

The structure of the brain includes the **cerebral cortex** and the **limbic system**. The cerebral cortex is the thinking part of the brain that handles logic and judgment. The limbic system is more primitive than the cerebral cortex and is the emotional centre of the brain.

- Sensory information entering the brain passes through the amygdala where the decision is made whether to send the data to the limbic system or cerebral cortex.
- If the incoming data elicits enough of an emotional charge (like anger), the amygdala can “hijack” it and send it directly to the limbic system, causing the person to react using only the lower, more primitive part of the brain. This could feel like panic or anger. The limbic part of the brain is not involved in judging, thinking, evaluating, or self-regulation.
- At this “hijacking,” a flood of hormones is released that cause physical and emotional alarm. The subsequent surge of energy prepares the person to fight or flee.
- This feeling caused by the hormonal flush can last for several minutes. During that time, the person may say or do things that they will wish they hadn’t when the thinking part of their brain re-engages.
- Furthermore, an additional, longer-lasting hormone is released, and its impact can last for several hours to several days. This may explain why someone who has calmed down from a powerful angry reaction will later have a huge flare-up in response to some small incident. This person experiences a reaction that is out of proportion to the situation because the hormone is still active.

As we can see, a great deal goes on physiologically during anger. When we know that someone has become “hijacked,” we need to give them time for their hormones to settle, their heart to stop racing, and their anger to subside.