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Anger the Useless Emotion

By Timothy D. Evans, Ph.D., Guest Writer

Anger is one of the most noticeable human emotions. Particularly in our society, we all seem to experience and use anger. We think of it as a normal part of human nature. Anger especially occurs during times of stress and unrealistic expectations.

People are often told that they have the right to be angry and it is healthy to express anger. Expressing anger is counterproductive even if for a moment one feels like a winner.

If anger leads to useless conflict and miserable human relationships why do we continue to indulge in angry behavior? When we feel angry, the realization of free will goes out the window. We assume that behavior is caused by heredity or the environment and therefore out of our control.

How often have you heard the remark, “you make me angry” “you hurt my feelings” or, “I lost my temper.” Many people come home from work angry convinced it was caused by miserable working conditions, traffic, or a red traffic light.

Unfortunately, most psychologists still seem to believe we are at the mercy of our emotions and little can be done other than to “manage” our anger. When you get angry count to 10, with the hopes of subduing your anger.

Another approach offered by the experts today is to express your feelings. They recommend that people be honest with their feelings of anger and express them.

When was the last time someone said to you “we need to talk” or “I need to be honest with you” and you walked away feeling encouraged and closer to that person.

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Expressing your honest (negative) feelings seldom moves you closer to the people you love.

Based on newer psychological ideas, there is a more hopeful way of looking at anger. It is based on the idea of free will. Between the stimulus-response, humans can make choices. That behavior is purposeful and we choose our emotions to suit our goal.

Humans are not victims of their emotions but instead creative problem solvers who chose and use their emotions as valuable tools to help them accomplish their goals. If our goal is to defeat and punish we subtly turn on the anger and use it to give us energy to accomplish our goal. Invariably, the result is more anger and conflict in which everyone loses.

On the other hand, if we have an adequate view of ourselves and others than our goal is to work with others. We would not think of choosing anger to help us.

The key to reducing anger is to develop our emotional self-reliance. When we become fully aware that we decide when to become angry and rather than blaming others, we are responsible for our emotions. We place ourselves in a position of strength when we recognize we are in charge of our own thinking, feeling, and behaving, and whatever we say or do will bring us closer together or further apart. We become more inner-directed, less outer directed, and therefore become more self-reliant.

It is encouraging to know that we can change our goals and determine our emotions. If there is a lot of anger and conflict in our lives, we can decide to stop moving against others and instead start moving toward and with others in a cooperative way. Unhappy marriages based on anger could be our number one public health problem. Out of these unhappy marriages come substance abuse, depression, physical ailments,

divorce, and a host of other symptoms. The solution to our own happiness is making different choices that improve our relationships. Even if some feelings of anger remain, it makes no sense to be angry when you have no intention of using the anger against yourself or others. At the very worst, you can at least admit your choice of emotion and promise your love ones that you will not use it against them.

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