



Anger – What’s it all about?

Anger is easy...but it’s cheap and most of the time anger is dishonest.

Anger is cheap because we use it too often and we use it in situations that don’t call for anger. The purpose of anger is to provide the emotional energy to fend off an attack. Saber tooth tigers and menacing muggers are not common occurrences in the everyday life of most adults...yet given the frequency of anger you would think there was a mugger around every corner. We live in a culture that gives all of us permission to be angry over the most minor situations and the ubiquity of anger dilutes and distorts its impact. In so many ways, anger has lost its punch – especially when anger comes from a person who is “*always angry about something.*”

Anger is also dishonest. Herein lies the most important thing for us to consider. Anger is what mental health professionals call a “*secondary emotion*” – it is the emotion that people express, in one form or another, when confronted with a situation that activates uncomfortable feelings. Uncomfortable emotions predictably generate anxiety, which is the real source of our distress. Uncomfortable and anxiety-producing emotions include feeling: embarrassed, disappointed, fearful, shame, awkward, neglected, frustrated, sad, humiliated, confused, annoyed, overlooked, rejected, unappreciated, guilty, and many more. Tender uncomfortable feelings have one thing in common...they all invite us to feel weak and vulnerable. So rather than saying; “*I’m really confused and feeling stupid right now;*” instead we level a blast of anger against the other person for daring to make a comment or engage in an activity that arouses uncomfortable anxiety-producing emotions.

In recent years much has been written about “*emotional intelligence.*” On the level of individual behavior, emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to 1) understand the link between emotion, thoughts, and actions; 2) recognize and name the emotion as it occurs; and 3) behave in a manner consistent with the named emotion.

If you would like to consider broadening your emotional response and thereby becoming less dependent on anger, here are a few suggestions. Anxiety-producing uncomfortable emotions are an inescapable fact of life. Begin by embracing the fact that from time-to-time you will feel anxiety that is driven by one or more of the tender emotions I spoke of earlier. When you feel the first surge of anxiety, ask yourself; “*What is happening?*” The answer should be, “*I’m feeling a tender emotion.*” Now name the emotion you are feeling (embarrassed, annoyed, unappreciated, confused, scared, neglected, guilty, overlooked, stupid, frustrated, etc.). Once you have named it, you can behave in a manner consistent with the nature of the emotion. If you feel confused, say so! If you feel guilty...admit it and apologize. If you are feeling neglected or unappreciated admit your vulnerability (at least to yourself) and determine if it’s safe to tell the other person.

Three-Minute Reflections

*Step back from life and reflect on how
the inner you shapes your behavior*



Dr. Burt Bertram

Broadening your emotional response and becoming less dependent on anger will take time and practice. You may even need some coaching on how to identify and/or express certain tender emotions. That's ok...personal growth is a process that takes time and practice.

Thanks for reflecting.