Steaming Mad?

Take a moment to think so you don't blow your stack

June 2, 2015 By Kate Ferguson

If you could draw a picture of anger, what would it look like? Would you express this powerful emotion as a destructive explosion? Perhaps a volcanic eruption, or a fast-moving tidal wave towering high and ready to crash down on anything in its path? We all get angry sometimes. But if anger isn't controlled, this feeling can escalate into rage and result in all sorts of unpleasantness. Happily, there are ways to outsmart this primal emotion and use it to our advantage.

Ever heard the phrase, "I was so angry, I could scream"? Many people assume that this is an effective way to release anger and avoid a more negative or violent emotional or physical reaction. But some studies show a far better way to "buffer and temper the anger response," say Joseph Shrand, MD, and Leigh Devine, MS, authors of the book Outsmarting Anger: 7 Strategies for Defusing Our Most Dangerous Emotion. "Our anger can be transformed into much more productive power."

The strategies the authors offer are brain-based techniques that train our prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for conscious reasoning, to first identify angry feelings and then change our reactions to them.

Here's an exercise to try: The next time you're in a heated argument with a loved one that seems on the verge of escalating, take a quick breather and ask if he or she would like some refreshments.

What happens next might surprise you!

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