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# ANGER: Ally or Enemy?

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**A**nger has been the subject of scholarship and debate for millennia, and yet it continues to derail careers, ruin marriages, and make us sick. So what is this powerful force we call anger? According to *Merriam-Webster*, the noun *anger* is defined as “a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism.”

We all experience anger and frustration; it fits within the range of human emotion and merits expression. It is considered a secondary emotion, meaning people frequently resort to anger as a way of covering up more-vulnerable emotions such as sadness or fear.

But is there an appropriate way to express anger? There is no question that it is difficult to be appropriate when anger is triggered. Just look back at a situation when you “lost it” and consider how difficult it would have been to harness the overwhelming emotion you felt. Much can be gained, however, by working to evaluate each situation in which anger comes into play, by asking yourself some key questions about the interaction:

- *How would I have handled the situation differently if I had tried to consider another perspective and had asked open-ended, nonjudgmental questions?*

- *What might I have noticed about the situation if I had taken an aerial view of the moment?*
- *Could I have reframed the interaction?*
- *What was I responding to?*

Asking these questions and deconstructing situations in which anger features can help you better understand the role that anger plays and help you foster more-productive interactions. Consider the following as you think about steps you can take to manage anger.

## BE AWARE OF YOUR TRIGGERS.

A *trigger* is an event, a feeling, a situation, a perception, or a thought that precipitates an angry response. We all have them. These questions might help you identify yours:

- *What precipitated the angry feeling?*
- *What thoughts were going through your mind?*
- *Did you feel something unfair was happening to you?*
- *What emotion were you feeling?*
- *Where in your body were you noticing something?*
- *What button was being pushed for you?*
- *What would an objective third party observing the event notice about your reaction?*

*You do not have a choice in terms of the precipitating event, but you certainly do have a choice in how you react.*

Keep track of the answers to these questions in a journal over different episodes to help recognize trends in your anger patterns.

**RECOGNIZE THAT YOU HAVE A CHOICE IN HOW YOU HANDLE ANGER.**

You do not have a choice in terms of the precipitating event, but you certainly do have a choice in how you react. Consider this scenario: Driving to work this morning, someone cuts you off. You have two possible reactions: let your teenage brain take over, honk loudly, or scream in an attempt to prove something to the other person; or let it go and be grateful that the action did not cause an accident. Each reaction would trigger a different outcome. In deciding how to react, ask yourself these two questions:

- *How will my reaction help me?*
- *How will my reaction help my relationship with others?*

See where your answers point you.

**EXPLORE THE FEELINGS UNDER THE ANGER.**

Are you sad about something? Is something scaring you? Getting to the root of the underlying issue will help the anger subside.

**WORK OUT.**

Take a walk or engage in some other form of exercise. In addition to getting your mind off what is upsetting you, exercising burns cortisol—the “stress hormone,” which has nega-

tive health consequences—and produces “feel good” endorphins.

**LIGHTEN UP.**

Looking for the humor in a situation can give you some distance and perspective.

**COUNT TO 10 (OR MAYBE 100) BEFORE SPEAKING WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY.**

Not only will this help you calm down because it forces you to think about something else but it can also prevent you from saying something you may regret.

There is a lot of energy in anger. It can be destructive, but it can also be an ally if you understand it and channel it effectively. What will be the first step you take to use anger to your advantage? ❁



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