© Emotional Intelligence Institute 2024 All Rights Reserved

2 Getting to Know OUR MINDS Better

2B LESSON
Avoiding Harmful Reactions to Emotions



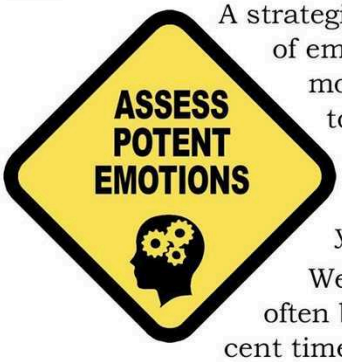
"Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way….that is not easy."

Aristotle, ancient Greek philosopher. (384 – 322 BCE)

Potent emotions challenge the mind to remain rational and calm. Safely controlling how we deal with these emotions in the heat of the moment is one of the most difficult, yet important EQ skills to learn well. This lesson teaches powerful, yet relatively simple ways to prepare for healthier reactions to easily exaggerated emotions, especially anger.

2B

ASSESSING POTENT EMOTIONS BEFORE REACTING



A strategic objective of this program is to help students realize the incredible power of emotions for directing the mind. Learning to manage this power is one of the most difficult, yet important EQ composure skills to learn well. We must learn to safely *manage* potent emotions in the heat of the moment.

In this lesson, you will be studying about the strong sensations that can cause us to react inappropriately, as well as techniques designed to assist you in reacting more healthfully when experiencing easily aroused emotions.

We all initially learned to react to potent emotional situations in our own way, often by mimicking our parents or others who were around us during our adolescent time of life. Perhaps you advanced your own understanding as an adult with further study. Whatever the case, the more predisposed we are to react in unhealthy ways, the more adult study we should encourage. This lesson will provide valuable insight for anyone who savors healthier *command* of their emotions.

As mentioned in Lesson 2A, managing emotions is considered the second domain of emotional intelligence. You also learned that one of the main requirements for building a more emotionally intelligent mind is to accept healthier and sometimes difficult behavioral *composure* in sensitive situations. *Defusing* our adrenalin at the onset of such situations can be tricky, since the mind can so easily justify our own aggressive feelings and direct us to move the mouth and our extremities into action without reservation or realistically weighing the value or consequences.

"Managing potent emotions well can equate to knowing how to captain a ship in rough seas!"

Sandra Hughes, lesson Author and Director, EII

The emotional pain of anger and other frustrations may initially compare to the physical discomfort we feel from a cut on our skin. Even if not requiring stitches, a cut can still cause intense pain temporarily. As children, we learned to withstand minor cuts, rather than to react by crying or fussing; realizing the damage was slight and the pain would soon subside.

Unfortunately, a far more complex assignment is involved for intelligently assessing adult aggravations and knowing whether we are dealing with an emotional surface cut, or a full-blown emotional stab to the heart! In the heat of the moment, the mind can be too pitched to consider whether to simply withstand the feelings with steadfast resolution, or to express our immediate discomfort. We must realize that the difficulties in weighing the rational of our feelings and the ease with which we can justify our emotions, when agitated, can reduce our ability to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate reactions.

2B

Aroused emotions can even be like a security system's false alarm going off. In thought, the mind can draw an erroneous conclusion with just a minor clue and repeat this assumption over and over. Such repetition of false alarms can go on and on for hours— with little evidence of the problem being a reality or a significant issue. Yet, recognizing this kind of distorted thinking may be impossible without looking at ourselves as though we are an outside observer. Once able to more deeply analyze our feelings or have professional help to do so, we may recognize the exaggeration.

To grow more emotionally intelligent, we must learn to explore healthier self-talk, such as telling ourselves the following:

10 Healthy Self-Talk Comments to Consider

1. "I can't handle this like it's a free for all!"
2. "I don't have enough information to draw a conclusion and need to patiently wait."
3. "It would be better to wait and discuss this later, after I calm down and can assess the real value or ways to resolve."
4. "Calm down and wait this out. It's not time to get so upset or to panic yet. What else could I think about to distract me from this issue?"
5. "I would love to express my feelings about this, but won't because I am loyal to a bigger cause."
6. "Let it go!"
7. "Am I dealing with a minor $1.00 issue or a more serious $1000.00 one?"
8. "Self-control is about accepting disciplines that sometimes make me feel uncomfortable."
9. "Potent emotions increase our susceptibility to irrational, stupid, and even dangerous thoughts and behavior."
10. "Increasing my effort to understand and defuse potent feelings in a healthy manner reduces the chance of expressing myself with total abandon!"

"Do not teach your children never to be angry; teach them how to be angry."

Lyman Abbott, American Congregationalist theologian, editor, and author. (1835 – 1922)

You will find additional healthy self-talk ideas for remedying potent situations in Lesson 4A *"Motivational and Stress Reducing Self-talk" supplement.*

The *Potent Emotion Compass* supplement to this lesson lists feelings that are easily aroused and expressed inappropriately. Please spend time familiarizing yourself with this supplement. The emotions listed have adrenaline rich *triggers* that have the power to numb our sensibilities. Learning to meaningfully assess these feelings before reacting is important to our health and well-being. Please keep this compass handy for helping you to remember to *STOP* and *ANALYZE* these emotions very carefully.

2B

Considering the need to assess potent emotions reminds us *of how tricky it is to know when to quietly withstand emotional agitations, rather than assertively express our immediate feelings. Understanding the manner in which potent emotions can naturally affect our reasoning and behavior is a critical components of EQ growth. To help us work our way through potent emotions, it is to our advantage to learn an abundance of healthy self-talk phrases for repeating to ourselves.*

REFLECTING ON POTENT EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS

Studying human behavior, especially our own, requires noting the subtle activity of our emotions and searching for unhealthy patterns. Because the mind can too naturally carry an overreaction too far, we recommend applying a more reserved approach, especially helpful in early EQ training. Sorting through our feeling by writing the details on paper also helps us to resolve sensitive situations more quickly and wisely than we can by reviewing them in the dark spaces of the mind.

One of the questions listed in Lesson 2A to ask yourself daily was: "What frustrated, angered or bothered me today?" By journaling this particular question each day for at least a month, you have been learning to reflect upon stressful experiences several days later in a more insightful manner than possible in the heat of the moment.

Posing this particular question brings a closer scrutiny of your mind's *stress gauge*, which, as mentioned, has a tendency to malfunction and initially overreact. By reviewing these experiences at a later date, you have a better chance of evaluating them in a more insightful manner. This exercise is designed to help reduce the number of times the mind malfunctions or overreacts to such feelings in the future.

Another question in Lesson 2A to ask daily was: "What did I do today that might have inconvenienced or offended another person?" By journaling this particular question on a regular basis, you are learning to reflect and identify the hurt you may have inflicted upon others. Without such reflections, you may not realize your own offenses. When we aren't sensitive to another person's feelings, it can be easy to even joke about others, inappropriately. This kind of reflection also helps us exercise humble self-honesty.

Reflecting on potent emotional situations reminds us *that the mind does not easily remain in intelligent control, especially when dealing with strong emotional currents. Once we study the complexities of what we are dealing with, we have a better chance to access wiser reasoning in the future when we find ourselves in the midst of potent emotions.*

"One of the hardest things in this world is to admit you are wrong. And nothing is more helpful in resolving a situation than its frank admission."

Benjamin Disraeli, British Conservative politician, writer, and aristocrat. (1804 – 1881)

REDUCING THE POWER OF THE EGO'S DARK SIDE

2B

As students of emotional intelligence, we must be aware of how our ego can deceive us. Otherwise the ego may too easily operate beneath the radar of our consciousness. Healthy reasoning often requires humble surrendering of our ego, and in some cases, even our dignity. For reducing the ego's deception, we must question our reactions to potent emotions with exceptional humility. Such honesty is difficult, as we are up against the mind's more natural way of reacting.

No other aspect of our reasoning power is more significant for improving our EQ, yet so difficult, than our ability to be honest with ourselves and recognize our own wrongdoing. As mentioned, the ease in which we can deceive ourselves makes it rather difficult to react appropriately in the heat of the moment.

The suggestion that we can deceive ourselves, as well as others, has become of particular interest in recent centuries. Author Bulwer-Lotton wrote in Victorian times that, "The easiest person to deceive is one's own self." And in 1969, philosopher Herbert Fingarette wrote a book entitled, *Self-Deception*, dedicated to better understanding the subject. In his most recent 2000 edition, Fingarette discusses how to question the merits of our thoughts and the ways we go about expressing ourselves, making us better equipped to recognize such deception.

As with blind spots in our car's rear view mirror, the mind has *emotional* blind spots that we must be aware of. In our natural mode of thought processing, these emotional blind spots allow unsuspecting wrongful thoughts and insensitive actions toward others. Granted, it is sometimes difficult to clarify who is responsible for tense issues at hand. Yet, if we don't even consider whether we are reacting appropriately, we are missing a necessary EQ observation



The internal physiological symptoms associated with the irritations and frustrations of potent emotions could be compared to severe weather conditions that contribute to tornados, hurricanes, or erupting volcanos. Fortunately, we can learn to control our internal barometer and mitigate the damage from comparable emotional forces.

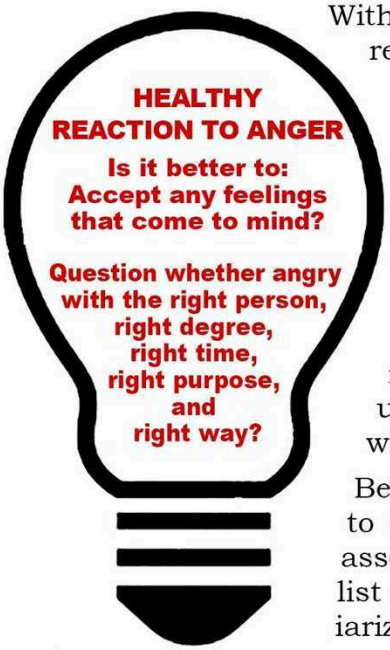
An untamed ego has great potential for hurting others verbally. We can so easily access sarcasm, spewing insulting words like bullets, penetrating another's mind and leaving them with horrible emotional scars. Knowing which feelings may be susceptible to influence from the dark side of the ego is quite valuable. Several possible feelings and scenarios that we must suspect may be influenced are listed in this lesson's supplement, *The Ego Dark Side*. Please spend time familiarizing yourself with the content of this supplement.

Studying self-deception and the ego's dark side reminds us *how important it is to investigate most carefully how well we are processing our thinking. Our ability to be honest with ourselves and to recognize our own wrong doing are often difficult because of the ego's deceptive nature, yet is critical to improving our EQ. By not understanding how subtly the mind can deceive us and not realizing the need for self-critique, we more readily react abrasively the very instant we feel anxious or agitated. When the ego is not restrained, we more easily express our anger vindictively, rather than to consider diplomatic comments.*

"Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power."

Marcus Annaeus, A Roman authority on the history and techniques of oratory. (54BC – 37BC)

APPROACHING ANGER CONSTRUCTIVELY



With better understanding, we are more apt to stop and analyze HOW to react intelligently, instead of escalating tension. There are necessary adjustments we must make to our thinking, as we begin to feel tense or angry, that are impossible to access without pause and self-critique.

2B

An emotionally mature approach requires a conscious effort to avoid creating or adding tension unnecessarily, especially to a potential conflict. This more sensible option also requires our being objective enough, as mentioned earlier, for thinking through uneasy situations honestly and for recognizing our own emotional triggers and short-comings. While those under-educated emotionally start to verbalize when aggravated, those with a higher EQ start analyzing thoughtfully instead.

Below and on the next page are two check-lists of valuable questions to ask yourself. The first list of questions is designed to help you assess your EQ barometer at the initial onset of anger, and the second list of questions provides for sensible review after the fact. Try to familiarize yourself with both of these question check-lists.

12 Questions to Ask Yourself in Anger's Initial Stage

1. How could I reduce tension, rather than excessively dramatize my position?
2. Have I learned enough about controlling anger to address this issue appropriately?
3. Could my anger have more of an effect than I realize on me or another person?
4. Am I alienating the other person more than I should?
5. Am I allowing the other person's exaggerations to fuel my anger?
6. Am I closing my mind to honest and objective discussion?
7. Am I allowing emotional triggers to go off on a whim, rather than withstanding the pain?
8. Am I missing pieces of information that might change my position?
9. Am I needing to be right too often, or unnecessarily
10. Is this a $2.00 issue or a $200.00 one, and am I treating it accordingly?
11. Am I absolutely sure that my opinion and level of understanding reflect the most educated or healthiest perspective?
12. Could I be ignoring incriminating evidence or could there be missing information that would change my position, similar to evidence omitted in legal battles?

"Consider how much more you often suffer from your anger and grief, than from those very things for which you are angry and grieved."

Mark Antony, a Roman politician and general who played a critical role in the transformation of the Roman Republic from an oligarchy into the autocratic Roman Empire. (83 BC – 30 BC)

7 Questions to Ask Yourself After Confrontation Has Passed

1. Have I treated the other person as though we are far from being on the same team?
2. Am I concentrating on resolving the issue, rather than just stewing in the aftermath?
3. Should I ask for advice of someone whom I know will take my side or a neutral person?
4. Could I apply my mind to thoughts that would be of greater value?
5. Do I really want to avoid contacting a counselor, when that professional may be the best resource for an optimally balanced viewpoint?
6. Am I just letting anger continue to intensify in memory of this negative event, or am I applying my mind to resolve this conflict and improve the situation?
7. Would it be healthy to gossip about how justified my anger is, while leaving out incriminating details?

2B

A PRACTICAL REMINDER FOR DIFFUSING ANGER

Several years ago our founder discovered an extremely helpful technique for defusing anger in the actual *heat of the moment*. This practical activity teaches a relatively simple way to reduce future confrontations and stress that may be incurred from angry agitations. By practicing this technique, you should improve your chances of reacting in a more emotionally intelligent manner whenever potent feelings of anger emerge. As mentioned in Lesson 1A, this technique is now being offered to anger management clients by some psychologists. You will be creating a daily reminder sheet that we call an *"Anger Extinguisher."*

How to Create a Practical Reminder — Anger Extinguisher

At the top of a sheet of paper or computer file, write the following reminder headline:

Remember, if I pause rather than comment or react too quickly, I have time to rethink what I will say and do— thus allowing myself ample time to consider a more diplomatic response.

Leave a space or two after the reminder headline, then start writing a list of people's names whom you would not want to hurt unknowingly and strain your relationship. You may want to create three or four columns, depending on your social exposure. The list should include everyone you encounter, including family, friends, working associates, etc. At the bottom of this sheet of paper or computer file, write the following quote:

"When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry count to a hundred." - Thomas Jefferson

On the top of the BACK side of the paper or second page of your computer file, note this reminder:

Remember that maintaining emotionally intelligent composure when angry is very difficult, yet is critically important for heightening my EQ. A major difference between IQ and EQ is that the latter involves accepting healthy and sometimes difficult behavioral composure.

"Anyone can become angry. That is easy.
But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time,
For the right purpose, and in the right way. . . .that is not easy."

Aristotle, ancient Greek philosopher. (384 – 322 BCE)

Again, leaving a space or two after this headline, create a list of the kinds of behaviors that offend, anger, and frustrate you. If you write brief comments, two columns may work. Your list may refer to examples of things other people do to you or specific behaviors that you just find annoying or bothersome. Compiling a thorough list may take time, so don't be concerned with completing it during your first try. (Perhaps you'll only be reminded of some people or particulars you need to list when you repeat related experiences).

No one can assure,in tense confrontations, that the other person is hearing precisely what we are saying and responding to us with healthy respect. As a reminder of the complexities of anger, Aristotle's quote at the bottom of page 6 is worth memorizing. On the bottom of the BACK side or second page of your computer file, note this revealing quote by Aristotle. This statement makes a good mantra for repeating to ourselves when attempting to defuse anger in the wake of a potentially harmful situation.

2B

HOW TO REVIEW THE ANGER EXTINGUISHER

For increasing the chances of this "Anger Extinguisher" becoming an effective tool, it is important to take a few minutes to review these pages once each morning and evening with *CONCERN* and *PURPOSE* in mind. By reviewing this information twice daily, there exists a strong possibility that reminders will rise to the forefront of your mind whenever you start feeling tension emerge. Recalling the reason for the "Anger Extinguisher" and its purpose will improve your odds of remaining calm, instead of reacting prematurely. Such reservation in the heat of the moment will allow more time and space for analytical thought, which can attribute to resolving issues more intelligently.

This kind of reviewing technique will also help us change other poor habits. Lacking such a review creates difficulties for any of us in remembering to challenge habitual, unhealthy ways that we may be prone to reacting prematurely. Understanding the mind's susceptibility to harmful over-reactions is not enough. Only by remembering and choosing to suppress over-reactions do we eliminate serious repercussions that are rarely realized beforehand

Reviewing your personalized anger extinguisher each day provides a protective insurance against natural reactions to anger. It can lessen stress in your life by greatly minimizing your chances of falling prey to exaggerated feelings, excessive negative thinking, and unnecessary conflicts.

If this activity doesn't work the first time in dealing with a frustrating moment, don't give up! It may take longer to transform such radical changes to existing long-term habits. At first, you may just look back after reacting and in hindsight, remember that you were supposed to be more reserved. The next time you may remember in the midst of your anger. And finally, with continued review of the Anger Extinguisher, you will one day recognize the need to calm your anger before it erupts.

You should learn from this daily reflection that it is often healthier to absorb these potent emotions in stride, choosing to deal with them more calmly. Moreover, as your days of practice turn into weeks, followed by months, your ability to suppress such overwhelming feelings should increase dramatically. Another Anger Extinguisher reminder page that you may want to create is one that will help to maintain emotional equilibrium with particular friends or family. You may need to prepare a single page for each friend and family member. Directions are provided in the following paragraph.

If you really want to do something, you'll find a way. If you don't, you will find an excuse.

James Rohn, American entrepreneur, author, and motivational speaker. (1930 – 2009)

Construct two vertical columns on a sheet of paper or computer file. Starting with the first column, list all of the attributes you appreciate regarding a significant friend or family member. In the second column, note the characteristics you dislike. As with the other two pages of the Anger Extinguisher, add to the list as more ideas surface.

To assist you in maintaining your relationship-equilibrium, plan to review the list of a person's attributes as part of your daily extinguisher exercise. The next time you sense anger's intensity, remind yourself of the influence that emotions may wield over you in jeopardizing relationships. You may also find this same technique useful for improving any difficult memory work. For increased anger management insurance, spend time familiarizing yourself with the following lists of *Do's* and *Dont's.*

2B

10 ANGER DO'S

1. Do read and study about anger.
2. Do create/review an anger extinguisher.
3. Do acknowledge your feelings to yourself
4. Do repeat mantras that calm anger.
5. Do allow space and time to develop a clearer perspective.
6. Do share your feelings with an unbiased person, such as a counselor.
7. Do try to look at the situation from the other person's perspective.
8. Do think of old memories or more recent ones that will remind you of better times.
9. Do write about the problem and ways to resolve, rather than just sustaining tension.
10. Do spend time searching for a diplomatic dialogue to express your angry feelings.

10 ANGER DON'TS

1. Don't rehash ill thoughts over and over again.
2. Don't distance yourself from a person with whom you are angry.
3. Don't be too frank or brutally aggressive.
4. Don't allow your opinions and understanding to be based on inexperience and an uneducated or unhealthy approach. –es-
5. Don't talk too bluntly about your anger at the expense of affecting others adversely.
6. Don't use terms like "you always" or "you never" to exaggerate your claims.
7. Don't try to excuse your own ill behavior by claiming that no one is perfect.
8. Don't operate machinery or drive while anger is filling your head.
9. Don't argue in front of children in an uncivilized manner.
10. Don't share your anger with mutual friends or family, as they may remain distant with the other person.

Creating an Anger Extinguisher reminds us *that by reflecting daily on such related factors, we have a better chance to avoid habitual triggers when potent feelings erupts. We learn to calm such pressure and react more diplomatically. This technique becomes a valuable insurance policy against unnecessary problems in our lives.*

"Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things."

Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Nobel laureate who was one of the greatest wartime leaders of the 20th Century. (1874-1965)

ENGAGING IN HEALTHY CRITICISM OR DEBATE

There are times when criticism or debate may be helpful, but it is always essential to adhere to sensible guidelines. Part of our own EQ growth involves learning to *temper* our expectations in others. We learn to approach our criticisms and differences with due care, while absorbing untoward comments or actions with as little resentment as possible.

HOW TO REVIEW THE ANGER EXTINGUISHER

2B

How many times have you noticed rifts between two parties that unfortunately led to a serious distancing between them, even leading to the possible dissolution of a relationship? With continued EQ training, you learn healthy solutions to significant issues with family, friends, business associates, etc., that can help reduce or prevent such extreme consequences.

Criticism and heated debate can also have emotionally devastating and scarring impact on our self-esteem and the overall mood of our relationships, if not approached constructively. Just as important is the need to structure a critique with a beginning, body, and closing as it is to do so in writing or giving a speech.

Remember that in most cases, the opening and ending comments should be complimentary. To assist in situations that you find yourself feeling the need to suggest an improvement in another person's behavior, please consider applying the healthy guidelines listed below and on the next page:

11 Healthy Guidelines for Critique and Debate

1. Approach the situation from a healing position, rather than by creating further tension.
2. Distinguish your comments or response, explaining precisely what is of concern.
3. Be careful to avoid repeated threats or such words as "you always" or "you never."
4. Don't exaggerate or add old grievances to the conversation.
5. Listen intently, as the other person speaks, so that you may assess their comments from an emotionally intelligent perspective.
6. Watch that you don't insist on being right all the time at the expense of the relationship; in some cases, your occasional diplomacy should allow another's wrong to become a right.
7. Be sensitive to not display anger toward a person in front of others. Any issue that might cause embarrassment should be addressed in private and remain confidential. Moreover, only as a last resort, should a person be rebuked in public.
8. Wait until a later time or date to debate the conflict as not many disagreements require immediate discussion. Fortunately, time allows us space for devising a more diplomatic approach or educated response, as well as a chance to rehearse your comments.
9. If possible, close a conversation before it becomes heated by saying, "Please, let's just talk about this later." If the other person remains persistent, repeat this statement again. If the other person doesn't back off, we suggest that you just leave the scene.
10. After presenting the body of your critique, close by adding some uplifting compliments, or reemphasizing the prior strengths you had mentioned in the beginning.

"How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it."

Marcus Aurelius, The last of five good emperors and considered one of the most important Stoic philosophers. (121-17 AD)

Below is an example of a critique with a complimentary opening remark, a sensitive body, and a kindly closing:

Critique example



Opening: "I really admire how you have progressed with your career. I'm so proud of you!"

Body: *Suggestions that may be helpful in shifting to the body of your comments are as follows, leaving the end of each first sentence for you to complete:*

2B

1. "Understandably, _____."
2. "If I can put this gently, _____."
3. "I will say this as kindly as possible, _____."

However, I do need to share a few concerns regarding the meeting you missed yesterday. I will try to explain myself as diplomatically as possible. I'm con cerned that the meetings you have missed lately are going to affect your career. From my own business experience, I've come to recognize that high level executives benefit greatly by keeping a detailed planner calendar, rather than trying to remember so much that is happening. It seems the busier they get, the more written reminders they rely on. I would not want anything unforeseen to happen, just because you forgot to attend a meeting.

Closing: *Suggestions for closing are as follows:*

1. "I appreciate our friendship very much and admire so many things you do. Perhaps we could go shopping next week and look for a day planner."
2. "With everything else you've done, I know you can _____."
3. "You have such determination, I know you can_____."
4. "One thing I know you really do well is_____."

Learning healthy guidelines to manage our emotions reminds us *that we can control misguided feelings with adequate direction and practice. With training, we learn how to handle heated situations in less confrontational ways. By spending time preparing diplomatic dialog ahead of time, we allow for healthier resolve of sensitive situations.*

IN CONCLUSION: Healthfully Dealing with Anger/ Frustrations

Anger has the power to incite inappropriate feelings that threaten to distance or terminate a relationship, just as hormones may create sexually aggressive feelings that may tempt us to initiate an intimate relationship prematurely. Whether we are dealing with an emotional splinter or a full blown emotional stab to the heart, the best responses can be tempered by pause and restraint. Without such review as this lesson suggests, it can be much more difficult to challenge harmful ways we can naturally become too prone to react to potent emotions.

"Most people have no idea of the giant capacity we can immediately command when we focus all of our resources on mastering a single area of our lives."

Anthony Robbins: Motivational speaker and author. (1960 -)

Sometimes we just need an emotional first-aid kit. Yet other times, we require the equivalent of a medical doctor or surgeon for dealing with emotional situations. Be sure to search the Internet and your local library for additional anger management tools. Since healthy control of anger is not easily learned, it is crucial to assimilate as much information as possible regarding anger management from reputable sources.

In acute situations, please consider a psychological counselor who may be our best resource in dealing with serious emotional wounds. The expertise and knowledge that counselors have at their disposal for emotional healing compare favorably to a surgeon's proficiency in physical healing.

2B

Be sure to take note of this lesson's supplements.

PLEASE NOTE: Remember at this point to continue reading through Lesson 3 group if you haven't done so previously, before beginning this lesson's suggested activities.

To rule one's anger is well; to prevent it is still better.

Tryon Edwards, an American theologian who was known for his collection of quotes. (1809 – 1894)

NOTES



A small leak can sink a great ship.

Benjamin Franklin the most accomplished American of his age and the most influential in inventing the type of society America would become. (1750 – 1790)