

Right Use of Anger

Often we hear anger called a negative emotion. Like the creator made a mistake in the original design of humanity—the kind of mistake typical of humans. Maybe it was just a slip of the spoon when adding ingredients, or inadvertent reactivity between two benign components (like barbiturates and alcohol).

Before we blame the cosmos for anger issues, it might be useful to step back and take a look at what we label anger. For one thing, anger has very different flavors.

The first kind we all experienced was infant anger about not being cared for adequately. We would fuss and then cry, but when all else failed, escalate into a full-bodied rage, complete with thrashing feet and flushed cheeks. Nothing inherently negative about demanding at the top of our lungs for someone to pay attention to our needs. After all our survival depended upon that. And this anger stopped quickly when someone responded to our needs.

Later on came anger that we got into when we began addressing the imperative to separate and become independent. It had two faces—resistance and defiance. When we put a word to it, what we expressed would be some form of NO! And we had nearly unlimited energy to bring to the task of making the person we were most attached to—usually mommy—very uncomfortable so she would let go of her end of our mutual attachment. Developmentally, this kind of anger has its purpose and was a necessary tool for when we needed it, no matter how unpleasant our parents thought we were back then. When separation was complete, our anger to push people away dissipated eventually.

A third flavor came along when we needed to learn how to get what we want from others—and keep them from taking from us what we don't want to give. Often that involves anger. Attempts to intrude into our space, take what's ours, or violate our person often require a measure of anger to repel. The less popular utility value comes as a way of manipulating or controlling others in our quest to “make” them do what we want. It would be easy to formulate a case that anger as a control device has socially negative attributes because these manipulations seldom engender good will. But a fundamental requirement to be healthy usually includes a sufficient quantity of anger to repel intrusions.

When we are too quick to label all forms of anger as negative—and therefore unhealthy—we miss the point that vital elements of our personality makeup require access and skill with the form of anger most appropriate to the task at hand. No matter what culture, race, or gender we find ourselves, prohibitions against a child's outward expression of the appropriate flavor of anger constitute attempts to redesign a fundamentally sound design for growing healthy humans.

Commonly we find females in our society who cry when feeling angry because prohibitions against being powerful have such universal acceptance. And males exhibit angry hostility rather than “weak” feelings of fear or sadness. Even when we do not accept that anger is negative, we often tell someone with legitimate anger “don't be angry.” Don't feel it. Get even. Just be happy. Be positive. Anything rather than express anger in its different forms.

What develops from wrong ideas about anger are some very negative manifestations. Repositories of unresolved anger explode into destructive rage at the slightest provocation, even when we attempt to be calm, rational, and positive in our attitudes toward life. And common maladies such as lower back pain have been directly linked to reservoirs of anger, dammed up by prohibitions against saying no to our loved ones. And a common form of depression has traditionally been attributed to anger turned inward.

We become fair game when unable to defend against unwanted intrusions because we get stripped of necessary force, which can be supplied by anger.

As adults, we often intuitively know that the kinds of behaviors traditionally labeled passive aggression are inappropriate when we see grown people engaged in them. We can observe the manipulative quality when someone makes us comply with his/her wishes by being angry at us until we do so. And when a full-grown person goes into rage we feel the inherent violence, whether or not it gets acted out. Negativity of unresolved anger comes from its fundamental inappropriateness. What was safe for a small child to express becomes unhealthy and even dangerous when we are adult sized.

The healthiest understanding of anger starts with correct identification of each particular flavor and what it is designed to accomplish. Rage because we have unresolved needs cannot be successfully worked out within love relationships with peers. It needs to be dealt with in the kind of professional structure designed to safely resolve it. Medications, management tactics, and other forms of diversion or prohibition don't work any better later on than they did when our parents attempted to stop us from having needs they couldn't fulfill the first time around.

When anger shows up in intimate relationships that pushes loved ones away, we can argue legitimately that the effects are destructive. But until we are free of attachments and can say no to what we don't want, real intimacy cannot happen. Struggling for autonomy by pushing away our closest love interests makes no sense when we do it as adults because the quality of thinking involved remains primitive, more appropriate to two year olds. If we try to make sense of what is largely devoid of rationality, we only get more confused. But there is no lack of complex theoretical models in nearly every culture to explain (confuse) us about this form of anger. Even to the extent of attributing our gender differences to different planetary origins.

Healthy adults do not go around with unresolved pockets of anger that come to bear whenever we get the slightest nick. We don't look to others for need fulfillment because we became fully accountable for that ourselves. And with real autonomy, we can say no when necessary, even without resorting to the force of anger to establish boundaries. When faced with a difficult challenge, we have access to the energy provided by anger to stand up and get in someone's face until the issues gets resolved—and the key is that no one else may even know that we were angry! Another important feature of healthy anger comes with the experience that as soon as the issue gets resolved, the anger immediately dissipates. We can confront even our closest friends and allies about important issues, remain entirely rational, and still be close when it's all over and done with.

I don't know about you, but right use of anger looks like an important component in the healthiest way we can live.

Much more on this and related topics can be found at [HTTP://doihaftagrowup.com](http://doihaftagrowup.com). You can take a test of just how well you mastered connection and subsequent foundational challenges and read related articles.

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