

Stuck in a Moment

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“I am so angry, I just feel like I want to punch something all the time! It’s not just one thing or one person – everything makes me mad!”

My client was in the midst of a messy divorce; there was a lot going on at her work, and she was having trouble getting more help for her aging parents.

Any of these issues alone would have been stressful, but as they all stacked up, she found herself stuck in perpetual anger.

All of us have been there at some time or another – emotionally overwhelmed, or maybe numb. Just stuck in a moment.

At times like this, I’ve found it most useful for people to either move their attention in or out.

Moving your attention in: Instead of trying to maneuver around emotions (in this case, anger), look for ways to notice the feelings, and safely off-load the tension.

My client and I came up with a number of options for her to try, but her favorite idea was to buy a notebook and write when she had strong feelings. Sometimes she would just write what was on her mind, other times she’d write (but not send) a letter to someone difficult.

She also found that it was very helpful to do some kind of exercise every day – cardio, walking, push-ups, sit-ups – whatever she could make time for.

Moving your attention out: Another option is to get your attention away from your feelings – get your attention out. This involves changing your mental focus to get a change in emotions. It is different than numbing or zoning out, like watching TV and surfing social media, which seems to just ‘bookmark’ people in the same frame of mind. Put your attention on something fun or interesting, or at least benign.

For example, do something you enjoy even for a few minutes. Pull weeds, look at something beautiful, snuggle with a pet, make a cup of your favorite tea.

Alternately, if none of those are possible, play little games in your head. These just take a moment, and you can do them anywhere. Here are some of my favorites:

For each letter of the alphabet, think of something you like, or something that you are grateful for.

Say all of the letters in the alphabet EXCEPT for the letters in your name (or someone else’s name).

Pick a letter, and then think of words that start with that letter with 1 syllable, 2 syllables, 3 syllables, etc. How high can you go?

Pick 2 random objects (maybe a mailbox and a palm tree), then think of 3 ways they are similar, and 3 ways they are different.

We all get stuck in moment sometimes. What’s your plan for moving on?

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