



Anger is Healthy and Normal

We all as human being are equipped with amazing emotional 'super powers'. All of our emotional repertoire – our sadness, our excitement, our guilt, our frustration, our fears – are part of what make us human. Our evolutionary biology has equipped us with emotions in order to help us to quickly and effectively solve problems in our lives.

Anger is felt by absolutely everyone. It can be an unpleasant feeling that is set off by a person or situation you feel has hurt you, or wronged you. Anger is our biological response to a situation in which we have been violated, our rights impeded upon, or we feel in competition to others. Anger is an emotion that is usually felt because of conflict, and is often a signal of our values. It is inside of us as a 'war-like' response, which in our human evolution has been needed from time to time. When a neighbouring tribe threatens our crops, we get angry. When someone tries to snatch our handbag, we get angry. When a political party begins making decision that appear to threaten our way of life, we get angry.

Anger is About Rights and Justice

Anger is often a response to a feeling of threat, either real or perceived. But unlike anxiety, where the threat is about our *own* safety (and anxiety drives us toward safety and protection), anger is often more of a *collective* threat. It is triggered off when we perceive a threat to our way of life, our values, society's rules, our boundaries, our basic rights. It can also be caused by problems or situations from the past or by a completely unrelated problem or situation in the present.

Because our anger triggers are particular to our values, what generates this response in us is unique to the individual. Different people may experience the emotion of anger very differently. The intensity of the emotion, the time it lasts for, and how it is felt is unique to the person experiencing it. This is because our emotions are affected by our characteristics. Our characteristics can play a major role in why we feel angry and how we feel it. And our reaction and interpretation of a situation can intensify or lessen the reaction.

Anger is a Motivating Force

Anger generates a great deal of energy inside our nervous system, and it drives up our motivation. This motivation is intended to help us to solve the problem or the injustice - to seek reparation or resolution.

Many people are taught that if you express anger you are a bad person. In fact, the opposite is true. Ignoring your anger can lead to pent up or suppressed anger (which bubbles out unexpectedly or in unhealthy ways), and can even cause hypertension and depression. Unfortunately, ignoring or avoiding our emotions does not get rid of them and only leads to less ownership, resourcefulness, and resilience. You want to be someone who can work *with* their anger and all its guises – frustration, annoyance, rage, rants, explosions, temper, irritation, passion, hatred, indignation, outrage, and fury – so you know how to tone it down or ramp it up when needed.



Anger is Different from Aggression

Anger is an emotion, and aggression is a behaviour. The act of aggression is a choice. In fact, in psychological literature, aggression is usually used in the context of interpersonal conflict management. It means a conversation or communication style in which the person attempts to violate, win points, degrade, harm, or else diminish another's rights. We do not need to become aggressive in order to stand up for ourselves. Many people benefit from learning *Assertiveness Skills* - how to balance our needs with another's.

Anger has been known to be followed by physical violence, but likewise the act of violence is also a choice. Research has found that expressing anger can *reduce* physical violence. This is because pent up anger is more likely to be discharged all at once, like an exploding volcano, and the more we suppress, the more likely we are to explode, rather than 'vent'.

How to express your anger in a healthy way

Mindfulness ~ The term mindfulness means our capacity to observe, non-judgementally, what is going on for us in the here and now. Increased awareness of our thoughts – physical sensations – and actions, through the practice of mindfulness, helps us to catch anger in the early stages and find ways to express it out.

Take a breather ~ If your anger is turning to aggression, it's time to separate yourself from your anger trigger. This will not only help you calm down but also give you time to gain some perspective. This can help you think about why you are angry, and in turn, help you convey your emotions better.

Use 'I' Statements ~ One of the ways of assertively expressing your feelings is by using 'I' statements. You can form an 'I' statement by including the behaviour and situation that made you angry, your feeling about it and why you felt that way.

Let it out ~ Anger seeks expression, and it needs to be 'vented' out of our physical body in healthy ways.

Try things like:

- Punching a pillow
- Screaming alone in the car
- Talking to a friend
- Vigorous exercise, like Cross Fit
- Writing in a journal

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FILL IN THE BLANKS TO MAKE YOUR SENTENCE

STEP 1: WHEN YOU _____
(THEIR BEHAVIOUR)

STEP 2: I FEEL _____
(YOUR FEELING)

STEP 3: BECAUSE _____
(WHY DO YOU FEEL THAT WAY)

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Repair the injustice ~ If there is a way to seek an apology or another form of reparation, take it. Anger wants us to take our injustice seriously. Live by your values, and try to be defined by what you stand *for*, not what you stand against. Finding ways to channel our energy into healthy ways of creating change, like joining a support group, helping other victims, and giving back to those around us, can help release these feelings.