



## **Anger Regulation: Compassion Towards Oneself Is the Key** **Martha Bramhall, MSW, LISW**

Anger is a powerful emotional reaction which heightens our ability to fight fiercely against a threat. But anger can also hurt us and those nearest to us. For some people, anger can also become a self-reinforcing habit so that, as a traditional therapists' maxim puts it: "the more you get angry, the more angry you get."

New understandings of how anger works reveal that anger is a reaction to even deeper feelings and emotions. This dynamic is the key to learning how to regulate our anger.

Stephen Stosny, PhD, identifies these deeper emotions as the "core hurts" of feeling disregarded, unimportant, accused/guilty, devalued, rejected, powerless, unlovable, or unfit for contact. This relationship between anger and the core hurts accounts for, as the old saying goes, "a dollar reaction to a nickel's worth of stimulus." The dollar reaction is valid, but 95 percent of it comes from stored-up, core hurts.

When anger taps into a pool of old core hurts, it may feed on that pent-up psychic energy. If getting angry is the main path you have learned to relieve some of this psychic tension, getting angry may become a self-reinforcing habit—an addiction.

Helping clients who have become, in a sense, addicted to their own anger is a retraining process. The therapist coaches clients in how to use their own capacity for self-compassion to tune into—and heal—their own core hurts.

In anger regulation, you become your own good parent and learn how to have compassion for yourself and all the times you struggled with the hurt. First, you find that hurting child within yourself. Then, you let your compassion sit with that child, in a safe place, just feeling through the emotions. Partly, it is about finishing the job of raising yourself.

A holistic approach that teams anger regulation with insight therapy and hands-on healing techniques can be helpful. Insight therapy helps people put strong feelings into context. Hands-on therapy, such as craniosacral therapy and visceral manipulation, can release traumatic memories that may be stored within the body, but out of our awareness.

The major component of anger regulation, however, is compassion—and learning how to discover and use this spiritual capacity. Compassion is the light by which we see to navigate the dark world of our negative emotions and it is also the balm that heals the suffering we find there.

It used to be thought that, once anger was aroused, you could not halt the reaction, but only ride out the storm. Now it seems that, through anger regulation training, you can learn how to act in a crisis to switch your attention—to close the computer screen of anger and open another, the screen of compassion..

As you compassionately tune into your core hurts, you begin to drain the pool. And, as the pent-up energy of these old feelings diminishes, it becomes easier to shake the habit of getting angry and to feel more compassionate toward the failings of other people.

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