



Sex and relationships Lifestyle / Family & Relationships



Luisa Tam

The Naked Truth | Anger management for couples – how to defuse the inevitable conflicts that coronavirus lockdowns are spurring on

Couples are bound to fall out now and then. Covid-19 lockdowns have made it more likely. Work out what's making you angry, and use it to grow closer together

Couples who avoid conflict may not have healthy relationships and could grow emotionally distant. That, more than any amount of anger, could drive them apart

Reading Time: **4 minutes**

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Conflict and anger are natural in any relationship – especially now, when feelings of frustration might intensify because of the impact of Covid-19 on our lives.

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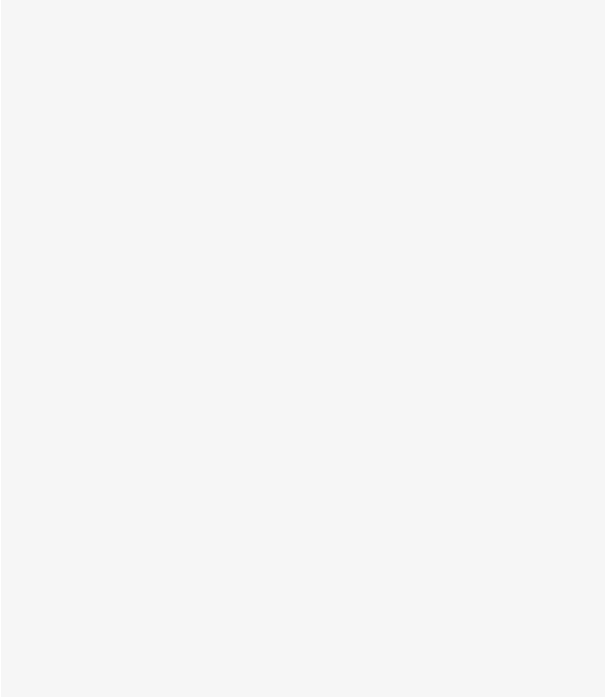
[Covid-19](#) related restrictions such as stay-at-home measures are triggering conflict between couples. Many family and relationship counsellors have reported an increase in couples' conflicts and anger issues at home.

Bottled-up feelings more often than not lead to anger when the parties involved don't know how to manage, contain or neutralise these suppressed emotions.

Keeping your cool and being reasonable is an effective way to defuse a tense situation, of course; but it's often easier said than done.



Covid-19 restrictions are proving a breeding ground for conflict between couples. Photo: Shutterstock



Sometimes, keeping calm is hard when you don't even know how to manage your own anger. There is the additional challenge of making yourself vulnerable by [reaching out to your partner](#) to get to the core of what is making you angry. Before you know it, all hell breaks loose – and in some extreme cases, couples might resort to separation or divorce.

Thankfully, many anger issues are manageable – so long as we are not talking about violent or abusive relationships. There are many effective ways to avoid conflict and one cardinal rule of doing this is not to take things personally.

When you are able to do that, you can let go of the need to be “right”. When you don't have the desire to be correct all the time, this gives you both room to negotiate and the space to calm down.

It's important to be honest with the other person so that they know how you are feeling, and to share what is making you angry. Being honest, direct, and communicating in a respectful yet assertive manner is a good starting point.

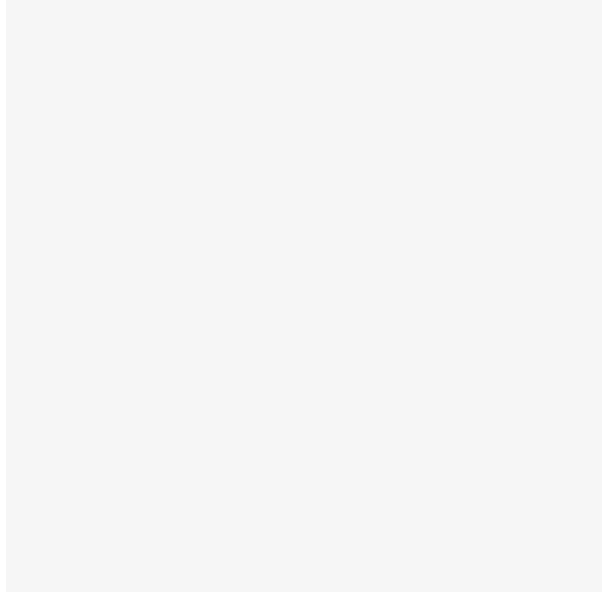
To manage anger more effectively, it might be better to understand what triggers this complicated emotion.



One of the most difficult things when anger is directed at us by a loved one is to not to personalise it and become defensive

— Quratulain Zaidi, clinical psychologist

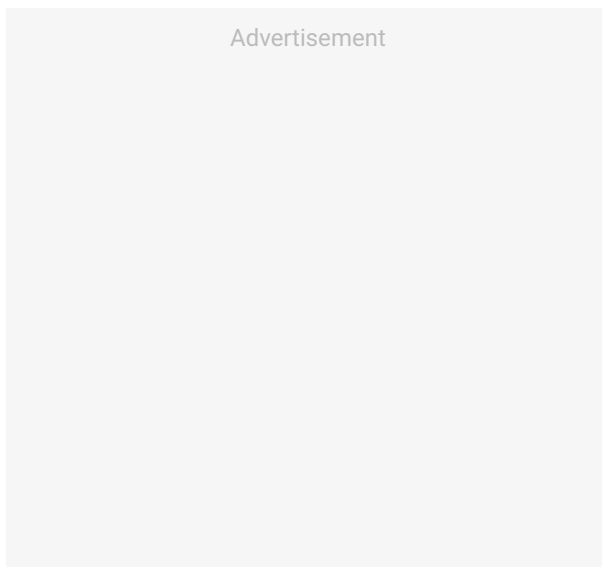
Clinical psychologist Quratulain Zaidi, founding director of Hong Kong-based MindnLife Psychology Practice, says: “According to American psychologist Paul Ekman’s research, anger is one of the six ‘basic emotions’ identified in the Atlas of Emotions, along with disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise.”



She says it is completely valid to feel this emotion.

“A person might express anger to mask emotions that cause them to feel vulnerable such as hurt or shame. It is often described as a secondary emotion in psychology, as it is often used to protect people from feeling raw, [vulnerable](#), and other overwhelming feelings.”

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To manage anger more effectively, it might be better to understand what triggers this complicated emotion.

According to Zaidi, common emotions known to trigger anger are anxiety, shame, sadness, fear, frustration, guilt, and disappointment.

“Learning to [recognise anger](#) as both a basic, valid emotion and as a protector of uncomfortable emotions is a first step to understanding and then identifying the underlying feelings.

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“Ask yourself these questions: ‘What is the most common first emotion you experience before anger?’ and ‘What are you protecting and why?’. These questions will enable you to see that it’s not your partner who has made you angry,” she advises.

Zaidi explains how managing conflict and anger correctly can benefit your relationship. “Relationship conflict is natural and it has functional and positive aspects. For example, it helps us learn how to better love and understand our partners, deal with changes, and renew connections over time.”

She points out that, according to research, in successful [long-term relationships](#) partners often try to manage, not eliminate conflict.

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“Totally conflict-free relationships are not necessarily healthy relationships and conflict avoidant couples are not necessarily the most emotionally stable couples,” she says.



Quratulain Zaidi is the founding director of Hong Kong-based MindnLife Psychology Practice.

By avoiding conflicts, these couples might become emotionally distant. And, by not expressing what they need from one another and the relationship, resentment and dissatisfaction could build up. This can sometimes lead to people looking outside the relationship for their emotional needs to be met, Zaidi warns.

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