

Argh!

The Art of (not creating) War

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#WellbeingWarriors

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“You teach people how to treat you.”

Wayne W. Dyer

You know that feeling of frustration bubbling up inside, just waiting to explode? When you feel you just want to shout, swear or punch something? Welcome to being human!

Feeling frustrated is a normal and often necessary emotion. No emotion is bad or wrong. What is important, is what we choose to do (or not do) with the emotions we experience. In other words, it is more often the consequences of our anger that lead to unwanted results rather than the anger itself. For some, it may be physical violence. For others, it may lead to damaging important relationships due to hurtful outbursts.

Let's unpack various sources of anger and what may help to knock them out.





Anger can be protective and necessary

For instance, it is perfectly normal and understandable to be angry when your wallet is stolen, or anger can also help motivate us to get out of an abusive relationship.

What to do?

This type of anger has a use – if you acknowledge and act appropriately towards it, it can motivate you to do something to change the situation you are unhappy about. Explore your true feelings – is there something you are not addressing that is causing you to feel frustrated? Other feelings such as disappointment and hurt, if not addressed, can often result in anger. Maybe you need to set boundaries (by being assertive) with someone in your life. Remember, if you don't act appropriately, your anger will only become worse.

Ego / Self-esteem

People often get angry when they feel as though their ego is being damaged. For example, if someone says you have a big nose, you get so mad that you either shout at them or you ruminate over it for days.

What to do?

Become aware of how often you become upset due to people's comments or comparing yourself to others. Start asking yourself why it matters so much what others think of you. I have found the following story very helpful over the years:

“Imagine you bite off a big piece of an apple. You could either chew it and discover it is sour or has worms in and promptly spit it out. Or, you could just swallow it without chewing, and it ends up feeling uncomfortable all the way down your throat. You have the same two choices when it comes to negative comments. The moral of the story is that you get to decide what you agree with or not. Just because someone criticizes you, doesn't mean you have to accept it and if you disagree, why do you need to react to it?”

*"Just because you're given an
opportunity to get angry, doesn't
mean you have to take it."*

Author unknown



Daily frustrations

Struggling with resources, technology not working, or people not washing the dishes – these can all be extremely frustrating, especially if they all happen at the same time.

What to do?

One of the best ways to manage these daily hassles is to divide them into things you can control and those that you cannot. If it is something within your control, try to find a solution for it. If it is out of your control, the best option is to change your perspective.



Related to COVID-19

There may be some unique frustrations you are currently experiencing, such as data issues or uncertainty about your degree. This is very natural and completely understandable.

What to do?

Try to divide these as you did for daily frustrations, but also consider the unusual situation that you are currently facing. Give yourself (and others) a break – you are doing the best you can under these unusual circumstances. Find solutions to challenges, if possible. If none are available, address the way you are thinking about it.



Stress

It is more likely for you to become angry when you are already stressed. Think of the last time you were late for an appointment. If something negative happens then (like dropping your keys or not finding your books), you are more likely to get upset than if you had all the time in the world.

What to do?

Thus, the best course of action is to effectively manage your stress levels. You know what helps you to relax. Sometimes it is a practical solution (such as managing your time), and other times it will be about creating a balance in your life (exercising and listening to music).





Belief systems and perspectives

If you strongly believe that all people must do the right thing all of the time OR that nothing should ever go wrong - you are setting yourself up for endless frustration. The way we perceive or interpret a situation influences how we feel about it.

What to do?

In the absence of facts/truth, people tend to assume the worst of others. As an example, if you are driving in traffic and someone cuts in front of you, almost causing an accident, the general tendency is to assume the person to be inconsiderate which leads to anger and/or frustration. But what if this person is racing to a hospital because they just received a call that a loved one is on their death bed? Would you feel less angry? You will not know which is true, but you can acknowledge that there may always be many reasonable explanations for a person's behaviour.

Professor Brené Brown shares that she aims to live her life, assuming that everyone is trying their very best. She has no idea if this is true or not, but she experiences more happiness as a result. Developing empathy and cognitive flexibility can thus help you become less angry at people and situations. If we attempt to understand someone else's perspective, it can help us to experience fewer feelings of frustration.



Blaming

It is often easier to blame someone or something else for our unhappiness or difficulties, rather than to take responsibility for our own feelings and experiences. This does not mean that people don't hurt other people.

What to do?

Individuals do make mistakes and behave badly. But in the long term, it is more helpful for you to develop empathy and set healthy boundaries than to blame others, as you are then also able to take back your power! It is very possible and useful to find that balance. Use your anger to identify unhealthy relationships or behaviours and address those. If things don't change, you have a choice to either stay or leave.

“The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny.”

Albert Ellis

“A mind not to be changed by place or time. The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n.”

John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* (1667)



Expression of frustrations / anger

Often, the best first step is to physically calm yourself down. This will help decrease the chance of you doing or saying something hurtful. If you need to address an issue with someone, practise [assertiveness](#), [conflict management](#) and communication skills as best as possible. If there is nothing you can do about a situation, try [changing your perspective](#). A helpful way of doing this is developing cognitive flexibility.

Top tips to remember

1. Anger is not the problem – your reaction is
2. Be aware of your [interpretation](#) / belief systems / perception
3. Look for facts, if possible, before reacting
4. Manage your stress levels
5. Listen to what your anger / frustration might be telling you
6. Look for possible solutions

Remember, ALL emotions are normal and welcome. They are there to give us a message. Try listening to them instead of trying to push them away. Your most important action is to choose your response to them. So acknowledge your anger and manage it effectively, instead of allowing it to rule you!

