BELIEFS THAT EASE ANGER

When someone takes away your power it is natural to get mad. The justified anger of childhood comes from having to give up primitive wants and desires in favor of socially acceptable behavior. The firm, controlled voice of adult anger can replace the strident outbursts of youth when three things happen:

1. Society’s rules become your own.
2. You can trust yourself to find both support and freedom.
3. You acquire enough self-esteem that it cannot be taken away by an off comment or a minor mishap.

Once these developmental tasks are accomplished, people can look through others’ eyes to see the whole picture and decide when they need to take action to correct a true loss of power. If you have many mad moments, it may be because beliefs instilled during early life experiences make it difficult to empathize with others and consider your options.

For more ideas, see Feeling Good by David Burns (Avon Books, 1980); and EMDR: The Breakthrough Therapy by Francine Shapiro (Basic Books, 1997).
INSTILLING BELIEFS THAT EASE ANGER

When you are not upset, the beliefs that prevent (unnecessary) anger may seem completely true. It will be harder to maintain them during conflicts of interest, when you feel controlled or unsupported or when things aren’t going “right.” To begin to change thinking patterns, start keeping a journal of your mad moments. Use the questions below and the previous table to identify the provocative thoughts that each incident triggers. Write a calming belief that you would like to have instead and affirm it regularly.

- When others disturb me, what does that mean about me?
- How do others’ actions make me feel about myself?
- When did I first have this disturbing thought about myself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal of Mad Moments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Upsetting Incident</strong></td>
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<td>Someone cuts you off while you’re driving.</td>
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<td>Your boss blames you for a mishap you didn’t cause.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A sales clerk keeps following you, even though you’ve said you are just looking.</td>
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BACK UP BELIEFS WITH ACTION

You can bolster beliefs that reduce the frequency of mad moments by acting on them. Don’t wait until you feel good enough to change your behavior. Acting as though the beliefs you want are true is the fastest way to make them work for you. You will find yourself going from fury to frustration, anger to annoyance, and ballistic to bothered without even realizing it. Check the strategies you most need to adopt:

___ Practice seeing the whole picture. Look for good intentions in others’ behavior and positive possibilities in negative situations.
___ Do not hide from hate. Admit what you are feeling and examine the incident that caused it. Identify the choices you now have. Take action to reclaim any power you lost. It is your responsibility to recover from past hurts.
___ Check out your assumptions and generalizations with at least two people who do not have problems with anger.
___ Burn your bridges. Let significant others know how you use anger for power, to look tough, or to distance.
___ Act as if healing beliefs are true—“I am good (enough), I’m loveable, I belong.” Hold your head high, quit apologizing, take praise, and be more open. Don’t turn your lack of self-esteem on others.

For more strategies, see Letting Go of Anger by Ron and Pat Potter-Efron (New Harbinger, 1995).