

4 ways to Deal with Anger in Aphasia

One of the things that families with aphasia miss is being able to have ‘adult’ conversations. Many times I’ve heard something like “we can’t argue anymore. He gets mad about something and I have no idea what it is. Then he storms off and I don’t know what’s going on.”

People without aphasia get angry, and they may or may not express it with language to try to resolve the issue. **When your loved one with aphasia becomes angry, they may not have the language or speech to explain their feelings.** They may be feeling loss, may have misinterpreted something, or they may be angry that they doesn’t understand something. They may be in pain or dealing with the loss of their lives, etc. It’s hard to know the root of the anger because they may not be able to tell you.

Anger arises when something doesn’t meet our expectations. We want something pleasant and we don’t want something unpleasant. No one expected to have a stroke and aphasia, no one expected losing their hobbies, their friends or their careers. Everyone expects to recover better and faster. Everyone expects their partners to know what they want and understand them at all times. **When these expectations aren’t met—anger can flare up.**

Sometimes someone else’s anger spills over onto you. You may be the most convenient or ‘safest’ person to vent to. You may then feel angry yourself—“after all I do and I get treated this way!”. You may start to feel resentful and carry that resentment with you.

“If someone gives you a gift, but you refuse it, who owns the gift?”

This is part of a parable about ownership of feelings and taking on the emotions of others. If someone is angry and blames you for their anger, but you don’t accept that anger, it puts the behavior right back on the angry person. **You have refused to be ‘infected’.**

What can you do to help yourself be less affected by someone else’s anger?

- **Take a mental or physical step back.** Take a breath and remove yourself from the emotional story that’s playing out.
- **Learn to practice mindfulness.** Be aware of your feeling in real time. Observe and analyze your reactions at the time instead of thinking about the past or the future. Notice when you’re starting to feel shame, anger, or sadness. **Noticing a pattern is the first step to changing your behavior.**

- **Give everyone a chance to cool off** before talking about the situation. It can be hard to think rationally when you're emotional. Apologize when necessary.
- **Take care of yourself first and foremost.** You can't take on all of the responsibility for someone else's emotions. You are the safest and most convenient person and it can wear on you. If you expect gratitude and don't get it, you may start to feel resentful. Being resentful sets the scene for anger and frustration that can be "contagious".

The stroke and aphasia was unexpected and not what you wanted from life. But you can't go back in time and change anything, what's done is done. **Accept that you can't change what has already happened, but you can change how you act and feel right now.** You can accept that aphasia recovery takes time and appreciate each step you achieve along the way.