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Transforming Anger

With Afshan Tafler

Covid Hope: Not just coping and surviving, we want to be able to thrive and be resilient, and there's a real difference.

Doing Well Now: I've seen so many people slowing down, which I think was so needed for so many more people outside, connecting with nature and slowing down more. And then people bond together and realize that regardless of who you are or your background, your financial status, whatever, we're all going through this together.

Action Item: I'm going to call it emotional fitness, just like we practiced physical fitness. We need to all learn how to practice emotional fitness every day in our lives because your emotional health affects your physical health. It affects your mental health, it affects your ability to thrive versus just survive.

Three Points

1. Why anger is not the enemy.
2. The importance of learning healthy ways to deal with anger.
3. Healing reactive anger by healing the hurt that lies beneath it.

Speaker BIO:

Afshan Tafler is a Whole Life Coach who helps you achieve your best health by healing the underlying emotional patterns that contribute to mind-body illness. Afshan is also a mom to a son with Autism and has struggled with chronic health issues herself. She is a person who strives everyday to bring more compassion, acceptance and peace into her life.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Hello, and welcome to the Mindful World Parenting Summit. I'm Dr. Stacy, and I am thrilled to be joined today by Afshan Tafler. Afshan is a whole life coach and conscious parenting coach who helps people master emotional stress in order to transform their health and thrive in their relationships with their kids.

Afshan has become a sought-after wellness and parenting expert here on the summit before she's been doing lots of summits. Her voice is out there, and she's also a mom to a special need's child. And who has got a strong will? She has learned through this journey that her conscious parenting is the way she brings people into this awareness so that they too can really connect with their similarly strong, will sensitive children and thrive in their relationships. Welcome, Afshan, to the summit.

Afshan Tafler: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be here.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: And today we are talking about transforming anger, the conscious way.

Afshan Tafler: Yes

Dr. Stacy Thomas: And what a time we are in right now and where it seems like the world is literally exploding with anger.

And as is the whole, this is the small, like we see parts of this in our own individual lives. So, I'm really interested in having this discussion with you today. And maybe we can just start with just talking about anger. So, many of us are raised to believe that anger is a bad thing, and either we suppress it, or we don't express it, we act out. You just don't know what to do with it.

So, first of all, let's get our mindset, right? How should we be thinking about anger?

Afshan Tafler: Okay. So that's a great question. And, what you had said, about how we deal with anger or it's so accurate. So, anger, if we look at anger, it's a core human emotion. We are biologically wired to experience anger.

We have reward centers in our brain to experience anger. So, no matter how much we try to get rid of it, it's the reward centers there for a reason. We need it for our survival, and we need it for our safety. And we need it for a number of other reasons. The challenge is that anger. We've never really learned healthy ways to be with our anger.

We've never been mirrored, healthy ways to be with anger. And so then we form more unhealthy ways to be with anger, which is either we were repress it, and we shut it down completely, or we go into a passive-aggressive mode with anger, or it gets acted out, and we dump it on to others, and I think the key is to understand that anger is a very natural human emotion, and it comes up and when it comes up, and it's also a very powerful human emotion is very connected to our life force energy. So, when it comes up, if we don't know what to do with it, that's what creates the anxiety, which then puts us into those other patterns that we've learned growing up.

And those patterns are the unhealthy patterns that really create ill health that can shut down our life force energy, or that can, put us into states of chronic stress. What we want to do, we have anger come up. I really understand it. No, it's there. Understand what to do with this powerful emotion, understand the message behind it, and then take our assertive action from it.

And then anger releases from the body. And that's a healthier way of being with anger and understanding that it's not something to be shut down, pushed away, or something to be exploded with. It's how do we learn that healthier way of really being with it?

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. So, it sounds like the first step is just accepting that anger is here for a reason.

Afshan Tafler: Yes. I would agree with accepting that it's here. I think so much of what happens is that anger comes up, and we don't know how to be with it, and we have a lot of resistance to it. And we've been taught. If we think about this, we've been taught from a very young age that anger is wrong, so from those terrible two years when we started to say no, I don't want that. No mine. And we started having meltdowns or tantrums. What did we get mirrored in return? From our parents, caregivers, teachers, society, that's not okay. No. No, that's not okay. And yes, we want to have healthier ways of expressing our anger.

But when we're kids, we don't have the exact functioning to really understand how to express our emotions. We need our parents to mirror that to us, how to express our emotions in a healthy way, but we weren't mirrored that. So, what fits within us and in our subconscious minds is this, anger is unacceptable.

These beliefs that anger is unacceptable. And so, when we see our children mirroring it to us, we're going to react, we're going to react and in a way of disapproval and disconnection. And so, what we really want is the first step. It's yes. To really accept that anger is here and be with it.

So, instead of trying to shut it down, where it builds, and then it explodes or letting it fully take you over where you're just going into an explosion, be with it first. And then from there really understand it. What's the message behind it?

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Yes, and certainly, depending on how you show up in the world, I think some of us get more messaging around anger.

That is, I think, male or female, women more often, it's don't be angry. Like it's just not good to be angry. And we get sad and sad, or we get sick and stuff very much refreshing, suppressing or this passive-aggressive way of expressing. And the man is either you're good, or you're angry.

There's nothing in between.

Afshan Tafler: There's so much of that messaging it's so deeply embedded and, definitely with women as we get angry, we're it's more acceptable. I think in men, we see it as more acceptable as men are. There's a lot of conditioning around that for sure.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: I know for myself in my own growth process, it's been able to just be okay with having angry feelings. Like I was shutting myself down.

And because if we think about it, it's so hard to be in the face of angry feelings yourself because nobody likes to be the receiver of the other person's anger. But that's because that anger is being expressed in a way that it's not the healthiest form of it. And so, we don't want to necessarily be that way either. And our own discomfort with anger inside of us is because it's, we never, again, we'll go back to childhood. I don't think any of us really ever learned how to be with this powerful emotion in a healthy way.

And When we're mirrored, that anger is not okay when we're children and we don't know what to do. We get a lot of anxiety. We don't know what to do with all these feelings, all these, this intense feeling coming up. And as children, we really want to stay. We want to be loved, accepted, and stay connected.

And so, then we will deny our anger, our authentic expression of anger, as it—true emotion, power feeling in that moment. And so then builds the whole discomfort of really being with anger.

Okay. So maybe you can walk us through a little bit, because we have the angry feeling and then what, like what are we supposed to do at that moment?

Afshan Tafler: Okay. So great question, because this is the question, I get asked a lot, all the time. What do I do in the heated moments? What do I do in the heated moments to stop that anger from coming out? If you're, and that's usually the ones who, the ones of us who have the most problem, are the ones who lash outright.

And very quickly, or get heated very quickly in those moments. Okay. So, first of all, understand that in those heated moments, our body is going to have an automatic stress reaction in the face of whatever or perceiving as the stressor. So, in this case, being parenting our child's behaviors, that stressor.

And so, because of what lives inside of us. And because of the way our nervous system has become shaped that we're going to either be more prone to react more or more prone to shut it down. Okay. So, our nervous system gets shaped through our life experiences, and then that nervous system has a scanning system that's constantly scanning the environment for threat. And then your child does something to signal any little bit of threat. And then, our nervous system is going to have an automatic response. So first realizing in the moment and noticing my body has gone into this state. I'm feeling tense.

I, my jaw is tightening. My throat is feeling constricted. I'm feeling heat. And my body, my hands might be going like this. So, to notice our body where our body responds to gone to cause that's what's going to happen first, but we're not gonna necessarily have that mind awareness right away.

And if we can start to be with our bodies and notice where our body is gone in the moment, then we can be like, Oh, my nervous system is reacting in this way. Okay. Noticing our tone of voice as it starts to rise like these are all signs of this nervous system, moving into a sympathetic fight state. And if you want to shut it down, then sympathetic flight state, which is you're gonna be like, I don't know what to do. And you're, you go more into fear in the face of that angry behavior, that behavior of your child.

And so, the first step is to notice that. And then, from there, how do we bring our nervous system back to feeling safe because, at the heart of it, your nervous system is going to react because you don't feel safe in that moment. And yes, like many of us, don't feel safe in the face of our child's behaviors. We can like logically when we think about that; it's my child's not alone. He's not dangerous to me. But your body's not saying that your body is saying. My child is a threat.

So, there's a few ways using the bottom-up approach, the body up approach. We notice where our nervous system status is. And then we understand how do we get it back to safety? How do we get ourselves back to feeling safe, or our higher thinking brain can come back online where then we can re-story, change the story and see our start to see our child's behavior?

There's a deeper meaning to our child's behavior here. But oftentimes, in the moments when we're triggered, we can't see the deeper meaning of the child's behavior. We just want that behavior to stop because we're feeling so threatened. Our bodies are feeling, so automatically threatened. And so, then we help our bodies get back to safety and the biggest thing is that as human beings, we are very wired for this kind of action. And, and we're very wired, and connection brings us back to safety. So how can we bring that connection back to ourselves? How can we bring love and connection to ourselves? So, we can start to have a different experience of anger in those heated moments, our own anger first, and changing our experience.

So, if you think about it, the experience that lives in our nervous system is we got to, somebody gets angry and. We automatically got angry as kids, and we automatically remit with a negative response either we were punished, or our parents disconnected from us or wouldn't talk to us.

And so, we've become very uncomfortable with being with our anger, but in those moments, if you can change your relationship to your anger, and bring that soothing love and connection to your anger in those moments. And I put my hand on my heart because this is what I often do in that moment and say, okay.

I am really angry right now. I named the emotion. I noticed where my body's gone too. And I bring that love and connection to myself to help bring my nervous system back into safety. And so, I say, this I'm suffering right now. This is really mindful self-compassion, right? I'm suffering right now.

This is a moment of suffering. This is hard for me. I don't like my child's behavior. And I feel this in my body and naming like what you're feeling in your body helps you to get a bit of separation helps to bring your higher thinking brain back online and helps you to see that your body is automatically gone here.

And then from here, once you get your back yourself back into safety only then becomes the opportunity of choice, having the choice to change the story and see that, okay, your child is doing this behavior, that your child has also gone into a place of not feeling right or feeling safe.

And the key is to bring safety to yourself and then bring safety to your child so that then they can shift in those moments and they can regulate in the face of their own, I'm a state of not being in safety cause my opinion and from what I see a lot of behaviors come out of not feeling safe.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: And that's universal. It's just the standards or whatever it is maybe different.

Afshan Tafler: Yes

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. Really, great. I love that. I do that a lot. In practice, they teach people around the self-compassionate hand on the heart really helps us a grant.

Thank you for that. That's the main thing, and it's just seeing ourselves first. It sounds right?

Yes.

Afshan Tafler: Yeah. And because it's so important, as parents, we always want to fare out what to do? What do I do? What do I do that sympathetic fight or flight state is all about? What do I do to stop this?

What do I do to stop this? What do I do to get my child to be different? And we want the external circumstance to change around us, but what we all need to focus on with everything going on in the world today is first, how do we shift ourselves? How do we put that mask on ourselves? Shift ourselves first? Because from here that has a ripple effect and your children. Their nervous system reads your nervous system. They're going to feel the effects of you calm in a calm and more relaxed and more regulated state. Their nervous system will feed off that, and we'll come into that. And because our nervous systems are constantly reading other people's nervous systems.

That's the way it works. That's the way we're designed. And so, then they will come into regulation more easily as well, and we'll be able to then hear you, listen to you, understand you. so, it's so important for us parents to really focus on ourselves first in those moments.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. So, we've done that. Let's say a child is like really lost. And how did we go into that situation? Or do we even go into that situation? If we are grounded within ourselves, is there a right way? Is there a way to be more effective, especially when I'm thinking about the children who are particularly sensitive?

I have a sensitive, very sensitive daughter. She just knows that she's not taking any bull. So, tell me.

Afshan Tafler: What are those two? Okay. So, I guess the question is that, how do we then once we're a regulated child?

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Yeah.

Afshan Tafler: Okay. So again, full acceptance of what they're presenting with. Because in life, if we can fully accept that they are having a full-on meltdown, they are having these big emotions, or they're having these really, persistent ways of being because they feel like they need to do that in order to feel safe. So really shifting our lens around their behavior in the moment, seeing that behavior really differently, strong-willed children. They have a lot of persistence, and partly they are. They've come into this world this way, and they've come here to teach us these lessons of letting go a little bit, letting go of our control, but they're also more sensitively wired.

I would say their nervous systems definitely get heightened easily to two different levels as it triggers their environment. And so, their ability to handle these big emotions are not as strong as some other kids might be at their developmental ages. And so, it's our job then to see that this child if they're having a meltdown, this child is really what this overwhelming emotion right now, how can I bring calm and regulation? So that and just mirror that literally, you don't even have to say a lot at the beginning while they're having this huge meltdown. You just have to change your energy, change your nervous system state and let them come into that. And then I would say they give them cues of safety.

So, the first cue of safety is your nervous system state being in a state of calm. Other cues of safety, our children read our faces like Hawks, like you told, like they know our expressions, right? When we're not happy with them, we're not satisfied with them. So even parents who don't scream and yell at their kids for their outbursts may like it if the stern looks and all of those are signals of danger that our children's nervous system is reading. So, we want to be able to have our crinkly eyes. It's just to have a soft smile. We want to be able to speak in a softer voice or in a more melodic or Prosodic voice because that helps the Vagus nerve, the calming, or the innervates our ears. To get a signal of safety and to start to signal our body to calm down.

So, you have to also understand the way in which your child likes to receive those safety cues. What are their dominant sensory pathways? Is it the facial for my son? It's facial expressions, the tone of voice and the energy of my body and the eyes, my stance, and how openhearted I am.

He reads everything. So, it all depends on your child. Specifically, how they like, receive those safety cues and stuff, read it, tune into that. And that's literally a lot of what you have to do. And then when they get regulated and calm again, only then can the teaching moments come in because their higher thinking brains are offline when they're in those States and safety first, bring everybody back to safety from there, connect, and from there, problem solved.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. So, I do appreciate that, like concreteness and let's talk a little bit about the problem-solving part, because what I can see, I think sometimes it's you who got really angry and shit. I don't understand why you get so angry. And there's a subtle suggestion in there that you shouldn't get angry.

Afshan Tafler: Yeah.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: So, I'm wondering if you could walk us through how we can more effectively talk to our children about anger.

Afshan Tafler: Yeah. So that's great because it's really learning how to be with this powerful emotion, which then needs moments, teaching moments now, and fighting our children to learn how to be with this powerful emotion. So, the first step is, "Oh, you got, I know you got, I noticed you got really angry there. What's up?" Just really keeping it really open and lettings, or maybe not even saying, "I noticed you got angry there. What do you think just happened?"

No. Because they know they got angry, right? Sometimes when we point out, they feel shamed by it. So even pointing it out, it's some for some kids if they don't like that. And then they shut down because they feel shameful. They do already feel that way. They know that outbursts are not something that they want to be in. It was just if it fell out of their control. So, the way I approach it is really about firstly, keeping them very open. And so "what's up, how was that for you?" and then from there saying, "okay, so yeah, that's natural. Your anger came up, and it's a big emotion. It's a very powerful emotion that comes up to be expressed. It wants to be led out.

So, I'm wondering if next time you're feeling that way, let me backup first". Get to the root of it. What do you think caused that and helping them to decode? What was it that really caused that?

Because sometimes we think our child is angry because they didn't get what they wanted but really, what's underneath that is anxiety about something else going on that they're really worried about. So, you really need to decode first. What was it that you think that got you in that state? And then, moving from there too, "okay, next time that happens, what do you think, how do you think would be a better way to solve this?" And this is for kids probably like at that developmental age that they can do this work.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: How is that, what age.

Afshan Tafler: I'm not a developmental specialist.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay.

Afshan Tafler: I would say you have to judge with your child, see, so here's the thing like it's so child dependent, if your child, you find can talk about these things at the age of four, then at the age of four, you can talk about them.

But four onwards, I would say, before that it's about, you can start. Yeah. The process, because they'll learn over time how to express their emotions in healthier ways. But I think that the key, the number one thing is to help them understand that it's very normal for them to have these emotions and to mirror that. And with that mirroring of I love you in the face of this emotion, they learn to regulate themselves. Believe it or not. I've seen the best. Like my son, the best changes he has made is when I haven't even said anything to teach him the lesson, all I've done is I completely accepted.

And I say, he's swearing at me. And I say, And I love you still, and I love you still, and I love you still. And then he knows how to shift it. He knows how to change it. I think they; a lot of our kids know inside. They just need to be mirrored that love and acceptance in the face of their emotions because then they learn to love and accept themselves. And then that doubt, they go back into safety that downgrades the response, and then they realize over time. Okay, that's not the way I want to do this.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. And so, you mentioned your journey with your own study. And so, as you've learned together on this journey, have you seen the progression within him in terms of being able to understand what's happening inside and being able to maybe more assertively express what he wants or what he needs.

Afshan Tafler: Yeah. So, my son is a child who really struggles with emotional regulation. Okay. Probably at the, one of the extreme, like the extreme emotional regulation.

And so, what I would say is with, yes, definitely the more that I mirror a lot of acceptance to him, the faster he calms down.

The more that he, the more I say I love you, and I accept you in the face of these emotions, the more he starts to bring that to himself in the moments. Really beautiful. Yes, some days, I want to cry when I see how he's able to support himself and what he's learned and how he's able to take the shame and blame out of it.

And how he's able to say, I heard him today on a call with his behavior therapist that he works with saying, "my nervous system got really heightened, and when I saw that, my nervous system got really heightened." So, for him to understand that I'm not this bad kid who has these awful reactions, it's my body's reaction.

So, then I actually had to tell myself this, and I breathed, and I helped myself, so I really think that just that total love and acceptance for children in the face of whatever they're experiencing and they learn on their own then to help themselves through it. And that I think the number one gift you can give your child.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Oh, that's so beautiful. I just love hearing that. It's the kind of conditioning we all need and creates such a beautiful foundation, like true resiliency, right? Just like true resilience.

Afshan Tafler: True resiliency that I can love. The dark and the light parts of me, and I can feel whole and complete with the dark and light parts of me, knowing that this is the human condition. This is my existence, and I can love all parts of me and not learn, grow up, hating my angry part, hating my part that's not perfect, hating my part that can't keep anything in control of life, and then going into anxiety and depression. I think that emotional health and mirroring that true acceptance of your children's emotions is powerful and can create really amazing resilience in life.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Wow. I'm so glad we had this conversation. So good. So, I have a couple of standard questions. We've been asking everyone, and I'm wanting to get your take on it. Clearly, like with this pandemic that we're still in and several months now on a global scale, it just feels like there's a major paradigm shift that's happening. Like we're just in the middle of it.

And my question is, what is your hope for how humanity might evolve as a result of this pandemic?

Afshan Tafler: Okay, so my hope is that, so first of all, I really truly believe that every challenging circumstance in life, every moment of where we're reacting to something, feel it suffering from something that's happening externally to us is an opportunity to go inside and to really see what is it within us that is causing us to feed this situation in this way. That is then causing our suffering and that's an opportunity to go inside and heal what's in you. And so, this pandemic is really that perfect opportunity. To really see that yes, there is a potential real-life threat outside of us, but it's bringing up.

All these fears that literally live in us, that I've lived in our family system for generations coming down and the true opportunity. So, my hope for humanity is to really take this and to heal what's coming up to really be with what's coming up to honor, what's coming up and then heal what's coming up so that then you can become resilient and thrive in the face of all of this and then teach that to your kids. Not just coping and surviving, we want to be able to thrive and be resilient. And there's a real difference. I hear a lot of us talking about just coping and surviving and getting through it. And that's very thrilling, so to listen to that message, and to really go inside.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Yeah, absolutely. I hear yeah, I'm on board with that.

Afshan Tafler: Thank you.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: And so, what do you feel we're doing well? Wow. Is there anything we're doing right now that allows you to feel hopeful?

Afshan Tafler: Yeah, you know what? I've seen so many people slowing down, which I think was so needed for so many more people outside, connecting with nature and slowing down more.

And then people bond together and realize that regardless of who you are, or your background, your financial status, whatever, we're all going through this together. So, there's this real sense of community I'm seeing in that, in the whole social world of people coming together, and those who are more fortunate helping those who are less fortunate. And so, you know, I think that's really beautiful to see. And I think there's a lot of people who are also embracing this opportunity to grow from it. There is a lot of hope in terms of what I'm seeing.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Okay. And you may have answered this next question already, but we're just going to get really specific. And if there was one thing, just one thing that you would like our viewers to action today that you think would make a really significant difference for themselves and their families. What would that be?

Afshan Tafler: Okay, so I'm going to call it emotional fitness, just like we practiced physical fitness. We need to all learn how to practice emotional fitness every day in our lives because your emotional health affects your physical health. It affects your mental health. It affects your ability to thrive versus just survive. And so, for us to really learn, none of us were schooled in emotions. None of us got that in our school language. I think we really need to have in schools how to really be with emotions, painful emotions, hard emotions, how to process them, how to release them.

So, I encourage people that every day, check-in with your body, check in with what's, what you're feeling and really be with that, and honor that and allow yourself to be with it and process it. And I call that emotional fitness, just like you would exercise, be with your emotions, learn that pattern and way of being with your motion.

So that in those triggering moments, you know how to be with it all.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Absolutely. That's my jam. It is so needed. And I do believe that is what we're all being called to do right now. So, thank you for that. And this has been so great, really great. I appreciate your honesty and your openness and the tool of these practical things that people can use right now today to start turning this away, transforming themselves from the inside out and the relationship.

So, for anyone who's watching, who would like to learn more from you, Afshan, get in touch. What's the best way?

Afshan Tafler: The best way to go to my website. It's <https://www.illuminateu.ca>. There are some great free offerings there to get you on the path of better emotional health. And my number one offering right now would be my free webinar, which is seven steps to transforming anger, the conscious way.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Amazing Afshan, thank you so much for all the work that you're doing for walking this path. We're taking people along with you and contributing to making this a more mindful world. Thank you so much.

Afshan Tafler: Thank you too. Thank you.

Dr. Stacy Thomas: Bye.