



Psychotherapy and Counselling



Della Perrett MNCP(Snr Acc) RN(MH)Dip.He

6 Dover Close, Alresford, Hampshire SO24 9PG

Phone: 07900 320399, Email: della@emotionalhelp.co.uk

<http://www.emotionalhelp.co.uk>

Core Emotions and Anger.

When people see psychological treatment programmes that involve the word anger, it is often also used in direct association with the word management. In fact no other emotion, such as sadness or fear, attracts this word as often as in connection with anger. Have you ever wondered why?

In many common psychological text books much is written about the well recognised flight or fight response, but little about fear itself and the specific ways fear manifests energetically in the body and between people – as it is invariably more subtle. In western culture fear, as an emotion is often tabooed and so anger remains still misunderstood.

Culturally, anger is often confused in many instances with violence, aggression, intimidation, bullying, over controlling behaviour or indeed losing control and 'blind rage'. However anger is a valid emotion as is sadness and fear, designed to tell us something important. Our culture has not always historically nurtured healthy direct ways to discharge anger, which becomes a freeing, empowering act.

Too often the presence of fear contaminates anger, the two together then become used as a weapon against oneself or another destructively. Hitting out in 'blind rage' out of control is not healthy anger, but the ungrounded behaviour of a desperate person approaching a present conflict situation seeing it through a filter: the ghosts of a past situation which caused initially much fear and so posed much real threat.

When we have been subjected to overwhelming fear the mind – and body – finds ways of cutting off to cope. From such circumstances individuals develop particular styles of blocking emotions from being felt, realised, let alone discharged safely. If we over control fear - this (life preserving) emotion is not given adequate opportunity for safe expression then (unexpressed) fear seeps into anger, distorting the way we view the world. We can no longer trust ourselves to be either rational or acted wisely upon instinctual messages.

Yet we live in a culture – perhaps even more so now economically driven – where it is often experienced as problematic or counterproductive to simply admit feeling frightened – even to ourselves. So much so people get scared of being scared and scared of this too!

In my work with individuals coming to me for difficulties they associate with anger, it is common for me to hear the assertion from a variety of distressed places, "I'm not an angry person". Indeed anger has become so misunderstood it has become also reflected upon in terms of a distorted belief, where a the person fearing judgment, judges their whole self by one emotion alone.

We are not necessarily our emotions! A person may become a genuine victim of their own behaviour, behaviour which is not serving them particularly well anymore as once intended. Also emotions and moods never exist in isolation of thinking and behaviour patterns, however mutually exclusive they might first appear.

You will probably have heard or used the term, “passive aggression”. This is a useful example of how, without any physical force, behaviour can be nevertheless aggressive through communication alone. This reflects how unexpressed fear contaminates anger. Unexpressed, fear undermines the empowerment in being able to stay with feeling angry just for the crucial moment necessary to warrant it and so behaviour becomes intensively manipulative.

It can be said, we rob other people of what we deny ourselves. In the processes of denying ourselves basic human emotions, we can come to despise or resent it when we see it in another and so deny them too making martyrs of our self in the process.

Living with healthy anger is also living with the reality that ultimately we cannot change other people. We may at best be able to influence their thinking as we learn different responses and adapt, make decisions and change ourselves. Violence is invariably used where the perpetrator believes they can force another to feel something they otherwise cannot.

Paradoxically, those in commonly regarded ‘anger management’ programmes at their purest, already over manage their emotions, including anger (from original source.)

Being able to identify and explore ways to ‘free up’ and let go of rigid arbitrary mental rules is a very important stage of disengaging the fear from the anger. We develop mental rules in early life to ensure our survival. You know if you are being driven by rigid unhelpful rules when in an attempt to avoid conflict or distress you find yourself using and repeating terms with the hot words: “...should...” / “must” / “ought to” - and using global ways of describing aspects of events by generalisations: “...everyone” / “always” / “all of the time” / “never”.

The person is struggling to handle anger well is like the car driver, fuelled by fear – adrenaline pumping through their blood stream, with his/ her feet at full pressure on the gas moving at 100 mph, without noticing any of the important signs around him or her.

If we need to handle our anger better, this doesn’t mean that anything is necessarily wrong with anger itself. It’s like blaming the car, for one not allowing for a blind spot and careering off the road! Anger is designed as an emotion to get us somewhere productive if we use it responsibly. Lashing out physically - or behaviourally - aggressively is not routed – not grounded - in the present and if you have found yourself in this state you will not have been aware at the time, of the true origins of that anger, but just of the triggers presented by the other.

I have created an example based on the many examples features clients have presented to me. The genders of which could be of course be reversed:

‘I kept pushing my wife away with my behaviour until I understood it was really about someone else entirely – my aunt. Once I found a safe way that I could direct my anger at the proper source, I could see my wife for who she really is again. ...but first, I had to work through the considerable fear this aunt caused in me years ago ...and that has been tough, because I’ve always been someone who doesn’t like to show I’m afraid or admit I felt devastating feelings of helplessness at the time. I work in a bit of a macho environment and it’s just not something you do. I had to just get on with things and home life was something I saw as a refuge from work, not something I considered I had to meet the demands of in a different way. ...Now I feel closer to my wife because, in getting in touch with great sadness also around the events of my aunt, I am able to let my wife support me if I feel sad – which is a first! We feel a lot closer. Before, I’d bottle things up and push away anything that made me feel vulnerable – then snap dramatically leaving a trail of destruction that would then only make me feel worse. I couldn’t even live with the guilt of this and I’d push that away also by lashing out.’

I combine cognitive behavioural approaches with established techniques used in psychodrama and aspects of bodywork theory, within counselling and psychotherapy for individuals and couples. This creative way of engaging those in therapy, powerfully offers individuals the opportunity to realise and work with core emotions – such as anger that have become distorted by old fear - based survival defences and gain genuine relief from a reparative process that supports the person’s own healthy discharge of the emotion they have most blocked out from awareness.

Individuals have shared they feel more energy and vitality for life. Their anger becomes respected rather than

misused. People feel much calmer and more secure in themselves with an ability to think things through clearly and access anger in proportion when it is most useful.

Effective work with anger is not only useful for those concerned about their own physical aggression, but also those people with an emotional blocking style that means whenever anger surfaces in the body at a sensation level, it gets converted into tears. This often can be mistaken for a healthy sadness release, when it is evidently anger contaminated by fear. The person may cry because it feels safer as a way of coping with feelings of insecurity about one's personal identity. In this case crying is an attempt to avoid rejection as being self assured risks not everyone liking or agreeing.

In this article I have shown that emotions cannot be worked with in isolation in therapy and the term 'anger management' if carried through literally, reduces the potential for real personal transformation where it is desired. By treating the cause of the anger we can create a more successful therapy.

Della Perrett MNCP(senior accredited) RN(MH)Dip.He.