

SOURCES OF ANGER: CLIENTS

PAST EXPERIENCES

CURRENT SITUATION

ANGER AND YOU

1. When I express anger toward another person, I worry that:

1. I will lose their love and respect
2. I will seem to be out of control
3. I might hurt them greatly
4. I will seem aggressive
5. I will reveal areas in which I am vulnerable
6. They might get angry in return.
7. Other _____

2. My physical reaction to anger expressed by others toward me is:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Nausea | 6. Headache |
| 2. Dizziness | 7. Trembling |
| 3. Weakness | 8. Blushing |
| 4. Stomach pain | 9. Fast heart beat |
| 5. Numbness | 10. Other _____ |

3. My greatest difficulty arises in expressing anger toward:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Children | 6. Persons in authority positions |
| 2. Spouse/partner | 7. Subordinates |
| 3. Parents | 8. Co-workers |
| 4. Friends | 9. Others _____ |
| 5. Boss | |

4. When I am angry toward another person, I express myself:

1. Nonverbally (stony silence)
2. Physically (throwing/kicking things)
3. By telling them honestly and directly how I feel
4. By joking about the situation and my feelings
5. By becoming verbally abusive (hostile put-downs)
6. By crying
7. By falling asleep
8. Other _____

5. My attitude toward anger is:

1. Anger is always destructive
2. Nothing is worth fighting about
3. Confrontation can be positive
4. Silence is golden
5. I am helpless
6. Most people just can't handle angry feelings
7. Other _____

6. When another person is angry with me, I usually feel:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Hurt | 6. Grateful |
| 2. Frightened | 7. Ashamed |
| 3. Depressed | 8. Resentful |
| 4. Guilty | 9. Other _____ |
| 5. Responsible for their anger | |

7. When another person is angry with me, I usually (action):

1. Apologize for having made them angry
2. Become very angry in return
3. Withhold my true feelings from them
4. Demand that they apologize for their anger
5. Ask them to explain their anger further
6. Try to ignore them or change the subject
7. Other _____

STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ANGER MANAGEMENT

AWARENESS

- Pay attention to body language
- Watch and listen for anger “triggers”
- Pay attention to the immediate environment
- Remain aware of your own stress, frustration and anger

ASSERTION

- Avoid threats, passivity or manipulation
- Avoid judgmental or demeaning responses
- Use “I” messages
- Remain in charge of yourself: don’t **react** to provocative behavior
- Stick to the point of the conversation

LIMITS

- Limit triggering/escalating behavior with crisis intervention
- Eliminate any audience when possible
- Establish and communicate clear limits and boundaries
- Know at what point you will assertively disengage

EXPECTATIONS

- Think positively: expect success in de-escalating
- Watch for negative role expectations and stereotypes
- Monitor your internal dialogue: Avoid self-defeating and destructive thoughts
- Share and discuss fears and expectations

CONTACT

- Listen actively and carefully
- Communicate respect and positive regard
- Be genuine, don’t play a “role”
- Look for “win-win” solutions; avoid power/control struggles

TO AVOID

ARGUING

confronting
defending
disagreeing

SOLUTIONS

directing, ordering, commanding
threatening, warning, punishing
preaching, moralizing
persuading, lecturing
advising, recommending

PUT-DOWNS

criticizing, blaming, labeling
sarcasm, teasing
diagnosing, analyzing

AVOIDANCE

withdrawing, diverting
cross-examining, interrogating

PSEUDO-SUPPORT

praising, approving
reassuring, consoling, sympathizing
me-too messages

USE OF THE ABOVE TECHNIQUES REDUCES THE HELPERS ANXIETY BUT DOES NOT ASSIST THE PERSON YOU ARE TRYING TO HELP

A STORY FOR THEM – AND US

There once was a little boy/girl who had a bad temper. The father gave the child a bag of nails and told him/her that every time s/he lost his temper, she must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day the child had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as s/he learned to control her anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered that it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the child didn't lose her temper at all.

S/he told the father about it, and the father suggested that the child pull out one nail for each day that s/he was able to hold her temper. The days passed, and the young child was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took the child by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my child, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife into a person and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say "I'm sorry", the wound is still there. A verbal wound is just as bad as a physical one.

**ELEMENTS IN CHILD WELFARE AND TREATMENT
SETTINGS THAT "TRIGGER" ANGER**

SEPARATION ISSUES

TRANSFERENCES

"RE-EXPERIENCES"

COMPLIANCE EXPECTATIONS

DISTURBANCES OF OTHER CLIENTS

UNTRAINED OR INSENSITIVE STAFF

BEING PART OF THE "SYSTEM"

MISUNDERSTANDING & MISLABELING
(Behavior problem vs. abuse victim)

INABILITY TO MEET EXPECTATIONS

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT
("7-day notice")

ANGER: SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Do you believe that you have a problem with anger?
2. What is your greatest concern about your own anger?
3. What rewards do you get out of being angry?
4. How would working on your anger problems make your life different?
5. Analysis of extent and conditions under which anger occurs:
 - Frequency:
 - Intensity:
 - Duration:
 - Situations:
 - Persons:
 - Mode of expression:
 - External factors:
 - Internal factors:
 - Adaptive or Maladaptive Function:

ANGER AND ACTIVE LISTENING

In order to identify the underlying determinants of an individual's excessive reaction to anger-provoking situations, we must listen carefully to his/her description of the provocation. If we know what to listen for, we can pick out the person's specific vulnerability, as well as the self-justifying story that is used to "explain" his/her reactive behavior.

With careful listening, we are then in a position to help the person identify these vulnerabilities in him or her self, so that s/he can replace mistaken attitudes with more appropriate ones. When this is done, her/his anger will become more moderate, and it will be easier for him/her to express his/her legitimate anger in acceptable and responsible ways.

If we can reveal to a parent or child (or any person) the hidden sources of excessive rage, s/he can begin to make other choices.

Listen for following problems:

1. **The Victim Attitude.** "Why is s/he always doing this to me"? "Other people don't have to put up with this!"

The child or adult mistakenly feels that s/he is being singled out for special "bad" treatment. S/he perceives others behavior as specifically intended to hurt them, and thus feels entitled to punish the person for victimizing him/her.

2. **The Moral Judgment Attitude.** "What s/he did was wrong!" In this case, the offended one feels it is his/her duty to punish the other for what was done to see that it never happens again. Behavior is "right or wrong", "good or evil"; there is no middle ground and no room for imperfections. The offended person seeks to enhance his/her self-esteem by appointing him/herself as Judge and Jury.

3. **The World Should Be Fair.** Person is oversensitive to unfairness and imperfections in the world, and if someone isn't seen as "fair" it's OK to hurt them.

4. **I Don't Take That From Anyone.** This person takes all behavior of others personally, as if it were a reflection on his/her worth as a person. Often the person's sense of worth is fragile, and they need to be helped to define self-worth in more substantial ways, so that it cannot be taken away so easily by others' behavior.

5. **Power and Control Attitudes.** The person gets very angry when others engage in power and control struggles with him/her. The issue is who can make whom do what. The precipitating incident is never the "real" issue, but only the occasion for the real issue, which is power.

6. **This is the Thanks I Get!** In this situation, a person feels unappreciated and becomes angry when his/her "goodness" is not reciprocated. These adults often have trouble giving without reward and recognition.

7. **We Can't Both Have Our Way.** This is a situation where a person wants his/her own way and wants it now. S/he can't see why s/he shouldn't get it, and gets very angry when s/he doesn't.

8. **Confusion Between Cooperation and Submission.** This person wants things done his/her way, and any deviation is perceived as rebellion. Only total submission is acceptable; any form of rebellion (such as not doing something immediately or doing it differently) causes anger and the person feels justified in suppressing the rebellion.

9. **Feelings of Inadequacy.** I tried everything and nothing worked, so I had to.....

SUPPRESSING ANGER

Many people suppress their anger because they learned as children to fear the consequences of open displays of certain emotions.

Many parents are not adequately prepared to cope with the tasks of managing their child's anger effectively and appropriately.

Some parents find that their child's anger caused an uncomfortable situation for them, and they sought to relieve their own discomfort by teaching their child to live in fear of his/her own human emotions.

Some parents taught that certain feelings were not OK: "If you don't have anything nice to say about someone, don't say anything at all!"

If our parents were afraid of or disapproving of expressions of anger, there is a good chance this attitude toward anger has carried over with us into adulthood.

There are various mistaken considerations that make us afraid to openly express our anger. These include:

1. **Fear of losing control.**

Some children learn to define “control” in terms of “preventing bad things from happening”. As an adult, this person might try to prevent bad things from happening by making life as predictable as possible. This would mean no emotional outbursts, no spontaneity, no surprises. Sometimes this person would then perceive the expression of emotions as evidence of “loss of control”. S/he might also come to fear that once s/he starts expressing emotion, they will carry him/her away, and s/he won’t be able to stop. So, s/he doesn’t start.

This person may also make the mistake of exaggerating the destructive potential of his/her anger, which causes fear that s/he will unintentionally annihilate someone with the force of his or her unchecked rage. In order to prevent that from happening, s/he holds the anger in.

2. **Fear of displeasing.**

Some people who attempt to prevent “bad things from happening” do so by trying to please people so they won’t hurt her. She must also avoid displeasing them for the same reason. S/he has come to believe that failure to avoid displeasing all-powerful parents will result in some devastatingly painful consequence. In some households, parents are seen as having the power of life and death over children, and the children learn not to dare offending them.

In some households, if children express negative emotions they are sent to their rooms as punishment or “until they can behave”. These children learn to make a choice between expressing their own legitimate feelings and living on their parent’s terms. Many, if not most, choose the latter course without even realizing that they have made a choice. This unconscious choice is carried over into adulthood, with negative consequences related to sacrificing one’s own identify as a person in a well-intentioned attempt to please others to avoid getting hurt. The person usually can’t see what is wrong with the choice that has been made, and is not aware that s/he can make other choices.

3. **Fear of victimization**

Some children have learned to perceive the negative events in life as if they were victimizations. The child's perception of him/her self as a victim predisposes him/her to "predict" that s/he will be "victimized" in the future as s/he has been in the past. This child also has a tendency to perceive victimization where none is intended.

This child suppresses anger out of fear that any overt negative reaction on his/her part will bring down on his or her head the victimization that s/he prophesies for him/her self and which s/he tries so hard to forestall. S/he is afraid that if s/he protests his/her "victimization", it will only make the situation worse, so s/he keeps it all in. Sometimes s/he conceals the anger even from his/her self. This person may, however, allow him/her self the luxury of expressing his/her anger at those who are even more of a victim than s/he is. Thus, the victim often becomes the victimizer, but only when it is "safe" to do so.

4. **Fear of rejection.**

These children come to feel that s/he doesn't belong, unlike other members of the family. They often perceive punishments, such as being sent to their room, as "proof" that they don't belong. The feelings of non-belonging in one's own family are terribly painful, and children often begin to feel that they don't belong anywhere.

As a consequence, the child learns to exaggerate the importance of external signs that s/he "belongs", as if these signs were proofs against being annihilated. When someone says "no" to him/her, s/he perceives it as a rejection of his/her worth as a human being, as proof that s/he doesn't "deserve" to belong after all. It confirms the feeling of worthlessness.

This person tries very hard to make him/her self secure against such devastatingly painful "rejections". S/he is afraid that rejection would certainly follow any expression of legitimate anger, and s/he is not about to take that chance.

5. **Fear of exposure.**

Some children learn to compare themselves unfavorably to other children. They come to believe that they are inferior in some way(s), and they never get over it. As adults, they still suffer from feelings of inferiority and inadequacy to cope with the tasks and responsibilities of life. They feel that they are worth less as a person than other people. They conceal the feelings of worthlessness behind a facade of phony toughness and bravado. They live in fear that the secret of their inferiority will be exposed for all the world to see, and that they will then be humiliated and devastated.

One way to forestall that eventuality is to suppress any signs of human “weakness”, such as feelings and emotions. S/he prides him/her self on being “cool” and unfeeling, as if these were virtues. S/he suppresses anger in a mistaken, lifelong attempt to prove to him/her self and others how “unweak” s/he is.

OVERCOMING FEARS

People with these fears all know, intellectually, that it is “OK” to express their emotions, including anger. They hear others say that one should just “let it all hang out”, but they simply cannot do it. They often recognize, intellectually, that their fears will not be realized if they dare to express their anger; but they are “stuck” in earlier patterns of behavior. The problem is that they don’t believe it emotionally.

The antidote to these fears is **COURAGE**, which is defined as the willingness to take a risk.

Fearful people cannot be “reasoned” out of their fears, nor cajoled nor threatened. They must have, or find, within themselves the willingness to dare the unknown.

As people experiment with legitimate, appropriate expression of anger and other difficult emotions, “homework” if you will, they will begin to feel their old fears falling away and being replaced with the courage to live freely.

ANGER AND FORGIVENESS

Many people cannot bring themselves to forgive those who have “trespassed against them”, and thus fail to employ one of the great antidotes to anger: forgiveness.

Something below the level of conscious awareness prevents some from relieving their residual anger, and they carry “grudges” in their hearts for years. These unresolved angers poison relationships with friends and loved ones, and even spoils the relationship with the self.

IMPEDIMENTS TO FORGIVENESS

Some unconscious attitudes that prevent us from forgiving others:

1. **“Why should I forgive them? They never forgive me. It’s not fair”.**

(The question: How are you helping the cause of justice and fairness by harboring this anger inside of you forever?)

2. **“When I am angry, there is nothing I can do about it. I feel so powerless and depressed.”**

(There is, however, something you can do. There is one power that you have, and that is the power to forgive.)

3. **“No one ever told me that I had the power to forgive. I’ve been so busy asking people to forgive me that I never realized that I had the power to forgive them.”**

(People have the power to forgive anyone they want to.)

4. **“Who am I to forgive anyone? I’m nobody.”**

(You are a worthwhile human being in spite of your faults and imperfections. You have as much right to forgive as anyone else.)

5. **“Why should I bother to forgive them? They don’t care whether or not I forgive them, so what’s the use?”**

(You are not doing it for them. You are doing it for yourself. This is a choice you can make on your own terms in order to relieve your own pent-up emotions.)

6. **“Why should I forgive them? What they did was wrong!”**

(Do we only forgive people who do right? Such people don’t need our forgiveness.)

7. **“I cannot forgive them. It is my moral responsibility to condemn these wretches forever for what they did.”**

(Your eternal righteous indignation makes you feel morally superior to others, but it’s not a big deal to be morally superior to a “wretch”. There is a limit to your responsibility for judging the imperfections of others. You are not more human than they are, nor are they less human than yourself. They, like us, are only imperfect human beings.)

8. **“It’s the principle of the thing! I must not compromise my abstract ideals even though they have nothing to do with the real world.”**

(You must catch yourself trying to relieve your painful feelings of inferiority by identifying yourself with high-sounding but irrational abstractions, such as:

1. “If my kid/parent makes me unhappy, I am entitled to make him/her unhappy, that’s fair.
2. “I am entitled to better treatment and I’d better get it.”

9. **“I have been carrying this anger for so long that it’s like a harpoon in my side, it’s part of me. I’m afraid that if I pull it out, I will bleed to death. I don’t know who or what I would be without it. It’s scary.”**

(It is true that your old role as the angry, impotent victim will begin to fall away from you after you have chosen to forgive. But you will not be left in a void. In place of this unhappy role you will find an identity as a worthwhile human in spite of yours or others faults. You’ll feel better about yourself and life than you ever have.)

10. **“If I forgive them, I might become like one of them, and I don’t want that to happen.”**

(Your rage is not your defense against losing your identity. You are more than a bundle of anger. Once you have experienced yourself in new terms, you will not be like anybody else.)

11. **“If I forgive them, it will be as if I were condoning what they did.”**

(Don’t confuse forgiveness with condoning. You are not being asked to condone their behavior, but to forgive them for perpetrating it. “Hate the sin but not the person”. Hating the sinner poisons our lives, and does not have much effect on the other person anyway.)

12. **“Why should I give him/her/them the satisfaction of forgiving?”**

(Are you living your life in order to deprive others of satisfaction? That is not a very gratifying lifestyle for you, and it doesn’t deprive others of anything they can’t live without.)

13. **“I am afraid that if I forgive them, it will make me vulnerable to being hurt again in the future.”**

(Where is it written that if you don’t forgive it will make you tough and invulnerable? You cannot prevent hurtful things from happening to you in an imperfect world by refusing to forgive. There is no connection between lack of forgiveness and security. You can learn to cope with hurtful things in the future rather than trying to prevent them.)

14. **“If I forgive them, my suffering might stop. I’m not sure that I am worthy to get relief from my suffering. It’s what I deserve! I’m not sure I deserve to be happy. Besides, if I ever stop suffering, what will I have to talk about?”**

(You’ve suffered long enough. As a worthwhile human being, you deserve to be as happy as anyone else.)

15. **“If I forgive them, I will forfeit my entitlement to get revenge on them someday”.**

(You are afraid that if you forgive them, the judge will throw your case out of court. But there is no case, no judge, and no court. Sometimes dreams of vindication in the unspecified future prevent us from living in the present. Life is too short and too precious to live it for some mythical time in the future. You pay a high price for reserving the right to be as cruel to them as they were to you.)

16. **“If I forgive them, I might have to start living my life in the present, and assume responsibility for my own situation. If I did that, I might fail. It’s much safer to nurse my old grudges and resentments.”**

(You are using ancient grievances as an excuse to withdraw from tasks and responsibilities in the present. You are seeking to exempt yourself from having to cope with life because you are afraid you’ll fail if you try. You can learn to respect yourself and find the courage to do the best you can with what you’ve got, now!)

Final Thought

Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun.

To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back - in many ways it is a feast fit for a king.

The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself.

The skeleton at the feast is you.

(Frederick Buechner; Wishful Thinking.)