

The Importance of Anger

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Anger is an important signaling system letting you know that you perceive a threat to universal need for yourself or someone else. It is meant to draw your attention to something so that you can take effective action.

In the context of recovering from an abusive relationship, anger can indicate progress. It signals that the receiver of the abuse is beginning to recognize that their needs have been unmet and hopefully is roused to take care of those needs.

When you are mindful enough to recognize anger as a signal, you can take your time and meet it by naming it, accepting that it's okay to have it, feeling it in your body, and looking for the feelings and needs underneath it.

Anger becomes a hindrance, when you fan the flames of it with your thoughts. These thoughts are some version of:

- Things should be different than they are, or
- Someone should act different than they are

The word *should* leads you quickly to a disconnected state. It's easy here to get caught up in how right you are about the way people should behave or about how things should be. After all, it's true that your partner shouldn't blame you, right? As you have likely found, being right and telling your partner how they shouldn't blame you, doesn't really help create intimacy. What's more true and important here is that something they are doing doesn't meet needs of yours, and you would like to make a request for a change.

Thoughts that fan the flame of anger are like a child having a tantrum. Children have tantrums because they can't yet accept that reality is different than they expect or would like. Like children in tantrums, your tantrumming mind needs some gentle containment and reassurance. You can let your mind know that even though you don't like the situation, it doesn't help to insist that it not be what it is. It's okay to feel sadness and disappointment about the way things are. Then you can connect with the needs unmet in the situation and take action to meet them. When you access connection with yourself and others, you can access skillfulness in your communication and actions.

Practice

This week, notice when anger arises and ask yourself, "Am I meeting it as a signal or am I fanning the flame of it with my thoughts?"