

WAIT: Being Mindful of Emotions

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Regulating strong emotions is a difficult task for everyone. Actions that result in negative outcomes can seem so right when you're angry, hurt or sad. When your boyfriend breaks up with you unexpectedly the day before Valentine's Day, saying that he's interested in your best friend, understandably, you may want to rip up every one of his prized and valuable baseball cards (not to mention what you might want to say to your ex-best friend). When your boss dictates that you have to work late on the evening you've planned your beloved grandmother's 70th birthday celebration, you may want to give him a piece of your mind, even though you know you can't afford to lose your job. Remembering and obsessing over all the ways your boss has been unfair to you will only fuel your anger.

In cases of strong emotion with no immediate danger, making an emotional decision is not usually in your best interest. Emotions can squash logical thinking like an elephant sitting on a daisy, leading to future regrets and sometimes worse.

So when you're experiencing strong emotions and want to act on them—WAIT. Being mindful of what you're thinking and feeling and being mindful of the consequences can help you decide your most effective response. However, when you're upset it becomes difficult to remember the steps it might be helpful to take in order to begin thinking wisely.

WAIT

Watch the emotion. Be mindful of your physical experience, what triggered the emotion, your thoughts about the emotions and/or the situation and any urges you have. The emotion may ebb and flow, getting stronger before it gradually decreases in strength. Remember you're not your emotion. You're not anger; you're *feeling* anger. Step back and observe your experience.

Acept that you're having an emotion, perhaps one you don't want to have. Acceptance means letting the emotion pass though and recognizing that you don't have to act on it. Often no action is necessary. Often our actions are geared towards getting rid of emotions. Resisting or attempting to get rid of emotions will likely make the situation worse. If you rip up the baseball cards, maybe you won't be so angry. If you eat a quart of ice cream, maybe you won't be as sad. But the quart of ice cream doesn't change the situation you're upset about.

What **I**nformation does the emotion give you? Perhaps your anger tells you it's time to make a change, maybe look for a new job. Or perhaps your anger is a signal to stand up for yourself in an effective way – one that maintains respect for yourself and others. Maybe the information is about lessons you can use for the future. Looking for the information your emotions provide can lead to effective actions that will help you move forward in ways that make your life better.

Take **T**ime to be **T**houghtful. Consider what actions would be best, if any. Know that with time the emotions will pass. Most often there is no urgency to act even though that is what you might experience. Sometimes you only need a few minutes to breathe before you can think more clearly. Sometimes there is no action to take.

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