

The Stoic Anger Management Guide

A practical protocol drawn from Seneca's *De Ira* and Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* — for recognizing anger before it moves you, and responding to it deliberately instead of automatically.

Seneca wrote *De Ira* ("On Anger") around 45 CE, arguing that anger is not a useful survival instinct but a form of temporary madness that begins with a judgment we choose to accept. This guide breaks his three-stage model of anger into a checklist you can use in the moment it starts, plus a set of preventive habits and an evening review practice.

Seneca's Model

01 The Involuntary Jolt

A sudden physical reaction to provocation — a spike in heart rate, tension in the jaw or shoulders. Seneca considered this pre-rational and outside your control. It is not yet anger. It is just a signal.

02 The Judgment

The mind interprets the jolt: "I have been wronged, and this should not have happened." This is the moment of choice. Seneca argued that anger only exists once you accept this judgment as true and act on it.

03 The Prolonged Movement

Full anger takes over — the urge to retaliate, raise your voice, or say something designed to wound. Once here, reason has little influence. The entire practical value of this guide lives in stage two.

When You Feel the Jolt

- ☐ Delay your response. Seneca's own rule was to wait before speaking or acting — even a slow count to ten interrupts the automatic move from judgment to action.
- ☐ Name the judgment out loud or in writing: "I am telling myself that I have been wronged." Naming it exposes it as a belief, not a fact.
- ☐ Ask what Marcus Aurelius asked himself: is this something within my control? If the offense is already done, anger changes nothing about the past.
- ☐ Check your body before your mind. Unclench your jaw, drop your shoulders, slow your exhale. Seneca noted that anger has a physical signature you can interrupt directly.
- ☐ Withhold the reply that would wound. Seneca's test: would you be comfortable if this exact response were read back to you tomorrow?
- ☐ Consider the offender's context. Marcus Aurelius repeatedly reminded himself that people act from ignorance of what is good, not malice — which does not excuse harm, but changes your relationship to it.

Reduce How Often Stage One Happens

- ☐ Identify your recurring triggers. Seneca advised knowing your own weak points — traffic, hunger, sleep debt, specific people — and treating those conditions as higher-risk windows.
- ☐ Lower your expectations of others deliberately. Much anger comes from assuming people will act reasonably; Seneca argued that expecting occasional unreasonableness removes its power to surprise you.
- ☐ Avoid unnecessary provocations. He recommended physically avoiding people and situations you already know reliably produce anger, rather than relying on willpower once you're in them.
- ☐ Protect sleep and physical strain. Seneca observed that fatigue and hunger make the same provocation land harder — a claim consistent with modern research linking sleep loss to reduced emotional regulation.

Evening Review — Three Questions

Seneca reviewed his own day every evening, asking himself what he had done well or badly. Adapt it specifically for anger with these three questions, in writing:

- 1 Where did I feel the jolt of anger today, and what preceded it?
- 2 Did I act from judgment two, or did I let it become stage three?
- 3 What would I do differently if the same trigger appeared tomorrow?