple, personalised strategies that support them in managing those feelings.
This empowers the young person to move down the scale—back toward feeling calm and in control.

Step 5: "I Can Try..."

Talk with the young person about what helps them feel better. This might include:

- Taking a break
- Doing a calming activity
- Talking to someone
- Moving their body
- Using sensory tools
- Listening to music
- Drawing or writing
-

There are no right or wrong strategies—as long as they are safe, appropriate, and actually help that individual.

Number	What I Can Try
5	Go outside and scream, hit a pillow, ask for help
4	Take a break in a quiet space, go to my room, cuddle a soft toy
3	Talk to a trusted adult, have a drink, squeeze a fidget toy
2	Walk away, stretch, deep breaths, draw a picture
1	Keep enjoying what I'm doing, stay relaxed

Encourage the young person to try different strategies and see what works best for them.

💼 Helpful Tools

- Calm-down boxes with sensory items, stress balls, or pictures
- Visual choice boards for easy communication
- Time-out cards for when they need space
- Reward systems for using their strategies effectively

🟨 Build Independence

With practice, the young person will start using these tools without needing to be prompted. This is an important step toward emotional independence and resilience.

Keep strategy suggestions short, clear, and visual. Laminate the final chart and display it where the child can easily access it when needed.

5. Putting it all together

Creating a Personalised Anger Scale

Now that you've worked through the steps—identifying emotions, recognising what they look and feel like, and choosing helpful strategies—it's time to build your young person's own 5 Point Anger Scale.

This personalised chart brings everything together in one easy-to-use visual.

Rating	Looks LIke	Feels LIke	I can Try
5	Screaming, crying, hiding	Out of control, hot, panicked	Go outside, scream into a pillow, ask for help
4	Frowning, pacing, snapping	Angry, frustrated, overwhelmed	Go to a calm space, listen to music, use a fidget toy
3	Restless, avoiding eye contact	Nervous, unsure	Talk to someone, take deep breaths
2	Tapping, fidgeting	Annoyed, distracted	Stretch, draw, drink some water
1	Smiling, relaxed posture	Calm, happy	Keep doing what I enjoy

Let the young person help fill it in using their own drawings, photos, or favourite characters. The more personal it feels, the more likely they are to use it.

Make It Practical

- Laminate it and keep it somewhere visible—on the fridge, in the classroom, or part of their calm-down kit.
- Create travel-sized versions for school bags, pockets, or desks.
- Review it regularly and update as the child grows or their needs change.

Goal: Self-Regulation

Using the 5 Point Anger Scale helps young people learn a vital life skill: how to recognise and respond to their emotions before they become overwhelming.

"Everyone feels angry or overwhelmed sometimes—it's what we do with those feelings that matters."

Remind Them:

- You won't always get it perfect—and that's OK
- Everyone feels like a 5 sometimes—even adults
- Practising the scale makes it easier to use when it really counts
- They're doing something brave and important by learning this skill

6. Tips and Resources

Supporting Success With the 5 Point Scale

Introducing the 5 Point Anger Scale is just the beginning. To help the young person use it successfully in everyday life, consistency, patience and encouragement are key.
Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

Top Tips for Adults

- **Teach it when calm:** Practise the scale in calm, everyday situations—not during a meltdown.
- **Model it yourself**: Say things like, "I'm at a 3 right now—I need a break."
- **Be consistent:** Use the same words and visuals at home, school, and in the community.
- **Make it fun and engaging**: Use their interests (e.g. superheroes, animals, colours) to personalise it.
- **Celebrate successes:** Give praise or rewards when they use the scale independently—even if they're just starting to try.

Common Challenges and How to Respond

Challenge	Try This
"I don't want to use it."	Ask them to help redesign it with their favourite theme or character.
"I forget the steps."	Use reminders like posters, keyrings, or a checklist.
"It's not working!"	That's okay—it takes time. Pause, review the scale together, and adjust as needed.

Useful Resources

- **The Incredible 5-Point Scale**

www.5pointscale.com
Printable tools, videos, and guides by the creator, Kari Dunn Buron.

- **ELSA Support**

www.elsa-support.co.uk
Printable emotion cards, games, and classroom resources.

- **Twinkl**

www.twinkl.co.uk
Emotional regulation worksheets and visual supports.

Need Further Support?

ASD Helping Hands

Supporting autistic children, young people, and families across Norfolk.
🌍 www.norfolkautismpartnership.org.uk
📧 contact@norfolkautismpartnership.org.uk
📞 01362 685860

Using the 5 Point Anger Scale isn't about stopping big feelings—it's about understanding them, and finding safe and helpful ways to respond. With practice, encouragement and time, your young person can develop lifelong skills in emotional regulation and self-awareness.

> ***"It's okay to feel angry. It's what you do next that counts."***

ASD Helping Hands

Our Mission

“Empowering autistic individuals and those around them, ASD Helping Hands is dedicated to fostering confidence, independence, and inclusion at every stage of life. We provide guidance, education, and resources to help individuals, families, and professionals navigate autism with knowledge and empowerment.

We champion the rights of autistic people, striving to create a more inclusive society while ensuring our services remain accessible, reliable, and built on trust.”

www.asdhelpinghands.org.uk

contact@asdhelpinghands.org.uk

01362 685860

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