

# Emotional Activation vs. Conscious Choice

When we feel **activated in conflict**, our emotions can overwhelm our conscious decision making processes.

To be activated is to become emotionally hijacked by the instinctive parts of our brain. We may feel compelled to:

- **Fight** someone or something in the situation, e.g. competing or escalating.
- **Flee** the situation, e.g. avoiding.
- **Freeze**, staying still, but completely unable to respond, e.g. feeling trapped in terror.
- **Fawn**, trying to appear non-threatening and appeasing, e.g. accommodating.

# The Psychology of Rationality and Emotions

## Prefrontal cortex vs limbic system

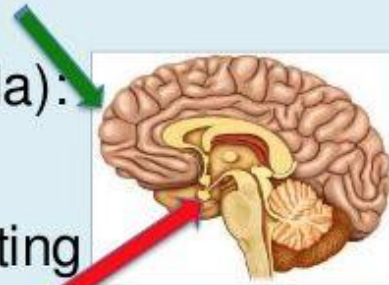
Prefrontal cortex:

- Control: reason, logic, prediction, analysis, impulse control, moral values, decisions

Limbic system (inc amygdala):

- Emotions + instinct:  
Reactive, impulsive, motivating

PFC



Amygdala

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# Is anger good or bad?



# The Role of Anger in Conflict

- Anger is sometimes the tip of the emotional iceberg.



-- Anger may be a natural emotion when we perceive our needs are being threatened.

-- A different emotion may come first and remain masked by anger (fear, grief, sorrow, etc).

-- Alternatively, some of us may feel disconnected from our anger.

## Emotions and Conflict

- We can engage more constructively in conflict by raising awareness around and observing our emotions.
- If we feel safe enough, we can voice our emotions to others as they arise, allowing these feelings validation.
- If we feel safe enough, we can encourage others to voice their emotions in constructive ways, helping them feel heard and valued.

# Emotions and Conflict

- Often, we know we are in a conflict because we FEEL it, both physically and emotionally.
- Emotions can affect our perceptions and behaviors.
- Poorly regulated emotions can escalate conflict.
- Deeply suppressed emotions can lead to disconnection with one's own needs and with the needs of others.

## Ultimately:

- Emotions are important signals that reveal our inner needs.
- We can acknowledge emotions and be curious about what they are communicating without letting them rule us.
- We can practice emotional regulation to avoid harming ourselves and others.
- We can de-escalate conflict situations while still validating the emotions and experiences of others.
- Respecting that everyone has unique emotional responses to conflict based on their experiences and cultural norms.