

ANGER

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Anger often gets a bad rap. It is classified as a negative mood state and is typically paired with some pretty ugly behaviour. Anger is a powerful emotion that can unhinge us at times, make us feel uncomfortable and leave us bursting at the seams. While some people struggle to effectively channel these feelings into appropriate and constructive behaviours, anger serves a number of important purposes.

Anger is an emotion that is triggered in the fight or flight area of our brain. It therefore has a protective component. Feelings of anger may indicate that we are under threat. In our early human development this area of our brain was used to alert us to physical danger. Today threats come in all manner of forms; emotional, relational/social and spiritual – not just physical. Some people get angry when they are stressed or under pressure, in this instance their coping abilities are under siege.

Similarly, if our boundaries are crossed in a relationship or we are disrespected, then anger is a normal response.

It lets us know that our self-esteem and psychological integrity is at risk and we need to take action. The protective element of anger explains why it's such an energizer. In our early human development stages, we protected ourselves from primarily physical threats by running or fighting. Two reactions requiring a bucket load of energy. Anger is very functional; it alerts us to danger, lets us know we need to take action to protect ourselves and provides us with necessary energy.

Since anger relies on such primitive brain hardware it can get us into trouble if we fail to draw on the resources found in the more rational part of our brains. For example, one of the typical inclinations of anger is to fight, but as I pointed out above, the majority of threats we encounter in our society are not physical. The primitive brain however does not differentiate, it will just tell you to run or fight – an inappropriate response to the majority of situations in our western world. Therefore, when dealing with anger it is important to give yourself time between the feeling and the impulse to act. This allows the more sophisticated part of the brain to provide you with additional information, facilitating the formation of more complex and appropriate responses.

At its core, anger is a fear based emotion. This makes sense considering it stems from the protective area of our brain. This piece of information is vital to understanding anger. Frequently people get distracted by anger and fail to realise that beneath the surface is the main event: the story and the core feelings that require attention. That's why it's helpful to view anger as an early warning system. It lets you know something is out of balance in the emotional realm. Beneath the smoke and fire of anger are usually vulnerability and an emotional soft spot surrounded by fear and/or grief. Once this has been identified, acknowledged and soothed, the anger will often deflate.

SUMMARY

Anger is often presented as "baddie" in the emotional world.

Anger is functional.

Anger is protective. It tells us when we need to act in order to protect ourselves

Anger provides the energy to respond.

Anger lets us know when our emotional and social world is out of alignment.

Anger is a primitive response – it should not be given free rein in determining behaviours. It's helpful to include other areas of the brain to regulate the anger.

IF YOU ARE HAVING PROBLEMS WITH ANGER

Map the pattern of your anger. Use an emotional thermometer to gauge the rise and fall of your anger levels.

Identify the tipping point – the moment just prior to losing control of your anger.

Use this information to implement circuit breakers prior to the tipping point; walking away from the situation, taking a deep breath, thinking of a funny/absurd situation, repeating a mantra.

Develop and expand the gaps between the feeling of anger

and rage and the impulse to act on these feelings. This pause gives the brain time to connect with and implement more rational options.

Explore the deeper emotional terrain. Often people are not aware there is something brewing in their emotions. Check in with yourself. Is there something in your life that's causing significant fear, grief and/or depression?

Chat to a professional counsellor or psychologist to assist you in this process.

RESOURCES

Mensline
Reachout
Youth Beyond Blue

mensline.org.au
reachout.com
youthbeyondblue.com

NEED HELP?

SALVOS COUNSELLING

salvos.org.au/more/get-help/anger

ACT

02 6248 5504

NSW (SYDNEY)

02 9743 2831

PENRITH

02 4731 1554

QLD

07 3349 5046

All information on this page is provided by professional counsellors, but is not a substitute for face-to-face professional help. If you or someone you know is struggling with this issue, please seek help as soon as possible.