

## ANGER

Anger is a normal human emotion. It is as normal as sadness, fear, joy, or laughter. But in our society any display of negative emotion, especially anger, is unacceptable. Most of us suppress anger, or try to. Sometimes we become so good at suppressing anger that we no longer recognize anger in ourselves.

Some years ago, Theodore Isaac Rubin, M.D., wrote a book called THE ANGRY BOOK. (I don't know if it is still in print) In his book he discusses at length, why we suppress anger and the effect of this on us physically and mentally. Dr. Ruben says: "So many of us are afraid to feel, afraid to express feelings, and afraid to have other people angry towards us. ...We can allow only so-called acceptable feelings to come through and then only with great care, constriction and trepidation."

Dr Rubin calls the ways in which we suppress the normal, natural free feel and flow of anger "perversions". Some of these "perversions are: "Putting it Down", "Putting it off", "Putting it on", and "Diluting it".

**"Putting It Down"** is the result of many years of practice. The person is completely unaware that she has had a feeling of anger at all. A typical statement by one who automatically down her anger is: "Oh, I never get angry."

In the perversion of **"Putting It Off"** the idea is that if you delay anger long enough maybe it will go away. The person consciously or unconsciously delays feeling anger and responding to it until the time comes when it will be safer to feel and to express it. A typical statement of this type of person is: "Why don't I think of the right thing to say until it's too late?"

**"Putting It On"** is the type of perversion that allows us, most of the time unconsciously, to remove anger towards ourselves, another person or event, that we are angry with, and place that anger on a person or event that is less threatening.

In **"Diluting It"** the anger is usually felt, but every kind of intellectual rationalization is used to render impotent. Examples of dilutions are: "He must be sick." "I know he

can't help it, so I can't get angry with him." or "I just do something else and the feelings go away."

Though some of us use one perversion more than another, we all combine them to some extent, as the various perversions are not mutually exclusive. Dr. Ruben tells us that: "Perverted anger twisted into grotesque forms must eventually poison one's self as well as one's relationships with others." This is especially true for the grieving parent. It is necessary to look at our own conscious anger at the death of our child and see how we have handled it. This anger, if it is suppressed can be the unknown stumbling block that will prevent us from healthy recovery. It is important that each of us look carefully at the progress of our grief to see what we are doing with our anger. We need to look at the very good possibility of suppressed anger.

My own "perversion" of anger led me to write a very kind and forgiving note three days after Arthur's death to the woman who ran over and killed him. I did not feel anger towards this woman, but for years I had an irrational, but intense anger towards my sister in another state who had a son just the same age as Arthur. I strongly believe that Ed's leaving the scene of Arthur's death to change clothes and not being there with me when I needed him so badly, was the beginning of a deep unconscious anger towards him that ultimately led to the end of our marriage.

Another mother whose faith had been very strong before her child died, became obsessed with her religion after her child died. She constantly ran to church. It was not hard to see that she was angry with God for taking her daughter, but since she did not feel she could possibly be angry with God, she had to prove to herself and to others that she was not angry with Him by running to church all the time.

These are but a few examples of how we twist our anger towards ourselves or someone else in order to make the anger acceptable. But in doing this we delay or even halt our recovery.

Through unexpressed anger, or inappropriately expressed anger vented on those we love we can destroy our marriage or emotionally cripple our children.

Many of us think that any show of anger is the same as violent temper tantrums. This is not true. Anger displays can be very mild to powerful expressions, and all levels in between. In reality, it is only the anger fed by the build up of tensions and buried angers that lead to uncontrolled explosions.

Dr. Rubin tells us that there is a difference between feeling angry, recognizing it and telling someone else about it, and taking it out on others. He says that the most important thing is to know and accept angry feelings. It is only after we accept angry feelings without judgment as to whether they are "good" or "bad", plus the ability to express the anger, will we then be able to make a choice regarding the expression of that anger.

Recognizing suppressed anger involving the death of our child, towards others or ourselves is important. If we continue to suppress our anger involving our child's death, not only will we not be able to successfully resolve our grief, but also it can manifest itself in physical, mental or emotional illness. (Most people do not recognize that depression is anger that we turn in on ourselves.)

The first step in the process of ridding ourselves of anger is awareness that we are angry, and at what or whom. The next is to ask ourselves if we can do anything to let the other know of our anger. Then we need to vent our anger. The best way to do that is to tell ourselves or the other that we feel angry with them. Remember—healthy anger does not hurt or become violent. It is only suppressed anger that gets out of control.

Remember also that good relationships such as with a spouse or another family member will not be ruined by constructive anger that clears the air. If we did not care for them we would be indifferent to them and would not waste the energy that anger takes. If we feel we cannot tell someone face to face of our anger, another way is to write that person a letter, saying all the angry things we feel. Put it away for a month. Take it out and reread it, then put it away again. Keep doing this until you feel less and less anger at each reading. Then tear it up and throw it away. What you have done, even though you have not directly confronted the individual with your anger, is

to have expressed your anger and gotten it out.

Whether we will admit it or not, for some of us it is unthinkable to be angry with God. Why? We may think it is disrespectful. Others of us may be fearful of what God will do to us. God knows we are angry with Him anyway, so why not tell Him. He can take it. Not only that, my being angry with Him and telling Him so is an affirmation that I have a relationship with Him. If this is a problem for you talk with a clergyperson about it. I am sure that he or she will tell you that it is quite acceptable

There are valid reasons why we feel anger in our grief. We may be angry with ourselves because we regret what we did or did not do for our child. Sometimes we are angry at the unfairness of our child's death. Another valid reason for anger is the powerlessness we feel. There are many reasons for our anger that are justified and right. The important point is to recognize and express it rather than let it consume and destroy us, as it surely will.

All of us are familiar with the physical energy and tension that we experience when we are angry. A practical suggestion for dealing with that energy and tension is to physically expend it. Some ways to do that is through strong physical action such as jogging or running. Punching a punching bag or pillow is helpful. Turn the shower on full blast and scream out your anger, or drive carefully to a remote place where you can roll up the windows in your car and beat the steering wheel and scream at the top of your lungs. Buy some old dishes at a garage sale. Throwing them, one at a time, at a basement or garage wall will expend a lot of energy. However you do it, it is important to release the pent up anger. Don't worry about losing control. You won't. Even the most "in control" person will again be in control after the energy has been spent. You will feel exhausted and relieved.

Try a daily release in order to avoid a build up of anger and its resultant stress. Exercising regularly is one way of doing that. Another way, and one I find especially effective, is to write daily in a journal. This way you can write out all your feelings and direct your anger to whomever you feel anger towards.

For some, putting anger into positive action is very helpful. Parents of murdered

children can do this by working for changes in the legal system or for victims of crimes. Working for stiffer drunk driving laws can be another way. There is much to be done or changed in our society. Take the energy of your anger and put it to good use.

After the anger is vented and released there is only one thing that will put the matter to rest—FORGIVENESS. Yes, we must forgive ourselves, we must forgive our spouse, or the doctor or others involved in our child's death. In some cases, we must even forgive the child herself. (I do not know if we can say we "forgive" God. Each of us has to work out our ideas about that.)

Grief is not easy to resolve. Of the many manifestations of grief, anger is one of the most difficult to deal with, but it must be worked through if healthy resolution is to be arrived at.

It takes time and work. Be patient with yourself, but keep plugging away and eventually you will work through your anger—and ultimately, your grief.

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