



Wellbeing Tips

Exploring anger and healing



Reframing anger as a foundation for healing

In Brene Brown's *Atlas of the Heart*, she speaks about anger as being an emotion that we feel when something prevents us from reaching a desired outcome or when we feel that there has been a violation of perceived justice. Anger can then be understood as a response emotion. Brene describes this as an action or full-contact emotion. This means that anger is a powerful emotion which can activate our nervous system impacting our physical body and mind through our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Studies have shown how this disruption to our nervous systems delicate balance suddenly or compacting over time can lead to dysregulation and illness or injury.

This research highlights the importance of working with and healing anger to support the rebalancing of our nervous system thereby preventing ill health and maintaining a sense of wellbeing. In order to acknowledge and work through anger it is important to explore the role of anger as an emotion. Brene challenges the notion that anger is a primary emotion, instead pointing out that anger can often act as an umbrella covering other more complex emotions such as grief and shame below. Brene says that anger often acts as a warning sign

asking us to stop and reflect upon what might be going on for us or someone else below the surface and behind presenting behaviours. For example, Brene argues that anger in its purest form is a compassionate response to experiencing or witnessing perceived injustice. Therefore, if we remain in a curious conversation with anger, we can more mindfully connect and hear our own and others deeper lying needs for healing.

It is important to look at what lies behind the presenting emotions and behaviours of the people we walk alongside. Through our Writing Through Grief online wellbeing activity, we focus on exploring grief, an emotion which can often be hidden by anger through creative writing frameworks. This structured form of exploration gives each participant permission to name, own, bear witness to, and heal from their anger and hidden pain. Brene shares that when we deny our anger, we deny our pain. This means that it is important to our health and wellbeing to be able to safely externalise and mindfully explore our anger to better understand ourselves and those around us acknowledging validating, and harnessing anger as an access point to forgiveness, growth, insight, and healing.