

DEFINING WHAT ANGER IS

(And What Anger Isn't)

ANGER (THE EMOTION):

- Anger is a normal and natural **EMOTION** that arises from how we interpret and label the physical arousal from the “fight or flight” stress response we all experience. This stress response is triggered when we are startled, when we feel fearful or threatened, when we believe that our expectations are not being met or that things around us are “out of control,” or when we feel insecurity, uncertainty, inadequacy, or self-doubt. Anger generally serves as a “protection” against some sort of emotional or physical pain.
- **ANGER IS:**
 - Appropriate
 - ...whenever it is handled effectively and respectfully
 - A source of discovery
 - ...since it tells you that “something is going on” within you or around you that needs to be attended to
 - A tool to help you clarify and define who you really are
 - ...and how you are different from others
 - A means to educate others about the differences between you and them
 - ...e.g. about your likes, dislikes, wants, and needs
 - A “warning signal:”
 - ...that a “core hurt” from the past has been activated by a person or situation in the present
 - ...that your wants, needs, rights, or core values are not being addressed
 - ...that you’ve compromised yourself in some important way
 - ...that an injustice has been done to you or those you care about
 - An important part of being assertive and taking care of yourself
 - ...i.e. setting personal limits and maintaining healthy boundaries for yourself and by enabling you to cope with difficult people and situations
 - A useful release of energy
 - ... since it takes enormous effort to suppress your anger and the other feelings it often covers; trying to completely deny your anger only creates stress, tension, and anxiety within you
 - A catalyst and a way to tap into your personal power
 - ...that can produce the energy necessary to help motivate you to solve your problems, address important issues, and accomplish what you need to do at times

- A form of protection
 - ...since anger often surfaces in a destructive fashion for you and those close to you if it is not addressed directly and effectively
- A gift to others
 - ...since sharing your anger (and the other feelings it hides) involves taking a risk and allows you to become vulnerable, which can open the door to new information about you and others and to trust and intimacy in your relationships
- If you do not address and handle your anger in an effective and respectful way, however, and you allow your anger to build and fester within you, it can lead directly to the unhealthy attitudes and behaviors discussed below which are actually distortions and perversions of what anger, the emotion, is supposed to be

CYNICISM/HOSTILITY/DISGUST/CONTEMPT/ENTITLEMENT (THE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES):

- These are **ATTITUDES** that consist of mistrusting the motives of other people and brooding about and focusing on others' real or perceived injustices toward you and believing that other people and the world in general absolutely owe you respect, approval, fairness, and the like.
- They also involve the belief that you are completely justified in blaming the people around you for the anger that you experience and your other feelings as a result of not receiving what you believe you have a "right" to expect
- These negative, pessimistic, distrusting, resentful, and vengeful attitudes lead to viewing the world as an unsafe place and continually looking for and expecting other people to:
 - ...be incompetent and inadequate
 - ...be inconsiderate, unfair, and untrustworthy
 - ...go out of their way to hurt or mistreat you, take advantage of you, or "cross" you in some fashion
- These attitudes can also involve critical, judgmental, and shaming thoughts about yourself, your mistakes, and your problems.
 - ...i.e. being cynical, disgusted, and demeaning with yourself at times
- These attitudes promote the idea that you are powerless and a "victim" and that the situation is hopeless which is never helpful in addressing and resolving concerns in your life.
- These attitudes are best represented by your negative thought process (i.e. your negative self-talk or rehearsal).
- When you regularly engage in negative thinking, you are constantly fueling your stress response and increasing the intensity of and prolonging the anger that you experience.

- Chronic cynicism, hostility, disgust, and contempt always lead to physical and emotional damage and significant consequences for you and others.
- If these attitudes become your way of looking at another person, other people in general, or the world around you, they then contribute directly to the violation of another person's rights or boundaries through the unhealthy behaviors discussed below.

AGGRESSION/WITHDRAWAL (THE DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS):

- Aggression involves **BEHAVIORS** acted out with the intent to **hurt, punish, intimidate, or control others** emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually as a means:
 - ...to get revenge for those real or imagined “wrongs” done to you and/or
 - ...to get your way in a particular situation (i.e. to gain “control”).
- Withdrawal involves **BEHAVIORS** designed to disengage emotionally from difficult situations. This can be:
 - ...a **punishing withdrawal** that is used to hurt and get back at someone (e.g. sulking and pouting) OR
 - ...a **protective withdrawal** when you pull back into yourself if you are feeling uncertain and unsafe (e.g. becoming passive and “stuffing” your anger).
 - ...A withdrawal may also combine elements of both of these.
- These behaviors, used on a consistent basis, will always eventually result in disrespect, a lack of trust and safety, and emotional distance and estrangement in relationships with others.