

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Understanding angry emotions

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

During COVID-19 your struggle with anger may be amplified, making this time a particularly challenging one. Dealing with angry feelings, whether they are yours, or someone else's, can be hard at the best of times, but add a pandemic to the mix, and it is no surprise that tensions are high and emotions are stretched.

It is important we raise our awareness and take responsibility for understanding angry feelings. We can also learn ways to manage our emotional worlds and choose behaviours that have healthy outcomes for ourselves and the people around us.

Here are some suggestions and insights to help support you during this time:

- **Your angry feelings are a signpost**

Angry feelings are normal and very important. Unfortunately anger has a bad reputation, which can make it harder for us to express it without causing harm to ourselves and others. Anger is a big signpost telling you that something is not right, something is uncomfortable. Your job is to work it out what that might be, so maybe pause – ask yourself: 'why do I feel angry?'- 'what's going on here for me?'

- **Be curious about your emotions**

We experience many feelings each day, and they can all be mixed up, so it can be difficult to work out exactly what we are feeling, especially the uncomfortable ones. Without questioning or exploring them they often escalate into anger.

So next time you get a sense of anger rising inside you, maybe pause and ask yourself:

- *"Am I really angry or resentful because I can't get to watch my favourite TV show because my partner is busy watching their show?"*
- *Or "maybe I am actually incredibly worried about losing my job, and really my anger is about my anxiety around our financial security?"*

Getting curious gives us the opportunity to pause, identify and speak our feelings out loud and choose different behaviours that send more accurate messages to the people we care about.

- **Recognise that angry feelings are not the same as angry behaviour**

We all feel anger, but angry, aggressive behaviour is not helpful to us or the people we care about. Angry behaviour is mostly hurtful and disrespectful to others. Being close together in isolation can be super difficult. When the anger shows up it's helpful to begin by acknowledging you are angry, then **PAUSE & BREATHE & CHOOSE** to behave in a way that looks after you and others.

- **Recognise that anger comes in many forms**

It's easy to see anger when there is yelling, but there are other ways it can be equally destructive. Many people bottle up their anger - some tell themselves we are bad people for being angry and punish ourselves quietly, or maybe blame others for our own anger. What might look like sulking to others, negativity, or being picky, can actually be pent up anger. Each of these are unhealthy ways of dealing with our feelings. When we are couped up, it's easy to see how this can happen, so again, it's useful to identify what is going on for us and consider how that might be impacting those around you.

- **Mind your language and take responsibility**

When we are angry, it's easy to cast outward and blame others, because it gets us off the hook and makes someone else responsible for fixing us up. Then we can get angry because others do try and fix us!

So think about your language - rather than saying:

- ***"You make me angry", try something like "I am really feeling angry, annoyed, irritated....and it's because of this.....but I will work it out/I would like your help."***

See the difference? That's you taking responsibility!

- **After the anger**

Angry behaviour can feel quite energizing and is often accompanied by feelings of righteousness. After that though, we often feel shame and embarrassment, and then maybe we feel vulnerable.

Often we then go straight back to anger to avoid the vulnerable feelings, which is unhelpful and so the cycle goes on.

A healthier response is for you to dig deep, acknowledge how you could have handled things differently and learn to say sorry. Vulnerability can make us more human, more courageous and more connected to others.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Understanding Angry Emotions** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.