



# Understanding Anger

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Success Coach

Somewhere in your thought processes, in your mood, in your attitude toward someone or something, you may be harboring anger. Perhaps it's anger at one or both of your parents. Perhaps it's about work or your kids, or choices you made when you were younger. Whatever the anger, so long as you hold onto it, you are imprisoned by it.

If the anger is something you've been holding onto for many years, it may have become habit. This means that anger is a natural state for you. You're used to it. You might not even be able to conceive of *not* being angry. Or it might simply be that you're angry at your coworker for something she did yesterday and you can't get it off your mind.

## Anger Defined

Like any other emotion, anger occurs after a trigger of some kind. It's a message from your inner self telling you that something is not quite right. [Emotional messages](#) require our attention; they are not meant to be stuffed down and forgotten about. They are a form of intelligence providing you with information and are meant to be experienced in the moment. When you experience an emotion however, your limbic brain is functioning. This reptilian portion of the brain is primitive and therefore, not the area of the brain that functions when you are problem-solving or critically thinking. For this reason, you cannot "think" and "feel" at the same time. It's just not possible. And when we try, the results can be quite unpleasant.

Asking yourself a question will kick the frontal cortex into doing its duty which is to help you figure out what's going on.

Anger is actually a fairly simple emotion. It is a reaction to something that is not as you want it to be. You may not like it and it may seem more complicated than this, but that doesn't change it or make it less true. What's more complicated, perhaps, is how people deal with anger. Let's say you've just walked into a house you want to purchase and you were *expecting* the walls to be white but instead, they were dark blue. You don't want them to be blue. You want them to be white. You might even have judgments about blue walls (for instance, they are too dark or the color is not a pretty blue). You become so angry, in fact, that you have difficulty concentrating, listening, and addressing whatever brought you into the room in the first place. And this is anger. It is the gap between *reality* and *your expectations* that causes your anger. You want so much for things to be different that you cannot accept things *as they are*.

## The Problem

The problem, you see, is not that you get angry but rather that you have expectations and judgments. Your expectations, anticipated outcomes, and the judgments you make *causes* the anger in the first place. Were you not so attached to people behaving a certain way or to a situation being the way you believe it should be, you would not experience as much anger. For example, if you had no preconceived ideas about how the walls should look, then when you walked into the room, you could observe the walls without the pain and agitation of wishing they were different. You might still want to paint them a different color and that is your option. But there would be no big emotional uproar about it. And you might even find yourself laughing at the color and enjoying the process of changing it rather than angry because it is not as you anticipated. Anger keeps us from experiencing joy and happiness in the moment.

Many people live in a [constant] state of *wishing things were different*. You may not even realize that you live in this state of mind. What do you wish was different? What expectations do you have about how you should have been raised, how work should be, how traffic should flow, how people should behave, how marriage should be, how kids should be?

Expectations often sound like "should," "have to," or "supposed to." Listen for how these words enter into conversations with others and in the privacy of your own mind. They can be very subtle and can be repetitive thoughts or beliefs that you have had all your life. What is *not* the way it's supposed to be? Who says that



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things are supposed to be different? How do you know it's not supposed to be just as it is? Can you start to see how much stress people cause themselves when they live with these thoughts running through their head all day long? if you gave up "should," how much happier would you be?

### Acceptance as the First Step

Whatever situation or person is the source of your anger, ask yourself this:

*What am I not accepting about this situation or person? What do I need to accept? What is the truth or reality of this situation, person, or me?*

Karla McKlaren, author of numerous books on emotions, states that anger tells us to ask the question: What needs to be protected or what needs to be restored? These are wonderful questions to ask of yourself in order to understand your anger and what to do with it.

Focus on what you can control. You cannot change anything or make decisions about anything if you first cannot see reality as it is. Once you see the true color of the wall, then you can decide what, if anything, you want to do about it.

Being in a state of [acceptance](#) does not mean that you naively take whatever people dish out without standing up for yourself. It is reasonable to expect to be treated with respect and dignity. However, if you are mistreated, by acknowledging both the person's actions and your feelings about it ("Wow, I cannot believe she just said that to me. That didn't feel good."), rather than allowing the anger to rage and judging the person ("I cannot believe she talked to me like that! She thinks she is so much better than everyone.), while you'll still feel the anger, you use it as a trigger to speak up for yourself, to bring the unwanted behavior to the attention of the other person, and to ask the person to treat you in the way you want to be treated. You might *expect* people to know better (they "should" know better); when they don't, instead of being angry, you can recognize the moment as a teachable one. "Expectations" tend to lead to disappointment and in relationships, this creates distance.

### Choose Your Response

Rather than being at the mercy of your emotional reactions, you can [choose your behaviors](#) and your responses to the situation or person. You can address the person by telling them what is or is not acceptable behavior by communicating a boundary. You can deal with an irate customer by *not* making it personal but rather using empathy to step into their shoes for a moment. You can handle the traffic when you are running late much better when you focus on your behavior, driving well, perhaps phoning ahead to let them know you'll be late, and leaving earlier the next time you have somewhere to go.

The more you can see reality as it is and the more you can recognize your physiological reactions when they occur, including anger, then when things are not as you think they should be, you will be better able to detach from your thoughts and expectations and you can think clearly about your choices and how to best respond.

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