

## MY SPACE

Anger is often a difficult emotion for survivors of childhood abuse to express appropriately, if at all. It has often been expressed violently or at least aggressively causing clients a phobic response to anger.

The God-given purpose of anger is to **empower** us to protect ourselves or those we care for.

I explain that the space they/their bodies occupy is their space. They have the God – given right to be here and occupy that space and that no-one should violate or intrude upon that space. I also explain that if anger is used for right purposes in appropriate ways it is not destructive but is an important resource to support their recovery.

I stand mirroring them and invite them:

1. To feel what it is like to be in their space.
2. To speak out “this is my space”.
3. To use their arms to ‘push’ an imaginary someone out of their space

Because working with the body can connect very strongly with emotions and memories it is important to work gently, giving time to reflect on body feelings and become aware of any feelings, sensations, images or reactions which may surface. Explore for as long as the client is comfortable to do so. Leave plenty of time to debrief, as a lot can come out of this exercise that is worth talking about.

There will sometimes be a tendency to collapse into grief or fear or another disempowering emotion which is more familiar. It is really important to support and call them into their power/anger. Mirroring can help here as well as decreasing a sense of being exposed or watched. The other emotions may be important and can be explored after the anger/power has been worked with. Pain is always below anger but it is important to connect survivors with the healthy empowerment of appropriate expression of anger. Starting with this exercise in sessions can be a first step to being able to assert their boundaries in relationship with others.

We then may consider what other things are ‘mine’, what belongs to us or is our responsibility, not material things, but other things where people may impose or intrude upon us in ways which are unwelcome.

- Values
- Emotions
- Beliefs
- Ideas
- Relationships
- Dreams
- Goals
- Hopes
- Likes and dislikes
- Opinions

Explain it is healthy and appropriate to be able to have and choose all these things for ourselves and not to have them imposed upon us or be in any way undermined because of our choices in these areas. Many survivors will find encouragement to explore and “own” these things for themselves a valuable support to developing their identity.

– Meryl Lee