



How to Deal with Anger

Webinar with Dr. Lisa Firestone

May 2022

This webinar will:

- Define anger as a natural and important emotion
- Discuss anger both as a primary and secondary emotion
- Help you understand your adaptive and maladaptive responses to anger
- Describe the downsides of trying to suppress this emotion
- Explain a method for understanding your triggers
- Illustrate constructive versus destructive ways of expressing and dealing with anger
- Offer tools to help calm down in heated moments



“Feeling angry is a universal human phenomenon. It is as basic as feeling hungry, lonely, loving, or tired.

—Theodore Rubin



Understanding Anger

Part 1

“If a human being never shows anger, then I think something’s wrong. He’s not right in the brain.”

–Dalai Lama

The Role of Anger

- **Natural:** Inevitable response to frustration or stress
- **Valuable:** Like all emotions, tries to give us information
- **Evolutionary:** Present early in human development, designed to keep us safe and surviving
- **Adaptive:** Alerts us to injustice/ unfair treatment



7 Primary Emotional Systems

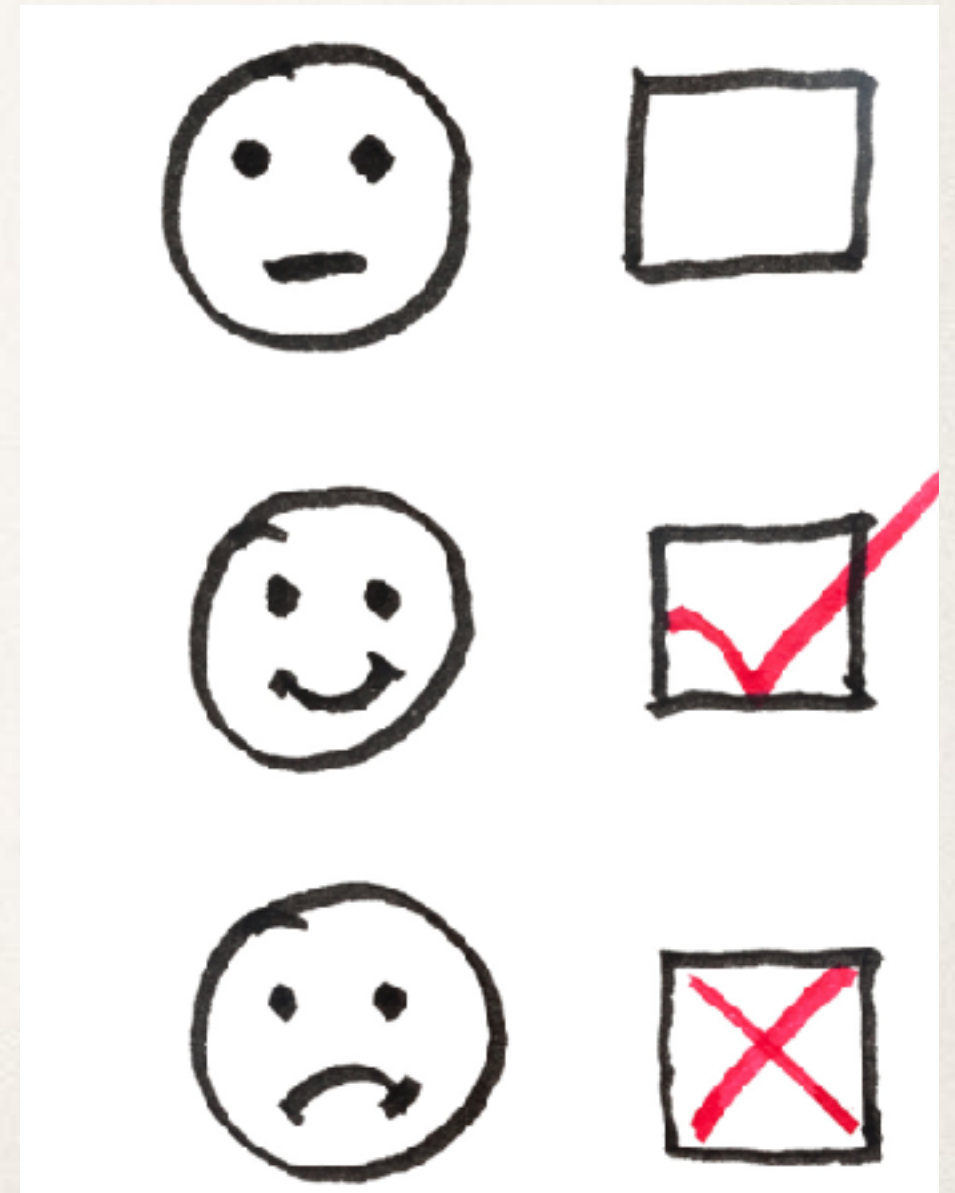
Jaak Panksnepp

Just one of the basic primary, adaptive emotions that helped us survive as we evolved.

Brain-based emotional action systems:

1. SEEKING
2. CARE
3. PLAY
4. LUST
5. FEAR
6. SADNESS
7. ANGER

Imbalances between these are linked to psychiatric disorders.



The Downside of Anger

- Can be maladaptive and can lead to considerable dysfunction
- Can lead to serious psychological, interpersonal, and physiological consequences including damaged relationships, heart disease, and other negative emotions
- Many people have trouble processing, coping with, and expressing their angry feelings.



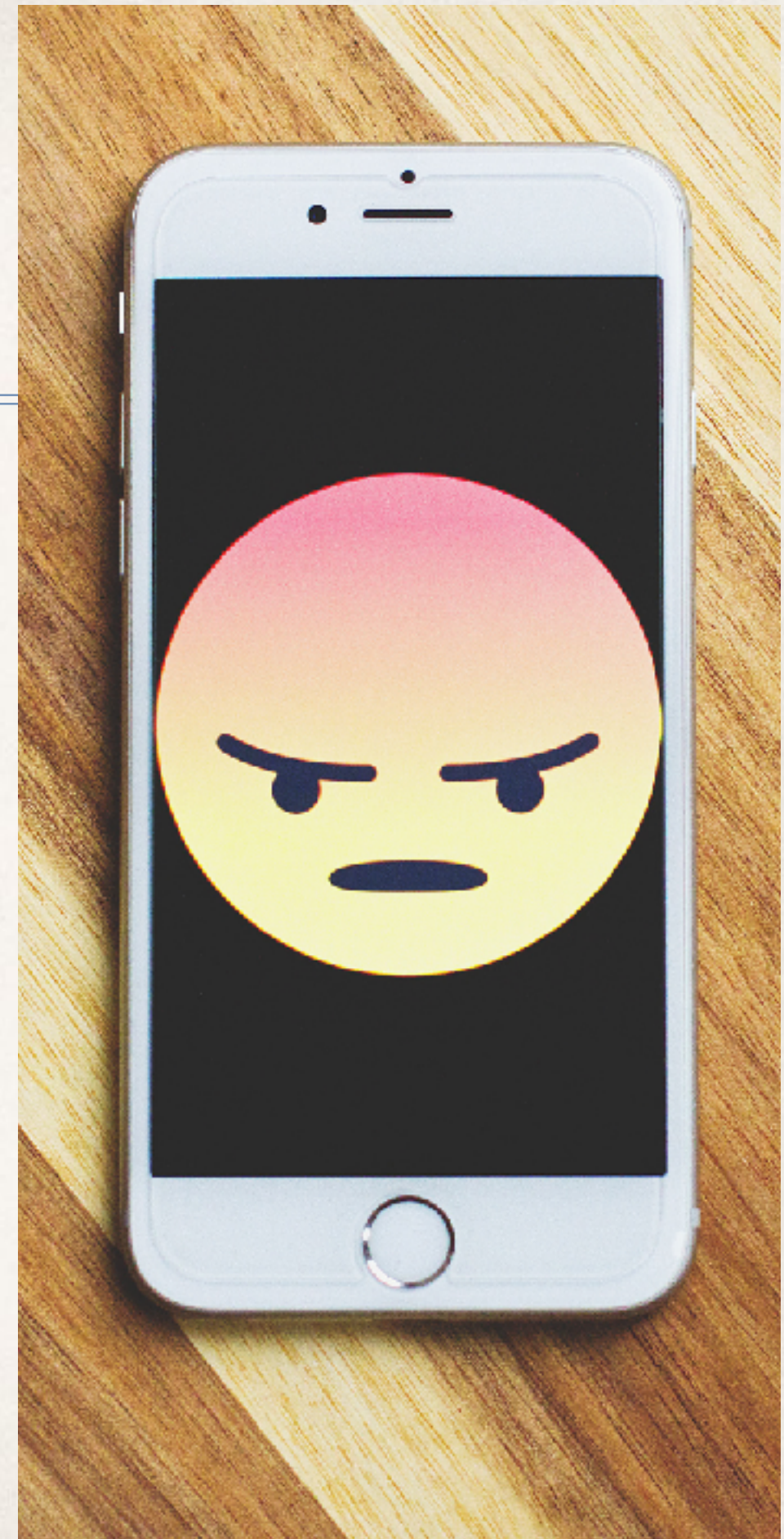
Anger Styles

There are four basic ways in which people respond to anger:

- **Aggressive** - Anger is externalized, "turned loose"
- **Passive/Aggressive** - Outwardly agreeable, but showing the anger through indirect actions or sabotage
- **Passive** - Anger is internalized or "locked up"
- **Assertive** - Anger is appropriately managed and communicated if necessary.

Anger vs Aggression

- People confuse anger with aggression, and because aggression is relatively well represented in the DSM-5, people do not see anger as being underrepresented.
- Anger is fundamentally different than aggression.
- Gives you energy for problem-solving or asserting yourself
- There are a number of negative consequences that can emerge when people experience anger too intensely or for too long: other negative emotions (e.g., sadness, fear), physical and verbal aggression, alcohol and drug use, intentional and unintentional self-injury, and damaged relationships
- These outcomes can emerge when one feeds their negative thoughts (critical inner voices)



Why We Get Angry

We experience what's happening as unfair.

- Feel helpless
- Threatened
- Vulnerable
- Exposed/shamed, victimized
- Violated
- Inadequate or unable to meet important needs

We then personalize the experience:

- “It's being done to me” or “It's happening to me”



Triggers

- Over-reactive emotional responses in adults, including intense anger or rage, often contain a primal element based on early experiences that were threatening or traumatic.
- Becoming sensitive to the types of situations that arouse overly strong reactions of anger is useful in making a distinction between present-day and primal emotions.
- Whereas the anger in the current situation may be justified, the intensity is often not appropriate to the personal significance of the event.
- An awareness of the primal components of one's anger not only helps defuse the level of anger but also allows time for rational self reflection and a more thoughtful consideration of one's thoughts and feelings.



- Robert Firestone

Primary vs Secondary Emotion - Les Greenberg

- **Primary emotions:** person's most fundamental, direct initial reactions to a situation, such as being sad at a loss.
- **Secondary emotions:** responses to one's thoughts or feelings rather than to the situation, such as feeling angry in response to feeling hurt or feeling afraid or guilty about feeling angry.



Primary vs Secondary Emotion - Les Greenberg

- In order to access their more primary generators, secondary emotions need to be explored.
- Awareness of primary emotions provides access to adaptive information that promotes orientation and problem solving.
- Thus, accessing the healthy anger at unfairness that underlies powerlessness promotes adaptation, while accessing the shame at loss of esteem that underlies rage can promote attachment in place of destructiveness.



Adaptive vs Maladaptive Emotion

- Les Greenberg

- Distinction between primary states that are adaptive and are accessed for their useful information and primary states that are maladaptive and need to be transformed.
- **Maladaptive emotions:** old, familiar feelings that occur repeatedly and neither change in response to changing circumstance nor provide adaptive directions for solving problems when they're experienced.
- Leave the person with symptomatic secondary feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety or despair



Adaptive vs Maladaptive Emotion

- Les Greenberg

- Doesn't help simply to get in touch with these maladaptive emotions. They need to be replaced or transformed by access to adaptive emotions that promote problem solving and growth.
- Primary emotions need to be accessed for their adaptive information and capacity to organize action, whereas maladaptive emotions need to be accessed and regulated in order to be transformed.
- Secondary maladaptive emotions need to be reduced by exploring them to access their more primary cognitive or emotional generators.



Is Your Anger Adaptive or Maladaptive?

I think another controversial idea is that anger can be adaptive and healthy. Many people think that anger is always dysfunctional, that it's maladaptive, but – handled well – anger can be a very healthy emotion. People often find that difficult to comprehend.

- Les Greenberg

Is Your Anger Adaptive or Maladaptive?

Les Greenberg

- Gut feelings can be adaptive or maladaptive (have to do with the past).
- Question whether you have a distorted filter? Is this feeling fueled by the past?



Reactions to Anger

- Some people are loud and expressive and some are just chronically irritable and grumpy
- Touchiness can have to do with being more sensitive

We shouldn't ignore our anger:

- If you try to suppress or redirect it, you end up turning it on yourself
- Leads to high blood pressure, hypertension, depression
- Leads to passive aggression, cynicism, hostility

Instead:

- Importance of calming down internally
- Get in touch with what your needs are
- Expressing your anger in an assertive not aggressive manner is the healthiest way to express anger



4 Ill Effects of Bypassing Anger

Robert Firestone

When people cannot tolerate angry emotions, they tend to act out their anger inappropriately. They find it difficult to control and are hurtful or abusive to themselves and others. Often, they act against their own best interests.

Bypassing anger can have four ill effects:

- (1) developing psychosomatic symptoms
- (2) projecting anger outward onto others; and
- (3) acting out hostile, negative behaviors
- (4) turning the anger against oneself



Avoiding Anger

Robert Firestone

- When we shy away from our angry emotions, they tend to become somaticized, causing varying degrees of harm to the body.
- Holding back angry feelings creates tension, and this stress reaction plays a part in a wide range of psychosomatic ailments, such as headaches, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.
- As reported by the College of Nursing, University of Tennessee: “...Such low scores suggest suppression, repression, or restraint of anger. There is evidence to show that suppressed anger can be a precursor to the development of cancer, and also a factor in its progression after diagnosis.”



Misplaced or Externalized Anger

Robert Firestone

- People who avoid or suppress anger frequently externalize their anger by **disowning it** in themselves and **projecting it** onto other people.
- Perceive others as being angry or hostile.
- Causes them to experience the external environment as alien and dangerous
- React to these perceived enemies with counter-aggression or paranoia, often triggering a dangerous downward spiral of progressive maladaptation and misery



Anger Justification

Robert Firestone

- When people find it difficult to acknowledge anger directly, they tend to **justify** the reasons for their anger.
- Leads to feeling **misunderstood**, **victimized**, **righteously indignant** or **morally wronged**.
- Often causes the anger and victimization to become **obsessive**.
- The angry thoughts not only persist for long periods but build and eventually take their toll on one's overall happiness and adjustment.



Indirect Expressions of Anger

Robert Firestone

- **Passive-aggression**
- **Withholding**

- *Withholding behaviors, such as being forgetful, habitually late, procrastinating and otherwise provoking, alienate others; in particular, they create distance between partners in intimate relationships and bring about problems in the workplace. In general, passive-aggression is dysfunctional, drives people away, increases guilt feelings and has a bad overall effect on the perpetrator.*

Anger Turned Inward

Robert Firestone

- When people internalize feelings of anger, it causes them to turn against themselves and become self-critical and self-hating.
- If this process reaches serious proportions, it plays a significant role in feelings of depression and worthlessness.
- It can lead to self-defeating, self-destructive and, at times, suicidal behaviors.



Critical Inner Voices

The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward our selves and others. The “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our maladaptive behavior. This internal enemy fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities. The critical inner voice effects every aspect of our lives: our self esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, and our performance and accomplishments at school and work.



Critical inner voices further feed maladaptive anger.

Voices About Anger

- *You're better off just ignoring it.*
- *You're evil for having this feeling.*
- *You can't control yourself.*
- *Don't let them walk all over you.*
- *You're just an angry person.*
- *It's their fault. They made you feel this way.*
- *You need to release this feeling to feel better.*





Healthier Ways to Cope With Anger

Part 2

Write down small irritations

Examples:

“My partner used a condescending tone.”

“My child threw a fit while I was trying to make dinner.”

“My boss sent me feedback on a project.”

“Someone cut me off when I was driving.”

“A friend didn’t respond to my text message.”

“My mom/dad tried to give me unsolicited advice”

“My spouse complained about me not helping around the house.”

“No one in my household thanked me for cleaning up.”

“My partner was late getting home again.”

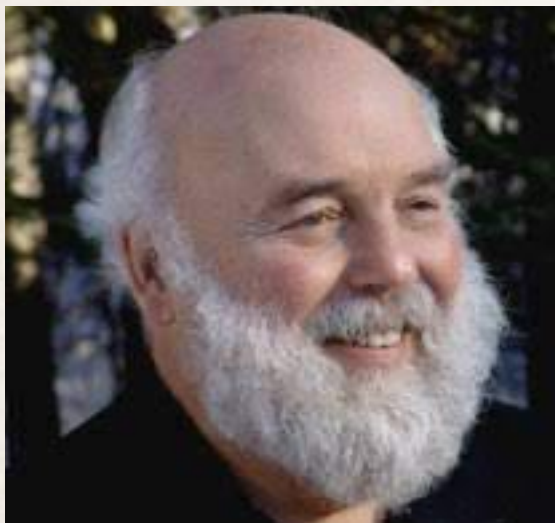
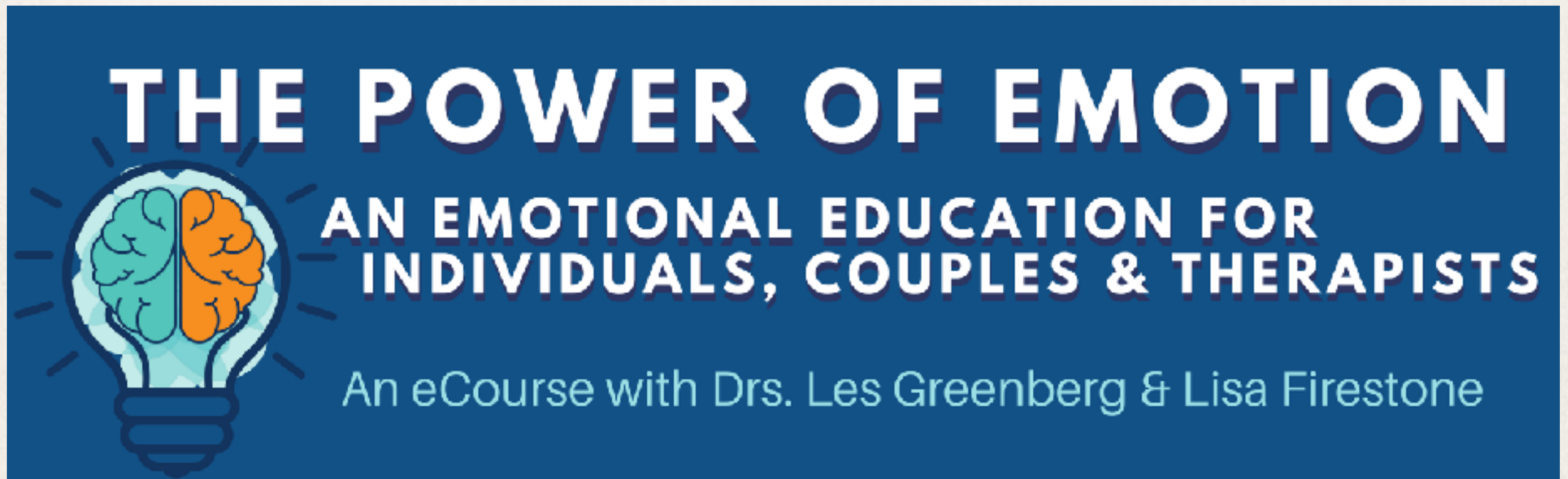
“My kid forgot to finish their homework.”

Write down things you're angry at

TIPS TO NOT GET STUCK IN YOUR SUFFERING:

- ✍️ Avoid being judgmental.
- ✍️ Remember anger doesn't have to be rational.
- ✍️ Don't try to rationalize or build a case.
- ✍️ Remember thoughts and feelings aren't the same as actions.

Exercises adapted from the eCourse:



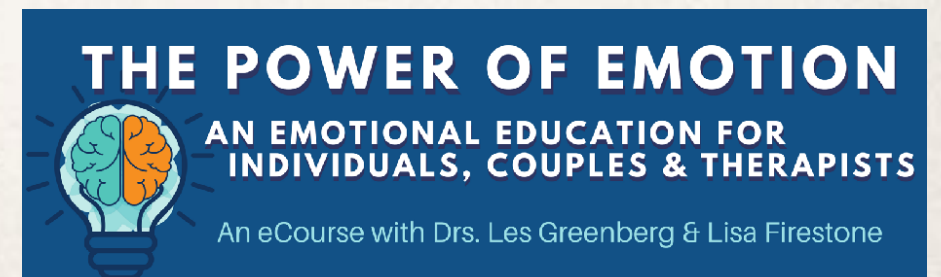
ecourse.psychalive.org

Label Your Triggers

“I have an emotional reaction that I regret when X happens.”

Fill in the X with one of the following feelings:

- I feel deprived.
- I am being teased.
- I am feeling looked over or left out.
- I feel criticized.
- I feel controlled.
- I feel unimportant.
- I feel competitive.
- I am alone



Identifying the Underlying Feeling

This exercise is designed to help you identify the emotions that underlie secondary emotions. Answering the following questions can be particularly helpful when you are feeling “stuck” in a certain emotion.

1. Describe the situation and your emotional response in which you are stuck.
2. Is this your main feeling?
3. Is the emotion you're stuck in covering another feeling underneath that is difficult to face?
4. What is the other emotion?
5. What do you need from yourself to help you feel it?
6. Allow yourself to focus on the new feelings and needs.
7. What is this new feeling telling you?



Respond to Your Critical Inner Voice

Write down the thoughts that feed and fuel your anger.

Write more compassionate, realistic responses

Tools to Calm Down



Name It to Tame It

Helps strengthen the left hemisphere of our brain's language capabilities and link them to the more raw and spontaneous emotions on the right side of our brain (integration)

The RAIN Approach

Recognize

Accept/Acknowledge/Allow

Investigate

Non-Identification

Balancing the Mind

Can help you achieve more calm and balance during times of chaos or stress.

Step 1: Place one hand on your chest over your heart and one hand on your abdomen.

Step 2: Apply a gentle amount of pressure with each hand and see how you feel.

Step 3: Try switching the position of your hands, so that the hand on your chest moves to your belly and vice versa.

Step 4: Again, place a gentle amount of pressure with both hands and notice how this feels.

Step 5: Place your hands in whichever position feels best and simply breathe in and out slowly until your body starts to relax, and your mind becomes calmer

4-7-8 Breathing

Been shown to help relieve stress, lower blood pressure, and induce sleep.

Step 1: Put the tip of your tongue to the top of your mouth just behind your two front teeth.

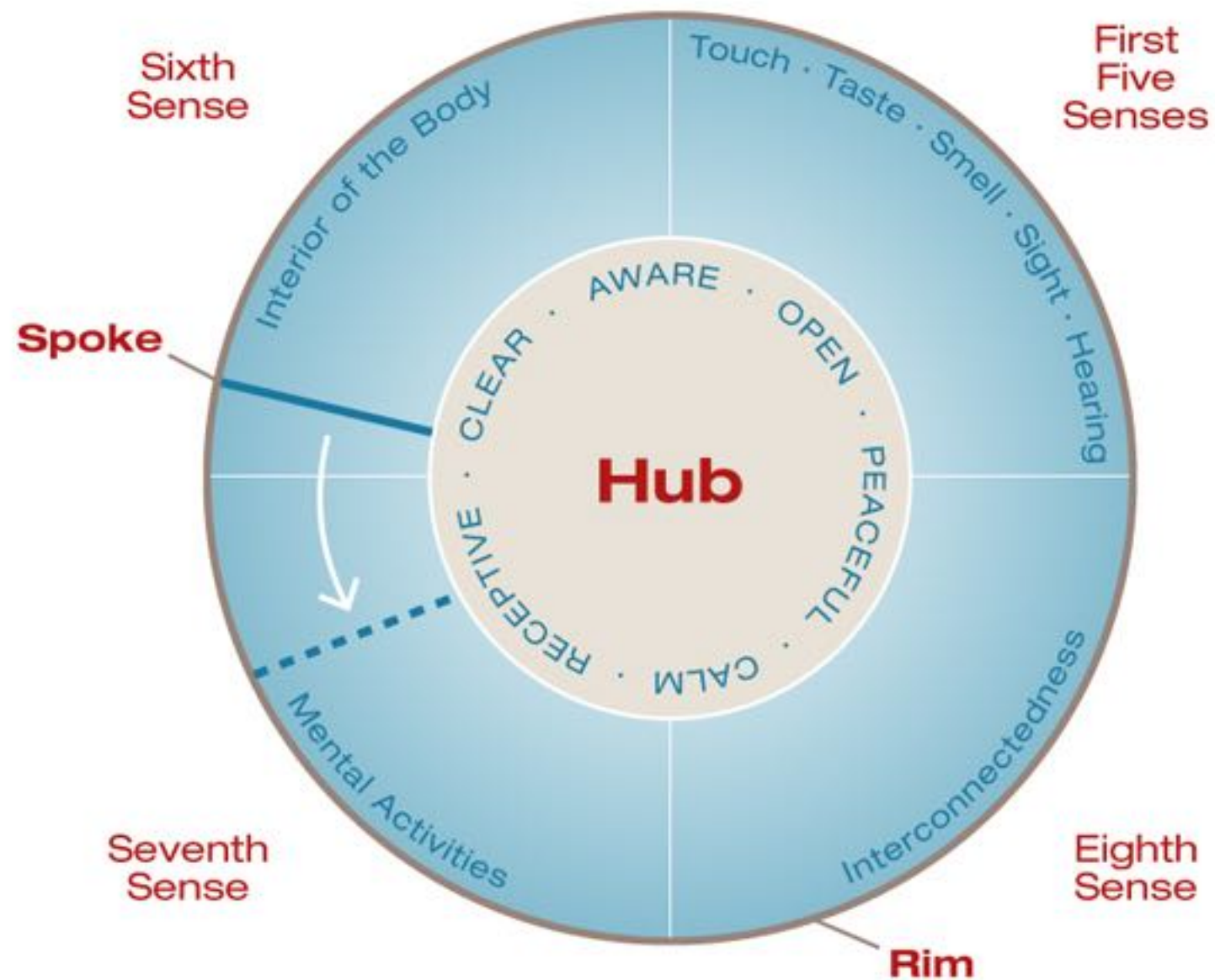
Step 2: Breathe in through your nose for four seconds.

Step 3: Hold your breath for a count of seven seconds.

Step 4: Breathe out through your mouth for eight seconds.

Step 5: Repeat at least five times.

Wheel of Awareness



Overcoming Anger

- Relaxation, breath deeply
- Cognitive restructuring - People aren't always out to get you
- Communicate better - collaborative communication
- Flipped lid slide
- Give yourself a break
- Look for humor
- Do something for yourself



Helpful Tools

- Effective stress reduction and stress management
- Standing up for oneself in a firm, but respectful way
- Setting appropriate limits and boundaries
- Developing the skill of moving forward
- Physical Exercise
- Realistic expectations of ourselves and others
- Not personalizing situations and adopting a problem-solving stance instead

We have to move through it; we can't just ignore it.

Decide how you want to express it.



“Feeling the feeling but do the right thing”

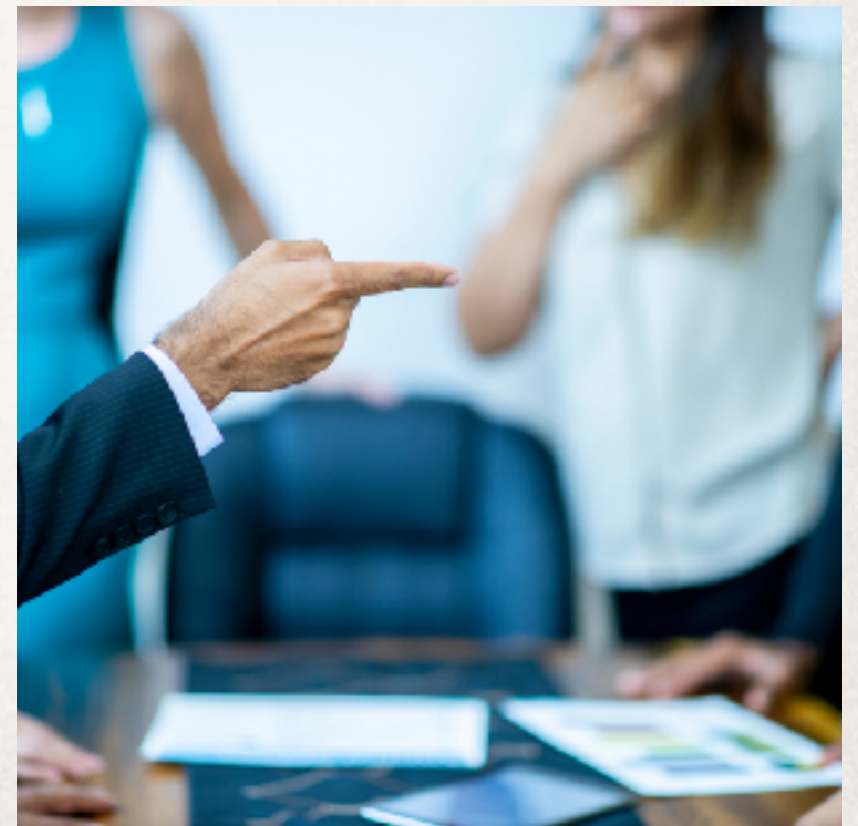
- Pat Love

It is beneficial to understand that anger is a healthy emotion, and it is ideal to feel the emotion fully. Critical, vicious thoughts and attitudes are entirely acceptable, morally speaking, whereas actions must be judged on moral grounds, and even a sarcastic or superior tone or an insensitive act can be considered hurtful.

👉 Robert Firestone

In relation to acting on anger, ask yourself:

- Is it consistent with our values?
- Would it be in our own best interest?



Expressing Anger

- It is crucial to be able to express anger, and at times it can have a remarkably positive effect in personal, vocational or political situations.
- State your anger directly and in a calm tone of voice, rather than in a rageful manner.
- Stand up for yourself.
- Set appropriate limits.



Expressing the Hurt Beneath Anger

Often, if someone expresses anger, for example, in their non-verbal mannerisms, in their facial expressions, there's also hurt. This is a very common sequence. I might also conjecture, 'I can hear you're really angry and I can imagine that was really hurtful'. So you shift people's attention toward subdominant emotions that are there but are not being explicitly focused on. And slowly it moves more and more toward the primary emotion.

- Les Greenberg

The acceptance of anger and the ability to tolerate angry feelings brings anger under our control and regulation. Indeed, when people are able to experience angry feelings and are comfortable with them, they become stronger and more self-possessed.

- Robert Firestone

Continuing Education Information

CEs for this webinar are optional and sold separately through R. Cassidy Seminars. A link to purchase 1.5 CEs will be e-mailed to registrants following the live webinar. For those purchasing or watching this webinar as an archived recording, a link to purchase home study CEs was provided with your purchase confirmation.

Thank you!



Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

lfirestone@glendon.org

Contact:

Glendon@Glendon.org

800-663-5281

<https://www.glendon.org/>

<https://www.psychalive.org/>