THE SCIENCE OF ANGER

The purpose of anger is to help us survive a situation our brain thinks is a threat (a perceived threat). When there is a perceived threat a defense response called Flight, Fight, or Freeze (FFF) can be activated. This response is automatic and helps us react quickly to protect ourselves from danger. This chart outlines some key facts about this process that prepares us for battle.

Fight or Flight

Heart rate increases which increases oxygen to muscles. Pain senses drop, hearing sharpens, sight sharpens, breathing increases. This allows us to fight or flee quickly.

Freezing

Similar changes happen to fight or flight but instead we stay completely still. May restrict breathing.

Thought & Logic Blocked

Thought and logic is blocked so you don't even have to think about your response, instead pathways are diverted to the amygdala to create an automatic response.

FFF Duration

The FFF process lasts about 20 -30 minutes. It takes about this long to return to your normal state.

Threats Vary

Threats are different for everyone. Most threats that typically trigger anger are social threats, in other words we are not in any physical danger.

Triggers

Anger is always proceeded by another emotion. The FFF response is always triggered by fear.

Smart Brain

Anger Management can help us connect to the "smart" part of our brain by becoming more aware of our emotions and trigger responses and this way we can step in earlier before the FFF is activated.

Shame

Once we return to our normal state we feel exhausted, confused and shameful about our reaction.

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Anger can be an issue if our brain perceives something as a threat that really isn't. Sometimes our brain gets confused about what is a threat (for example, a bear) and what is not (for example, your parent asking you to make your bed). Therefore, anger management can help your brain to understand how to handle perceived threats and respond appropriately using your smart brain!