Express Anger with Responsibility

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When you think about screaming at someone in anger, you probably imagine a barrage of criticism and blame. If you value kindness, you likely don't want to scream at someone in this way and at the same time you know anger is a valid feeling and you want to express yourself and stand up for your needs.

While yelling and screaming isn't pleasant for anyone and can have a painful impact on another's nervous system, if this is something you find yourself doing, it is still better to share your experience responsibly in that raised voice, rather than make demands, blame, and criticize. It's okay to feel angry, exasperated, frustrated, irritated, etc. These feelings are as valid as any other. Like any feeling they are meant to cue you about your thoughts, needs, and potential requests. When you use anger as a cue you can identify and express what's true for you, rather than behaving from anger by engaging in demands, judgment, or violence. Let's look at an example.

When you get home from a long day at work and open the door to the living room strewn with papers, food, and clothes, you might be tempted to yell at your teenage children,"Didn't I tell you guys to clean up when you get home! Why can't you do what I tell you?!"

While this may or may not set them in motion, it certainly doesn't do much for your relationship. Using anger as a cue and taking responsibility for your needs, it might instead sound like this:

"Arrg! I feel so angry and tired when I see this living room. I need a break. I am taking ten minutes alone and then I would like to talk."

From a place of self-responsibility and care for others, you recognize that engaging in a dialogue from anger rarely yields effective results. If it does get results, you will pay for those results later. Resentment, disrespect, and a loss of connection are the long term results of acting from anger.

Express that you're angry and then take responsibility for it by identifying what you need and how you will meet that need. When you have found your center again, anger may still be present, but it is no longer filling your thoughts with blame and judgment. You have enough mental space to identify your needs and express curiosity and care about another's needs.

If the parent in the example above came back after centering and started a dialogue, it might start like this, "Hey guys, I am wanting collaboration and harmony, would you be willing to sit down with me and talk for ten or fifteen minutes."
(teenagers agree to ten minutes).

"When I see the state of the living room, I feel angry and tired because I am wanting comfort and peace at home and a clean orderly house really helps with that. I want to be sure I am being clear. Could you tell me what you understood me to say?"

This is just the beginning of a dialogue. The emphasis here is on *dialogue*. That is, you're expressing your feelings and needs and willing to hear theirs.

Anger is a valid feeling and an important cue about what's important to you. When recognize it in this way, it directs you inward to identify what's important and then outward to

collaborate with others in a way that takes care of what matters with wisdom and compassion.

Practice

The next time you notice anger arise, ask yourself what’s most important to you or what need is present for you.