
Distortions of Anger

BLAMING	“You did this,” name calling, put downs, not taking responsibility for yourself and what you feel, getting down on the other person’s case, the response you get from others is usually defensive.
SARCASM	Devious, ambiguous, and hostile joking at someone else’s expense, you are not vulnerable and are taking no risks since you can deny that you really meant what you said.
VIOLENCE	The more pain that you feel inside, the more the potential for violence directed outward, often seems like an uncontrollable volcanic eruption although violence is a conscious decision, may come in part from suppressing and not expressing anger and the primary feelings underneath.
VINDICTIVENESS	Actions taken so that you do not feel “one down”, revenge, getting even, getting back at others for real or imagined “wrongs” done to you.
VICIOUSNESS	“Going for the throat”, “hitting below the belt”, taking advantage of another person’s vulnerability, betraying another person’s trust, taking pleasure in causing pain in others, intentional cruelty.
PUNITIVENESS	“Punishing” others for what they did to you, “teaching someone a lesson” so they won’t repeat the behaviour you dislike.
AGGRESSION	Pushiness, intrusiveness, bullying, being rude and abrasive, giving orders and commands, completely ignoring what others think, feel and want, disregarding the other person totally, violating others’ rights.
SULKING	Passively punishing others with a silence that is hostile, controlling, ominous and threatening.
MANIPULATION	Used to control others indirectly, a way of getting what you want without having to ask for it straightforwardly.
SCAPEGOATING	Yelling or screaming at the kids, your partner, or your pets instead of figuring out where your anger is really coming from and directing it there, taking out your anger or your primary feelings on “targets” who do not deserve to be “dumped on”.

CHECKLIST FOR HIDDEN ANGER

If we have any national fault, it is hiding our own anger from ourselves. Here is a checklist to help you determine if you are hiding your anger from yourself. Any of these is usually a sign of hidden unexpected anger.

1. procrastination in the completion of imposed tasks.
2. perpetual or habitual lateness
3. a liking for sadistic or ironic humour
4. sarcasm, cynicism or flippancy in conversation
5. over politeness, constant cheerfulness, attitude of “grin and bear it”
6. frequent sighing
7. smiling while hurting
8. frequent disturbing or frightening dreams
9. over-controlled monotone speaking voice
10. difficulty in getting to sleep or sleeping through the night
11. boredom, apathy, loss of interest in things you are usually enthusiastic about
12. slowing down of movements
13. getting tired more easily than usual
14. excessive irritability over trifles
15. getting drowsy at inappropriate times
16. sleeping more than usual – 12 to 14 hours a day
17. waking up tired rather than rested or refreshed
18. clenched jaws – especially while sleeping
19. facial tics, spasmodic foot movements, habitual fist clenching and similar repeated acts done intentionally or unaware
20. grinding of the teeth – especially while sleeping
21. chronically stiff or sore neck or shoulder muscles
22. chronic depression – extended periods of feeling down for no reason
23. stomach ulcers

This is not about rage. Rage is anger out of control and taking over your whole being. This is about the feelings we call “irritation”, “annoyance”, “getting mad”, etc. All these negative feelings share one thing in common; they are considered undesirable at best, sinful or destructive at worst. We are taught to avoid them; to avoid having them if possible (it is not) but certainly to avoid expressing them. Unfortunately, many people go overboard in controlling negative feelings; they control not only their expression, [but their awareness of them as well.](#)

Because you are unaware of being angry does not mean that you are not angry. It is the anger you are unaware of which can do the most damage to you and to your relationships with other people, since it does get expressed, but in inappropriate ways. Freud once likened anger to the smoke in an old fashioned wood burning stove. The normal avenue for discharge of the smoke is up the flue and out the chimney; if the normal avenue is blocked, the smoke will leak out of the stove in unintended ways...around the door, through the grate, etc. choking everyone in the room. If all avenues of escape are blocked, the fire goes out and the stove ceases to function.

Likewise, the normal (human) expression of anger is gross physical movement and/or loud vocalisation; watch a red-faced hungry infant sometimes. We learn to “be nice” which means (among other things) hiding the “bad” feelings. By adulthood, even verbal expression is curtailed, since a

civilized person is expected to be “civil”. Thus, expression is stifled, and to protect ourselves from the unbearable burden of continually unexpressed “bad” feelings, we go the next step and convince ourselves that we are not angry, even when we are. Such self deception is seldom completely successful and the blocked anger “leaks out” in inappropriate ways, some of which are listed above.

The items in the list are all danger signals that negative feelings are being bottled up inside. It is true that each of them can have causes other than anger (procrastination for example can be due to an unreasonable fear of failure) and the presence of any of them is reason enough for you to look within yourself for buried resentments. If you are human, you will find some. If you’re fortunate, you will find few, since you will have learned effective ways of discharging them. If you are like most of us, you will need to unlearn some old habits before you can learn new ways of handling “bad” feelings – ways that are constructive rather than destructive.

Getting rid of a lifetime accumulation of buried resentments is a major task. This information is to provide you with some techniques, which will help you, stop adding to the pile, whatever its existing depth.

PROCESS OF DEALING WITH NEGATIVE FEELINGS

The process of dealing with negative feelings can be divided into three parts for purposes of discussion, although the living of it is all of a piece. The parts are:

1. recognition of the feeling
2. owning it – acknowledging that it is yours
3. discharging it – acting on it in some way.

THE PROCESS OF EXPRESSING ANGER RESPECTFULLY

- 1 Admit your anger. Accept that you are angry. Shouting “I am not angry!” at the other person only escalates you more. It can be safe and growth producing to acknowledge that you are angry.
 - 2 Take a “Time out” to cool down if you need it. Learning to deal respectfully and constructively with your anger takes time and practice.
 - 3 Identify the source of your anger (look for your primary feelings). Make sure you perceived what happened correctly. Ask yourself questions like; “What is my negative self-talk?” “Am I dealing only with this issue at hand or are there other stressors that have already escalated me before this?” “Am I looking for a reason to blow up?”
 - 4 Separate the energy of your angry (pent-up feelings inside you seeking release) from the issue your anger is about (the condition, idea, event or person you feel angry at).
 - 5 Decide how and when you will express your anger.
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- 6 Talk to the other person involved with your anger. Share your anger and any primary feelings you can identify in an open, direct and respectful way. 4
 - 7 Make “I” statements. Take responsibility for your own feelings. Resist the temptation to blame someone else for “making you” feel angry.
 - 8 Listen closely to the other person’s point of view. Recognise and accept that their view may be quite different from yours. Remember that they have right to their perspective and feelings.
 - 9 Get in touch with your expectations and your intentions in sharing your anger. The purpose is not to “win” the argument (or discussion) or to make the other person agree with your point of view. Rather it is an opportunity to give both of you a time to express feelings. Also, explore alternatives such as comprising, “agreeing to disagree”, or table the discussion until another time.

ANGER DOS AND DON'TS

Here is a review of some basic dos and don'ts to keep in mind when you are feeling angry.

- 1 Do speak up when an issue is important to you. Obviously we do not have to address personally every injustice and irritation that comes along. To simply let something go can be an act of maturity. But it is a mistake to stay silent if the cost is to feel bitter, resentful or unhappy. We de-self ourselves when we fail to take a stand on issues that matter to us.
 - 2 Don't strike while the iron is hot. A good fight will clear the air in some relationships, but if your goal is to change an entrenched pattern, the worst time to speak up may be when you are feeling angry or intense. If your fires start rising in the middle of a conversation, you can always say, “I need a little time to sort my thoughts out. Let's set up another time to talk about it more.” Seeking temporary distance is not the same as cold withdrawal or an emotional cutoff.
 - 3 Do take time out to think about the problem and to clarify your position. Before you speak out, ask yourself the following questions; “What is it about the situation that makes me angry?” “What is the real issue here?” “Where do I stand?” “What do I want to accomplish?” “Who is responsible for what?” “What specifically do I want to change?” “What are the things I will and will not do?”
 - 4 Don't use “Below the belt” tactics. These include blaming, interpreting, diagnosing, labeling, analyzing, preaching, moralizing, ordering, warning, interrogating, ridiculing and lecturing.
 - 5 Do speak in “I” language. Learn to say, “I think..” “I feel..” “I fear..” “I want..” A true “I” statement says something about the self without criticizing or blaming the other person and without holding the other person responsible for our feelings or reactions. Watch out for disguised “you” statements or pseudo “I” statements. (I think you are controlling and self centered.)
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- 6 Don't make vague requests. ("I want you to be more sensitive to my needs.") Let the other person know specifically what you want. ("The best way that you can help me now is simply to listen. I really don't want advice at this time.") Don't expect people to anticipate your needs or do things that you have not requested. Even those who love you cannot read your mind.
 - 7 Do try to appreciate the fact that people are different. We move away from fused relationships when we recognise that there are as many ways of seeing the world as there are people in it. If you are fighting about who has the "truth" you may be missing the point. Different perspectives and ways of reacting do not necessarily mean that one person is "right" and the other "wrong".
 - 8 Don't tell another person what she or he thinks or feels or "should" think or feel. If another person gets angry in reaction to a change you make, don't criticise their feelings or tell them they have no right to be angry. Better to say, "I understand that you are angry, and if I were in your shoes, perhaps I would be angry too. But I have thought it over and this is my decision". Remember that one person's right to be angry does not mean that the other person is to blame.
 - 9 Do recognise that each person is responsible for his or her own behaviour. Don't blame your dad's new wife because she 'won't let him" be close to you. If you are angry about the distance between you and your dad, it is your responsibility to find a new way to approach the situation. Your dad's behaviour is his responsibility, not his wife's.
 - 10 Don't participate in intellectual arguments that go nowhere. Don't spin your wheels trying to convince others of the "rightness" of your position. If the other person is not hearing you, simply say, "Well, it may sound crazy to you but this is how I feel". Or "I understand that you disagree, but I guess we see the problem differently".
 - 11 Do try to avoid speaking through a third party. If you are angry with your brother's behaviour, don't say "I think my daughter felt terrible when you didn't find the time to come to her school play." Instead try, "I was upset when you didn't come. You're important to me and I really wanted you to be there".
 - 12 Don't expect change to come about from hit-and-run confrontations. Change occurs slowly in close relationships. If you make even a small change, you will be tested many times to see if you "really mean it". Don't get discouraged if you fall on your face several times as you try to put theory into practice. You may find that you start out fine but then blow it when things heat up. Getting derailed is just part of the process, so be patient with yourself. You will have many opportunities to get back on track...and try again.

Source: Dance of Anger by Harriet Goldhor Lerner

USED CORRECTLY, ANGER CAN:

Energise

Release tension in a constructive way

Help to communicate when you're upset

Resolve hidden conflict

Give new thoughts

Alert you to threats

Provide information

INAPPROPRIATE USE OF CAN:

Disrupt your life

Control your thoughts

Ruin relationships

Cause pain

Cause health problems

Cause other emotional problems

Leave a negative impression

(General source unknown)

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON ANGER

Know yourself: Biblical teaching – 1 Corinthians 11:31 “But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world”

Proverbs 4 – Another chapter on how to know yourself.

1 Corinthians 2:11 “For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God”.

Job 36:13 “The godless in heart cherish anger; they do not cry for help when he binds them”

Job 36:15 “He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity”

Job 36:21 “Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction”

Proverbs 22:8 “He who sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.”

Proverbs 29:22 “A man of wrath stirs up strife, and a man given to anger causes much transgression.”

Proverbs 14: 17 “A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of discretion is patient” (warning sign of misuse of anger)

Proverbs 14: 29 “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly”. (warning sign of misuse of anger)

Psalm 4: 4-5 “Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord”

Psalm 9: 1-2 “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sign praise to thy name, O most High” (process of positive thinking)

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- Psalm 31:10 "For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away"
(Depression)
- Psalm 37:8 "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil"
- Psalm 42:5 "Why are you cast down O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my held and my God"
(Depression and how to combat it - hope)
- Psalm 142: (Depression – process of a sense of abandonment and resolution to unity and hope)
- Genesis 31:36-43 (Process of Jacobs anger – what was his core issue here) (see verses 1 and 2 as cues)
- Exodus 4:14 "Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold he is coming out to meet you and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart" (God's anger – what he does with it)
- Matthew 7:1-5 "Judge not that you be not judged...." (Projection of anger – conversion of it)
- Luke 6:6-11 "On another Sabbath, when he entered the synagogue..." (misuse of anger – what was going on for the Pharisees?)
- Luke 6:41-42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'brother let me'..."
(Projection of anger)

Contributed by Fiona Bosly
