

I am mad at COVID-19. . . is that okay?

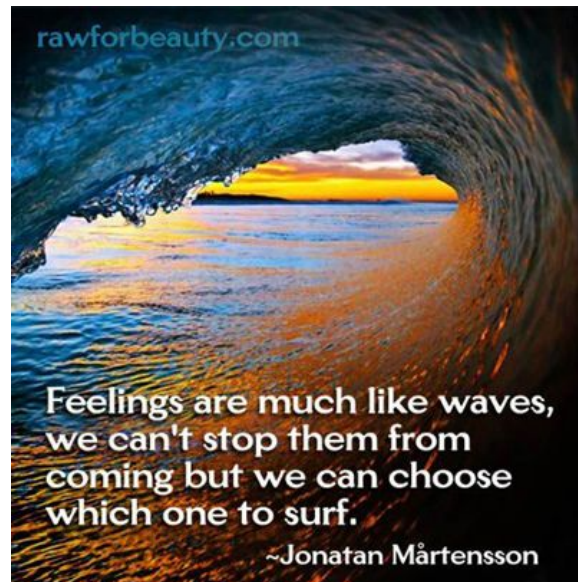
My music is on, the window is open, and I am seated in my comfy chair. My favorite coffee mug houses my favorite tea and a fleeting moment of gratitude crosses my mind. Like a wave, the moment passes and I return to feeling angry, frustrated, distraught, and likely numerous other synonyms for angry. I am angry at COVID-19. But what does it really mean to be angry at COVID-19 and what do I do with this anger?

“Feelings, unlike thoughts, involve a total body reaction”¹. In particular, anger is a feeling that ranges in intensity and is related to a sense of harm or wrongdoing, from others. COVID-19 has done some wrong. As human beings, we are taught that it is good to find healthy ways to communicate our anger and let the anger subside. These days, it seems so much harder to do so. Where do I begin to direct my anger? I could decide to be angry at the policymakers, leaders, and those in positions of power to make decisions about COVID-19 and how we globally respond to this pandemic. A person might decide to be angry with God and ask why this is happening and when will this end? I might decide to be angry at neighbors who defy social distancing or the individual who coughed near me at the grocery store. I might decide to be angry over the 24,582 (at time of this writing) lives lost to COVID-19 in the United States² and the countless other lives lost across the globe. The number of jobs, graduations, lives lost has only fueled my antagonism towards COVID-19.

As a psychologist, I am attuned to the understanding that my anger is valid. I understand that feelings exist in this world, that I have the right to put energy into my feelings just as much as I can decide to decrease the energy I put towards a feeling. But this process is so much easier said than done. For every step taken towards acknowledgement and letting go of my anger, it can feel as though I have already taken two steps back. According to Bourne¹, a 3-stage process of identifying, expressing, and communicating feelings is important for dealing with feelings. Tense shoulders, muscles aches, and tension headaches are examples of potential indications of identifying my anger. This article is an attempt to express this anger. The last step, the communication of my feelings is typically rendered towards the person that is perceived to have caused harm. In the age of a global pandemic, who is that person and how do I communicate my feelings to them?

The short answer: There isn't one. Bourne¹ posits that strong feelings are often connected to unmet needs of the self. So what is it that my anger is trying to tell me? In retrospect, anger is only my beginning. Beneath anger, there is sadness, hurt, and fear. I am sad and hurting for all of the ways this pandemic has impacted humanity. I am fearful of the future, for myself, and my family and friends. And maybe. . . just a little. . . I am hopeful. I am hopeful that I will ride out this wave of a pandemic. I am hopeful that I can find ways to live life in the present while looking forward to a future devoid of pandemics.

I am angry at COVID-19 but these feelings are more complex than anger alone. I am also sad, hurt, fearful, and hopeful these days. There are moments and days of happiness, gratitude, and joy as well. Anger, like the rest of my feelings, is okay. In closing,



So maybe. . . just maybe, I will become a better surfer at the end of this.

- Kristina Rodriguez, Psy.D. – CAPS Clinician

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Article by Kristina Rodriguez, Psy.D.