

Transforming Anger

AHFOWL - The Anger Process

by Dave Potter

Anger is sometimes considered a “negative” emotion, but it has a purpose, and that is to correct a hurtful action. Unfortunately, it is such a powerful emotion that an unskilled expression of anger can itself be hurtful and cause an escalation of emotion and action. The problem with most expressions of anger is that it often feeds on itself, creating more anger and blame, eclipsing any possibility of healing and reconciliation. The process described in this document, whether done in the moment, or in writing, or in person, can serve to move through the anger in a way that is productive rather than destructive, and is more likely to result in correction and/or healing. Below are six levels you can take yourself through to help peel the onion and move through the anger to the positive potential underneath. [See [Jack Kornfield](#) for insight about how hurt and fear actually *precede* anger.]

Anger... What is it that I'm upset about? What actually happened? Who said/did what, when? (be concrete)

You might say: “I’m angry that...”, “I’m upset about...”, “I got mad when I saw/heard...”

Hurt... Anger is a secondary emotion, usually triggered by hurt, disappointment, sadness, or loss.

What is the emotion beneath the anger? How has this action harmed me?

You might say: “I feel hurt/sad that...”, “At that time I needed...”, “I feel disappointed about...”

Fear... What am I afraid of? What might happen next? What does this mean for the future?

You might say: “I was/am afraid that...”, “I was/am afraid that _____ could happen...”

The next level is more difficult. Even in cases where it's not obvious, you have some responsibility, even if it's only some very small thing you did, or situation you put yourself in, that provided a trigger for someone else's inhumanity. If you didn't cause it, how did a choice you made contribute to the situation? This is the level of remorse or regret. What was your "Own part"?:

Own part... What part did I play in this event? How did I contribute or collude? What do I regret?

You might say: “I wish I hadn’t...”, “I’m sorry that...”, “I didn’t mean to...”, “Please forgive me for...”

There is probably something you want to happen - even though it might not be likely or even possible (if the person involved is no longer alive, for instance). Do you want an apology? Restitution? A demonstration of understanding? This can be what you wanted in the past, but it's more powerful when stated as a present want or need:

Want... What do I want to happen? What do I want or need now? (even if it's not possible)

You might say: “All I ever wanted...”, “I want(ed)...”, “I want you to...”, “I deserve...”

The last level is both the most difficult and the most important. Sincere appreciation for the person or situation can't be experienced before openly exploring the preceding levels of anger, hurt, fear, accountability, and needs. When you try to jump to this level without completing the previous levels, you may come across as patronizing and insincere, and your still unresolved anger may speak in spite of the words you use, like a six year-old's “I’m sorry” to a brother he’s still mad at. **All anger contains the seeds of a powerful and positive resolution. The anger provides the energy for resolution and an honest and open acceptance prepares the ground from which the seeds can bear fruit.**

Love/Appreciation... What do I love or appreciate about this person or this situation? What am I thankful for?

Or, at least, what important lesson did I learn that I wouldn't have otherwise?

You might say: “I appreciate...”, “I learned that...”, “Thank you for...”, “I love you for...”

Whether spoken or in writing, try to spend an equal amount of time at each level. If done verbally, you may find you need to revisit a previous level as you speak. Next time you're upset, remember **"AH, FOWL!"**. Here's a summary:

A Anger	<i>what made me angry, upset, or fed up - who said/did what?</i>
H Hurt	<i>sadness, pain, disappointment - what harm it did/does to me</i>
F Fear	<i>afraid of what it means about me, you, others, or what will happen next</i>
O Own part - if only I had	<i>regret, accountability - how I promoted/allowed/triggered it</i>
W Want	<i>what I want(ed) to happen, or what I deserve or need</i>
L Love & appreciation	<i>what I appreciate or am thankful for, what I learned, forgiveness</i>

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