

Theme E: Tips to Take Away: About Anger and Other Uncomfortable Emotions

Anger is an emotion that has a long list of close relatives: irritation, frustration, impatience, rage, hatred, annoyance, resentment, irritability, crankiness, and so forth. Anger and its variations can cause us to “heat up.” Notice the way we refer to angry feelings, for example, “boiling mad,” “hotheaded,” or “seeing red.” Anger impairs our thinking and can feel overwhelming. It makes us lose our balance. Sometimes when we’re angry, we act impulsively in ways that end up hurting ourselves and others. Shouting, threatening, fighting, rudeness, disrespect, and name-calling are a few examples. Sometimes we take out our anger in quieter ways by gossiping and excluding others and making them feel bad. Most of all, anger can hurt our health, well-being, and social relationships. Chronic anger ramps up the stress response and reduces our own level of happiness.

Kick the anger habit!

Try a mindful approach to difficult emotions. When you feel yourself getting angry:

1. Stop and pay attention. Notice with interest where you are feeling the anger in your body. What does this experience feel like for you?
2. Turn your attention toward the feelings as they arise: Are they sharp, hard, soft, intense, fast, slow, burning? Are they moving around in your body? Are they centered in one place? Do they change as you observe them?
3. Experience the feelings of anger as waves, coming and going. Don’t try to block them, avoid them, or get rid of them. Don’t try to hold on to them or keep them going. Just don’t act on the angry feelings right now. You can view anger as a strong energy in the body and mind, like a sudden storm.
4. Tune in to the breath and see if you can ride the waves of the anger and watch them get smaller and smaller. Be kind to yourself if this is hard to do.

Now you’re in a better position to make a smart decision about how to act.

Remember: You can use this approach to work with any difficult feelings. Just substitute the name of a feeling in the steps above. Surf the waves of your annoyance, boredom, sadness, disappointment, jealousy, and so on. Breathe and watch the feelings rise and fall. They’re not fun, but they will pass. And you will become more empowered.