

ANGER AND EATING DISORDER RECOVERY

BY: NATIONAL RECOVERY ADVOCATE

*One of the most pivotal moments in my eating disorder recovery was recognizing that I needed help to confront and truly feel my emotions — what some recovery spaces refer to as **emotional sobriety**.*

My eating disorder and substance use served a purpose: they numbed the emotions that felt too painful to face. Shame and anger were buried deep inside me, too overwhelming to acknowledge. As I began to sit with them, I discovered that they weren't just painful—they were messengers, revealing deeper truths that made recovery feel more tangible and possible.

"Anger is the appropriate response when we feel unsafe and afraid."- fellow recovery traveler

It took years into my recovery to understand that my eating disorder and substance use were shielding me from emotions and experiences I wasn't ready to process. This was a revelation, yet feeling my emotions—especially anger—still didn't feel safe. The intensity of my anger, how it burned in my chest and stomach, how it threatened to spill over was terrifying. Learning to sit with my anger, rather than suppress it, became a crucial step in my healing—though at the time, I hated every minute of it.

The Role of Anger in Recovery

Anger was a messenger, trying to show me what was and wasn't okay. It pointed to the places where I needed boundaries. Over time, I began to see anger not just as a reaction but as a signal—beneath it often lay sadness, grief, disappointment, and even despair. As a child, it wasn't safe for me to feel or express anger. Growing up with neglect and abuse, I had every reason to be legitimately angry. That anger deserved to be acknowledged, validated, and expressed in a way that could help me heal. This was now the purpose of my recovery.

Anger as an Invitation to Grief

A powerful realization in recovery was that anger and grief are connected. Anger pointed to losses—lost time, lost identity, lost relationships, and lost opportunities. Allowing space for grief became a crucial part of moving forward. I was told that grief is when something is lost or taken without our permission. This was an incredibly liberating definition. So often I feel that active recovery and feeling grief are synonymous.

Rebuilding a Healthy Relationship with Anger

It was an imperfect journey learning to confront and express my anger. But what I love about recovery is the challenge of my perfectionism while taking responsibility and making things right when I need to. Sometimes that has looked like not being honest about a boundary and letting resentment build, saying things I don't truly mean, or reacting in anger instead of responding with compassion and grace. Over time, I've learned to take a step back when anger shows up—to get curious about what it's trying to tell me. Rather than burying it, numbing it, or letting it take over before I understand it, I've learned to pause, listen, and let it guide me toward what I value.

#nationaleatingdisorderawarenessweek #NEDAW

Connect with Esperanza's Intake Coordinator, Dessimber Lauber at 210.253.9763 for a telephone screening, insurance benefits review and to schedule a comprehensive, in-person assessment.

