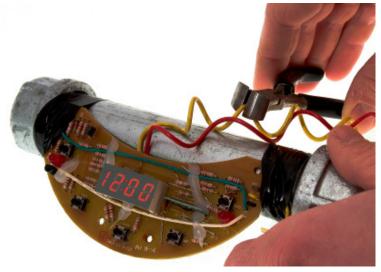# Diffusing Anger

It seems to me that there are two types of anger – one healthy and the other unhealthy. The healthy kind of anger is one that protects a boundary violation involving ourselves or someone we love. This kind of anger usually arises out of a sense of extreme injustice, personal violation, or a desperate need to protect ourselves or the people we care about from those who are threatening to do harm. In these rare situations anger can serve a purpose. It is a way of self-protection and creates distance from people and situations that we perceive as dangerous or hostile. However, more often than not, anger operates as a 'secondary emotion,' where it masks or conceals what we are *really* feeling. Underneath anger, for example, are usually feelings of disappointment, hurt, rejection, disrespect, neglect, and/or sadness.

The problem with this second kind of anger is that it serves to distance ourselves from other people at the very moment when we are in need of empathy, validation, and comfort. In short: *anger begets anger*. Far from producing understanding, compassion, or a caring response, it usually causes the other person to react with defensiveness (due to their feeling attacked) or with a counter-attack of their own. Anger produces a vicious cycle that is unlikely to resolve the underlying feelings.

If you tend to experience frustration, annoyance, or anger, you can start by trying to be more aware of when it happens. Try to stop yourself from time to time, or even reflect back on a situation after the fact, in an attempt to uncover what feeling might have been hiding underneath the anger. Make more of an effort to express vulnerable feelings that will serve to connect you with others, instead of push them away.

If someone you care about has difficulty controlling their anger, learn how to increase the chances of 'diffusing' it. It is usually best to not ignore the person who is extremely upset – they are looking to be heard and your brushing them off will make them more angry and resentful. In addition, try not to react with anger of your own, since that will only escalate the situation further. Instead, try to recognize that underneath the anger, this person is feeling hurt in some way. Ask them what they are upset about and be curious about what caused them to feel that way. It feels good to have someone actively trying to understand how we

are feeling. Try to validate their feelings – remember, you do not have to agree with their reasoning, and you are entitled to your own feelings about the situation as well. Once they feel validated and understood, you are in a better position to express your thoughts, concerns, and feelings. It takes some skill, but some of the above strategies can help to move past unproductive feelings of anger.