



# Practicing Emotional Self Management

From: Hammond, 2015, p. 66-67

## Steps to Calm your Amygdala

Steps	Why?	How?
<p><b>Identify what sets you off.</b></p>	<p>Think about which of the five areas of social threat make you defensive-- class issues, geographic/regional differences, racial differences? Sometimes we know in advance that we're going to be in a conversation or a situation that is likely to set us off. By thinking it through in advance you're using your prefrontal cortex and are programming it to help keep your amygdala in check.</p>	<p>Take some time in advance to ask yourself: 'What am I trying to do in this situation and how do I need to show up to make that outcome likely? How do I want to respond when that person does something that pushes my anger button?'</p>
<p><b>Label your feelings when they come up.</b></p>	<p>For decades, psychologists, counselors, priests, and educators have been helping people identify or label their feelings. Now we know from new research using functional MRI imaging of the brain that labeling these feelings helps reduce their intensity and return some of the activity back to the prefrontal cortex along with more cognitive control. They call it 'affect labeling.' This process helps you cognitively reappraise or reframe negative feelings, thereby reducing their impact.</p>	<p>Begin by stating what's happening: If you can either say out loud or to yourself, 'I'm getting angry here,' you put yourself in the role of observer rather than actor. It is easier to make thoughtful choices about what to do next if you can decouple yourself from being the actor.</p> 
<p><b>Create an 'early warning system.'</b></p>	<p>Knowing what causes an amygdala hijack can help you head it off. By paying attention to signs and emotions you can take action early rather than allowing the amygdala to completely take over.</p>	<p>Notice your physical reaction. When threatened or angered, most people have physical cues that they're headed down that path. It could be a tightening of your jaw, a flush feeling in your face, your vocal cords tightening up or something else. If you notice that, it's a cue to step back and regroup.</p>