

Turning down the heat on difficult emotions

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series. In this meditation we will learn how to calm down painful feelings, and even to change them into something better. For example, if we know how to handle anger and frustration when it comes up in us, we can turn it back into understanding, and even love.

This meditation will actually help us find the opposite emotion or the 'antidote' emotion to more destructive emotions such as anger, frustration or jealousy, remembering if we don't learn how to be with and manage feelings like anger as they arise, we will repeat them and that's no good for anyone, including ourselves.

So, finding your comfortable posture now whether that's sitting or lying down, closing your eyes if that feels okay, and taking some calming breaths in and out of your body, slowing your out-breaths down now, resting your body into gravity. You're just letting your awareness follow the movement of your breath for a few moments.

And once you feel more settled and grounded in your body, more present in this moment, remind yourself of a time when you were very angry or frustrated, or maybe something else, perhaps because someone had hurt or misunderstood you, insulted you, or simply did something or told you something that caused this emotion.

Perhaps it is a recurring thing that arises with the same person - maybe your child's other parent, or maybe a group of people. Replay the occasion in your mind, feeling the emotion that arises within you as you replay it - the emotion that bursts up from the depths and takes hold of you.

Now let the scenario fade away from your mind but focus on the physical feelings that are there in your body. Let it stay strong – so outraged or hurt, or disbelief about the way you have been treated. Now start to really see it, as if you are holding this feeling in front of you or in the palm of your hand, so that you see it clearly from all sides, with your mind's eye, applying mindfulness to the emotion - real awareness. See it for what it is.

As you examine it ask yourself: "How does it make me feel? Unpleasant or pleasant? Where can I feel it? How is this emotion affecting me physically? My breathing, my heart rate, inner heat or blood? Can I feel any sensation, any pain? Where is that located? Scan through your body for feelings, tensions and any stress, and observe your emotional state: do you feel the way you like to feel – calm relaxed and in control? What's happening to your thoughts? Are they relaxed or are they rampant, running all over the place?

Now let's begin to turn down the heat so to speak. Take a deep breath in, and on the flow of your outbreath let the feeling of anger or frustration or whatever to go. Dissolve it. Use these thoughts to help:

This [name the emotion] is destructive to myself and others.

This [name the emotion again] is taking control of my rational and calm self.

Now turn your attention to what the opposite of that feeling or emotion could be - so the opposite antidote feeling to anger or frustration. You could try 'patience' or 'understanding' or for example, the opposite to jealousy could be generosity.

Let that positive emotion begin to grow, to build within you, perhaps from your heart. Imagine it spreading out to your whole body. Be bathed in this more positive antidote emotion - the opposite emotion to the one that hurts you, an alternative remedy, if you like, to soothe the hurt that you are feeling right now.

Patience, for example, is an attitude that helps us accept difficulties as they arise, allows us to consciously choose our response rather than to retaliate or act out in a way that we might regret. Patience keeps our mind calm and balanced and doesn't wish to best anyone. It's a good, healthy emotion - a more helpful one to anger.

How does having an emotion like this feel in your body and your mind in comparison to the destructive one of anger now?

If it's useful and relevant, visualise the person who may have caused you your anger or frustration, perhaps your child's other parent, or maybe someone else. Imagine they are sitting in front of you, and see in this moment if you can look at their story. Think about their reasons for why they may have caused this scenario - perhaps they were angry with you; they were gripped in the moment by a feeling, themselves.

Recognise how they are providing you right now with an opportunity for practicing, for example, patience or understanding, maybe even forgiveness.

Develop love, wishing them to be happy.

Develop compassion, wishing them to be free from suffering. See them free from suffering now.

Generate a strong feeling of contentment that you have resolved your feelings for the person. If there are still some leftover feelings, then think about how you prefer the positive view of the person rather than the old negative view, and commit now to try to work with this more positive opposite feeling or view of them.

Simply rest in the feeling of this opposite emotion, this antidote emotion, you have grown within you – helping to pacify your own mind, not another's. We are working on our own mind to change our response to the difficulties we face.

The qualities of patience, acceptance, understanding, generosity, and forgiveness. Feel their beauty and the light in your heart - how it guards and protect your mind. Surround yourself and the other person in this light and love and compassion. These positive emotions are what maintains healthy nurturing relationships.

Then come back to your breath, taking some deeper in-breaths and longer out-breaths, and come back to feeling your body resting against the support beneath you. Slowly begin to bring your meditation to an end.

Thank yourself for giving yourself this opportunity. See you next time.