

The other day I was in the grocery store and I saw a young couple arguing vehemently in one of the aisles. The young woman's anger was visibly escalating and, as I came closer, I noticed that a jar had fallen from the shelf and the contents were spread all over the floor.

I can't tell you why these two were arguing but I can identify that we get angry for two reasons: we either feel threatened or we feel frustrated.

When I say this, people usually think this can't be right but, when challenged, they cannot think of one example in which this is not the case.

Both threat and frustration cause a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that creates an internal flush of energy. It is this energy surge that causes the physical symptoms of anger, such as beating heart, red face, shortness of breath and clenching of fists, to name a few.

Over the years, I have heard people say, "Oh I never get angry," and I know they are thinking this is a good thing. Actually it is not a good thing to never feel anger. There is a lot of confusion about anger because it is one emotion that can cause quite a bit of trouble if not handled correctly.

Basically there is healthy anger that we all need to survive emotionally and, at times, physically. Most of us are familiar with the instinctive responses of fight or flight that go back to prehistoric survival responses. Even though the modern-day versions of threat are different, they are still critical to our ability to function in a healthy manner.

For example, anger is the emotion that tells us when our boundaries are being crossed. When someone is treating us disrespectfully, that is a crossed boundary. Maintaining our boundaries is essential to our safety. Aside from basic respect and fairness, personal boundaries cover physical, emotional and sexual boundaries. There are myriad boundaries that we need to protect in daily life and knowing what they are is important.

Frustration comes up when our self-esteem is involved. People get angry when they can't understand something or when they feel stupid or incompetent.

Sometimes we can feel frustrated about how our kids are doing. When your child comes home with a poor report card, you may want to respond in a supportive way but the fear that he will ultimately not have a good life without an education or the frustration that we can't fix the problem can get in the way of how we react.

The important thing is what you do if you feel angry. Yelling and screaming, or stewing about how upset you are, or turning your anger on someone or something else, are not healthy or acceptable. The real key to dealing with anger is finding a way to resolve your feelings so you can understand, release and let go.

If you need help dealing with your anger, reach out and do something about it. It's the safe thing to do.