

Anger Management

What is it about anger that makes us want to manage it? Perhaps the out-of-control rage that is destructive to relationships, property, and our self-concept? We all feel anger. It is an inherent trait. Evolutionary Psychologists tell us that without it we would not exist. Thus anger must be good for something. Think about all the legitimate jobs out there that use anger as a means to get the job done. So what is the problem?

On the most superficial level the problem is deemed to be anger. At a slightly deeper level the problem is thought to be the lack of control when one gets angry. Look deeper. Underneath anger are a multitude of emotions...emotions we don't like to acknowledge. Fear, anxiety, sadness, hurt, shame. Look deeper still, and you will find that there are triggers for these emotions in our lives that set off the anger and let out the anger monster.

Strangely, the way to control anger is to accept it. It helps if you understand what set you off...which most people don't (I just lose it; It is like a switch clicks on; I don't have time to think, it just takes over; I see red; I snap). Everyone is different in what will set them off, so even if we have a clue as to what set us off, it is hard to get people to understand why it would have had that effect on us when it doesn't have that effect on them...but they didn't have our experiences, so they don't have the same responses.

The need underneath, way way down under, beneath understanding what set you off in the first place...is a belief. Beliefs are invisible and intangible. They are the code that determines how we think, which regulates our actions and words. Some people believe they are indestructible; some think they are meant to change the world. Some think they deserve

punishment, while others feel that they should devote their lives to helping others. None of these beliefs are any more right than the others. They are all just beliefs. We can believe anything we want...or have been programmed to believe.

The belief that sends a person into a rage may be that when someone acts a certain way it means they think we are inadequate, stupid, lack emotional regulation, clumsy, ugly, etc. etc. The key is: *Is the belief true?* Where did the belief come from? Generally beliefs come from someone we love; a parent, sibling, or other relative or even a friend. Many times we interpret the way people feel about us from their actions or demeanor, their words or non-verbals (which often have more to do with how that person's day went rather than with us). Perhaps they really did think that about us...or maybe they didn't, and it was a misinterpretation. Even if they did, is it really true? Maybe they felt that way about themselves and to make them feel better they wanted to hurt us? Any which way, what is important is not their beliefs at all, but what *we* think and believe. Does someone else's opinion really make something true? How is that possible when everyone has a different opinion?

The only way to figure this all out is to nail down where the belief came from in the first place, and *challenge its validity*. If you continue to believe that it is true then you cannot change your response when you are triggered by someone who makes you feel stupid or inadequate or emotional or clumsy or ugly etc. etc. However, if you can nail down where the belief came from, challenge its validity, and see that the belief was distorted in the first place, than whatever triggered you before, will no longer trigger you!

You suddenly have control of your anger. It is just gone, and so is the underlying negative belief. Sometimes there are a lot of negative beliefs that we have about ourselves, and we need to go through this process with each and every one of them. It takes time, it takes persistence, and it takes a lot of effort and soul-searching. There are no quick fixes. Lots of little tricks may help temporarily, but the real issue is not at surface level, nor is the solution.

Some suggestions for going through this process are: Journaling, a video or audio blog to yourself, self-help books, videos or audio recordings, hypnotherapy, or talking with a non-judgmental friend or counselor. Whichever method suits your personality is the right one for you.

Written by Diane Kinnear

Anger Management Counselor, Red Deer, AB