



February 2021

## Taming the volcano

Anger is the emotion inside us that allows us to respond to situations where we feel threatened—where we sense that our safety and security is at risk. When we are angry we can feel our power and be strong. As an emotion, anger is neither good nor bad. It is a valuable part of our emotional character and if we deny it is there, we are denying something that is fundamentally human.

- ★ Anger is an emotion and all emotions are okay.
- ★ We need anger to survive in a world that is sometimes dangerous, abusive and cruel.
- ★ Anger is a powerful feeling which is natural and exists for the purpose of self-preservation.
- ★ Anger is emotional energy which we can use to create and maintain healthy boundaries in our relationships.
- ★ Anger does not have to hurt anyone. It does not have to lead to aggression or attack.
- ★ Anger is energy and power to be used for our protection.

(From: “Anger: Deal With It, Heal With It, Stop It From Killing You” by Bill DeFoore)

Our anger can have many causes but its effects depend on our ability to deal with it. The first step to dealing constructively with anger is to recognize it and admit we are experiencing it. If we are not mindful of it, if we pretend we are not experiencing it or if we just stuff it somewhere inside us sooner or later, it will come out in some other way. For some us, we have become very “skilled” at not attending to our anger and it may take some practice to become familiar with the signals our anger is sending that lets us know it is there. Anger often comes up when we need to say “no” to something. If we don’t say it, our bodies may say “no” on our behalf.

### **Understanding our Anger**

Try to identify what you are angry about. The cause of anger is not always obvious. We’re so accustomed to shutting off our feelings that we might have to think seriously about the cause of our anger before we can identify it. What made us angry might not be the last thing that happened today but the first. Or it might have happened yesterday or last week.

Anger is like an old friend reminding us what we like, what we want and what we need. It tells us when something has gone wrong. In our relationships, we need to make choices on how we will express it rather than lashing out or reacting without thought. We can remain both emotionally honest with our anger and also choose to express ourselves in respectful ways.

### **Taming the Anger Volcano**

When you are calm and able to reflect on a time when anger erupted in a hurtful or disrespectful way, you may wish to consider these things with an intention to see if they are helpful the next time anger rises up inside you:

- Consider whether your reaction matches the situation. Ask yourself, what would I think of someone else if I saw them getting angry this way, in this situation? Is this situation really as bad as I am making it out to be? Is my anger expression primitive or hurtful? Perhaps ask someone you trust for their perspective they may help you look at the problem in a more balanced way.
- Look at your thoughts. Sometimes the way you think can fuel anger for example, assuming that another person is intentionally trying to hurt or annoy you, in a situation when that may not be true.
- Identify the source of your anger. If the actions or words of another person are hurting you, try to deal with them directly in a firm and productive way. Assertiveness skills can be a great way to do this.
- Consider further exploration of the triggers and history of your anger if the pattern is powerful and seems to be long lasting or harmful to others.

### Being Angry and Staying Respectful

Most hurtful anger is caused by what we say to ourselves about a situation, not what happens or what other people do. Listen to what you say to yourself when you are upset. You may hear yourself blaming, calling people names, feeling entitled or talking your anger up. You can make yourself so angry that it seems easy to blame someone else for your anger and fanning angry flames. **There are other ways we can choose to respond with anger and remain respectful.**

### Time Out

Try taking "time out" when you feel yourself getting angry. It is a simple technique that works well but is not always easy. Learning to recognize your symptoms of anger...things like a knot in the stomach, a tight chest, clenched teeth or fists... can help you know when you need time out. When you feel the symptoms it is time count to ten or else time to leave the situation, staying away just long enough to cool down. During time out don't go over the argument and other resentments, rather talk yourself down and calm yourself. If you can talk about what upset you when you return do so, but be prepared to leave again if you are too angry to listen. Time out gives you a chance to regain you self control. Don't use time out to avoid talking about or dealing with difficult issues. Once you are calmer you will be able to hear the other person's point of view.

### Talking Yourself Down

Try "talking yourself down" when you get upset. Think of phrases that can help you to calm down. You might say to yourself, "This isn't worth getting angry about," or "I can't talk right now but I will talk about it later".

### Listen with Compassion

Listening to other people's viewpoints helps you to gain a new perspective and to feel less angry. Often we are so busy defending our own point of view that we don't really listen to the other person. Try to listen to the thoughts and feelings of the other person. Better yet if you can repeat back what that person has said without arguing or blaming, that person will know you have heard and understood their perspective.

### Talk About Your Feelings

Simply talking to someone else about how you feel can help ease the emotional pressure. Call someone you trust when you feel bored, depressed, or angry and let them know what is going on for you.



## Vancouver Island Counselling

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### Counsellors Corner

*How we express our anger is completely our responsibility.*

*If anger often gets the best of you, you might benefit from talking about it with one of our EFAP counsellors.*