

Mindfulness, Part 4: A Technique For Dealing With Anger

Occasionally, anger can be healthy if the emotion is controlled and used both sparingly and carefully. Mindfulness can help cool any unwanted, unhealthy anger.

When is anger helpful? Controlled anger is healthy if you're being treated unfairly. It can help you take careful action to ensure you're treated justly and with respect. However, being out of control when you're angry can cause tremendous harm both to yourself and to your relationships with others.

Use mindfulness to cope when the fire rises up

Let's explore a common example. You arrive home and your partner hasn't cooked any food. You were working late and you begin to feel anger rising up in you. What do you do? Logically, you know that you're far better off talking calmly about the issue and resolving the conflict. Here's how:

1. Become aware of the physical sensation of anger in your body.
2. Notice the sensations in your stomach, chest, and face. Become aware of your rapid heart and breathing rate. Observe whether your fists or jaw are clenched. Breathe. Breathe into the physical sensations of your body. Close your eyes if you want to. You may find it helpful to count out ten breaths. Imagine the air entering your nose and into your belly. As you breathe out, imagine the breath going out through your fingers and toes.
3. Continue to stay with the sensations as best you can. Bring a sense of kindness and gentleness to your feelings of anger. Try to see the anger as an opportunity to explore and understand the feeling. Think about how the burning rises up in your being, and how the previous breathing technique may or may not have a cooling effect on the flame within you.
4. Notice your thoughts. Thoughts like 'it's not fair' or 'I'm not having this' feed anger. Notice what effect you have by letting go of these thoughts. If you have trouble or can't let go, which is common, continue to watch the way thoughts and feelings feed each other.
5. Take a step back from your internal experiences. Become the observer of your thoughts and emotions rather than feeling them firsthand.
6. Communicate. As soon as the main force of your anger has dissipated, communicate your feelings with the other person. Begin with 'I' statements instead of 'you' accusations. As you continue to communicate, stay aware of your own feelings and let go of any aggression if you can. Less aggression and more honesty will lead to a harmonious and productive conversation and result.

Coping with anger is a challenging task. Keep these steps in mind, and follow them with smaller levels of frustration rather than outright anger. When you are able to manage this, you become more adept at cooling the flames of anger.

Additional ways of managing your feelings of anger:

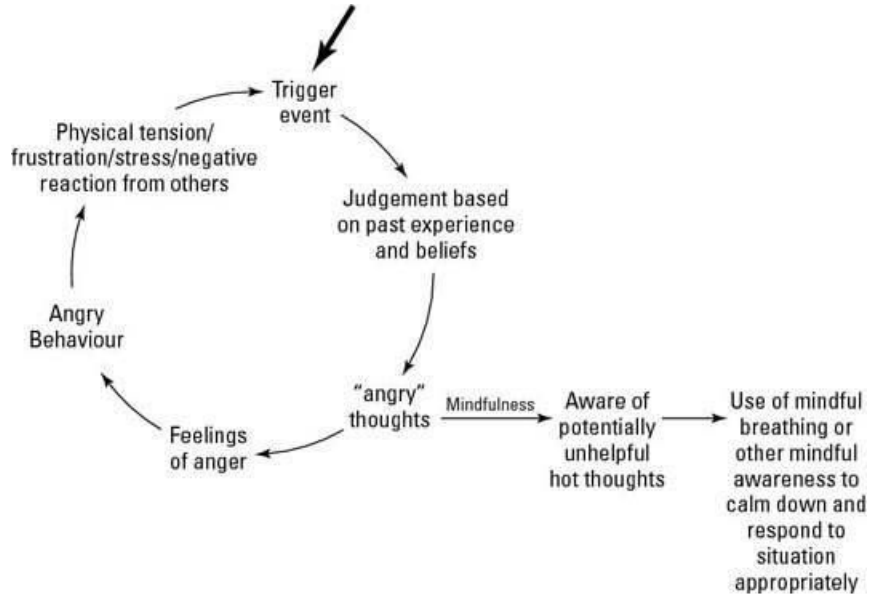
- **Be mindful of the thought patterns that feed your anger.** These include:
 - **Over-generalizing.** Examples include: 'You always ignore me' or 'You never respect me.' Be specific instead.
 - **Mind-reading** and assuming you know what the other person is thinking, such as 'I know you think I nag you too much.' Try to avoid this.
 - **Blaming** others for your own anger with thoughts like 'You always make me angry' or 'It's all their fault.' Take responsibility for your anger.
- **Mindful physical exercise.** By exercising regularly, you build up a greater resilience to stress and this may dissipate some of your anger. By exercising mindfully, you simultaneously build up your mindfulness muscles too, leading to greater levels of awareness and less reactive, automatic-pilot behavior.
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- **Question your reaction.** Ask yourself questions like 'Is this worth it?', 'Is this important in the big picture?', 'How else can I respond in this situation?'

Use mindful attitudes to cool the flame of anger

Cultivating a mindful attitude can reduce the frequency, duration, and level of anger you experience from day to day. Some mindfulness groups have come up with the "**RAIN**" method as a mindful way of dealing with emotions.

- **Recognize** that a strong emotion is present. Often, you can easily be swept up by the emotion itself and immediately begin acting upon it. Emotions can be such an integral part of who you are that you don't give the feeling due credit. Begin with recognition of the emotion.
- **Accept** that the emotion is there. With strong emotions, sometimes the natural reaction is to pretend that the feeling isn't really present. In this step, you accept that in this precise moment, you're experiencing anger. You aren't being passive and allowing it to control you. If you don't accept what you are currently feeling, you can't hope to manage the emotion in any way.
- **Investigate** thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. In this third step, observe what's going on in your mind, heart, and body. What thoughts are running through your head? What feelings are you mindful of? What areas of your body feel tense, or burning, or warm, or relaxed? Where is the core of the emotion exactly located, and what effect does a sustained mindful awareness have on the physical aspect of your experience?
- **Non-identification** with the passing emotion. Emotion has the word motion in it. Emotions are always moving, fluxing, and changing. This final step is to try to distance yourself and create a space between you and your emotion. The emotion is most likely to do what emotions do quite naturally, which is to keep moving. Anger comes and goes, but you don't – you're always here.

The following diagram summarizes the cycle of anger and how mindfulness can work to diffuse the situation and also allow time to calm down before reacting:



View [this video](#) of a guided mindfulness session that will allow you to diffuse your anger in ten short minutes so that you can calmly deal with a situation. Using the tools provided above and taking the time to follow the video will enable you to think clearly as opposed to dealing with your situation in an angry state. In just ten minutes, you can change your entire state of mind and be more effective at resolving the issues that make you angry.

Source: "[How To Use Mindfulness To Cope With Anger](#)", by Dummies, A Wiley Brand