

WELL-BEING ESSENTIALS

Five Strategies for Keeping Your Cool

**Anger can be destructive when we let it take over.
Here are five simple and practical ways to work with anger in the moment.**

1 DO THE OPPOSITE

Engaging in actions that are opposite to the fight or flight response activate our parasympathetic nervous system (calming system). For example, thinking about what we want to say before we speak, slowing our movements or speech, stretching our arms and legs, taking a couple of deep breaths, noting what we can see in the room, recognizing what all we can hear.

2 BEWARE OF UNHELPFUL THINKING

Anger is often fueled by all-or-none thinking, sweeping generalizations, and other types of judgmental, unproductive thinking. Catching ourselves when we are thinking this way can help us redirect our thoughts more productively.

Unhelpful narrative	Reshape the narrative
"You're either with us or against us"	"There I go making all-or-none statements."
"This is all their fault"	
"They're never going to change"	"I'm really frustrated but that doesn't mean they'll never get it right."

Please note that while trying this exercise, you may find yourself engaging in a mental tug-o-war ("But it is their fault!"). If this happens, just redirect your thoughts back to the task at hand—it will become easier with practice.

3 VALIDATE THE EMOTION

Oftentimes, acknowledging that it makes sense we are experiencing a certain emotion, like anger, helps us to work with it in a more adaptive way. For instance, when a car cuts us off on the freeway, taking a moment to acknowledge how it's okay to feel frustrated at the situation because we could have been hurt can prevent us from madly honking at the driver and engaging in retaliation. This is also a simple form of [self-compassion](#).

4 TAKE A TIME OUT

Giving ourselves permission to stop what we are doing, even if just for a couple of breaths, can help prevent us from overreacting while we feel angry. We can excuse ourselves from a conversation, ask for a moment to collect our thoughts, or even request to wait and discuss a topic at a later time. This may feel awkward in the moment; however, pausing in this way allows us to slow down the situation so we can feel more grounded and in control.

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Five Strategies for Keeping Your Cool (cont.)

5 ACT ON VALUES

Values are [one-word descriptors](#) that can serve as a compass for how we want to treat ourselves, interact with others and engage with the world. Values are particularly useful during difficult moments, especially when we feel stuck and helpless. We can ask ourselves questions like, “What do I want to stand for right now? or What would it look like to act on the value of patience even though I’m really angry?”

Reminding ourselves that we can act on and return to values, like respect and curiosity, may help us discover that we have more options for action than we initially thought.



Whatever you do, know that feeling angry is normal and is telling you that something is important. Anger can be destructive when we let it take over but choosing a strategy (like ones in this Quick Guide) may help you work with anger in a more productive and compassionate way.

Access the complete article online at: <https://accelerate.uofuhealth.utah.edu/resilience/how-to-keep-your-cool-when-all-of-your-buttons-have-been-pushed>