

Personality Disorders & Anger

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Thank you very much, Begonia, for that lovely introduction.

What my talk tonight will be about, mostly, is how to achieve and maintain healthy relationships. Why do I think that healthy relationships are important?

Because good relationships are the key to happiness.

I' ll explain why.



The next impediment is unnecessary guilt.

A number of years ago, when I was working at Douglas Hospital, I used to give talks to groups of family members of mentally ill patients. One time, during the question period following my talk, a man stood up and asked about a particularly difficult situation he and his wife were experiencing. His daughter, a woman in her thirties, had been hospitalised for many years at the Douglas, and the couple, very devoted to her, their only child, would take her home on weekends. The problem was that she would swear and curse a blue streak as well as verbally abuse her parents, endlessly. They felt powerless to do anything about it, as they had been told that their daughter's behaviour was caused by her mental illness.

I asked the father how his daughter's behaviour made him feel. He replied, "I get very upset and angry, particularly when she is so abusive to my wife. But then I feel guilty; after all, she's sick, it's not her fault that she acts this way."

So here we have the father ♣ who's being abused by his daughter. This naturally makes him ♣ angry as it would anyone. But because he believes that his anger is unjustified, he experiences ♣ guilt. His guilt prevents him from acting to stop the abuse, and in fact it leads to more abuse from the daughter, completing ♣ the vicious circle.

How can we avoid getting into this vicious circle? The answer



If anger causes so many problems, why do we even possess the capacity to get angry? What the heck was Mother Nature thinking?

Imagine that you're a mother, 50,000 years ago, living in the jungle. A wild animal comes along and grabs your baby. Naturally, you're frightened. When your baby is hurting, you're hurting. Suppose you aren't able to get angry - it hasn't been built into your genes. What happens? Your baby gets eaten, and your lovely genes, free from all anger, fail to reproduce.

On the other hand, ♣ suppose you are able to get angry when you're hurt or frightened. Your anger gives you courage, so you can overcome your fear of that wild animal, and your anger gives you strength and energy to go after that animal and get your baby back. Because of anger, your baby survives, passing on those genes that have the capacity for anger, to future generations.

So anger itself is good - ♣ it gives us courage and energy. Even if anger were bad, there wouldn't be much we could do about it. It's an emotion - it happens automatically ♣ when we are hurt or frightened. We can't turn it off.

So let's forget the notion that we shouldn't be angry. If we get angry, there's a reason. Anger by itself doesn't cause problems - it's angry behaviour ♣ that gets us into trouble. If I get angry with my boss, and punch him in the nose, I'll lose my job, not for getting angry, but for punching him.

In general, when we get angry, it's often best to not say or do anything until we've figured out what not to do. Our capacity to not react

Anger: the fight-or-flight response

- **Physiologic changes when we are hurt or frightened:**
 - **Blood is redirected to large muscles, skin**
 - **Blood is redirected from stomach and gut**
 - **Less blood goes to the brain!**

I can't stress enough how important it is to first calm down before making a decision about what you're going to do!

There's a very good reason for this. You've all heard ♣ of the fight-or-flight response? When we are frightened or hurt, besides becoming angry, our bodies get ready ♣ to either fight or to run away. For example, the circulation of blood is altered so that more blood goes to the large muscles of the legs and arms so we can fight or run better; ♣ more blood goes to the skin, for cooling. Where does this blood come from? Well, less blood goes to the stomach and gut ♣, because digesting our food is the last thing we need to worry about; and most importantly, blood is redirected away from our brains! ♣ That's right, when we're angry, we become temporarily stupid! That's why we don't want to make any important decisions about what we're going to do or to say, until we've calmed down by counting to ten, or a hundred, or a thousand, whatever it takes.

Now, many people have all sorts of immature or inappropriate ways of expressing their anger. Let's look at some of them.

The person who behaves aggressively when they get angry is



You can think of the range of angry behaviours as being on a spectrum, with ♣ aggressive behaviour at one end. Suppose you're dining out; you've ordered a steak, rare, and the waitress brings you a steak that's thoroughly cooked. If you're aggressive, what will you do? Yell at the waitress across the restaurant, of course, embarrassing her as well as the people you're with.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from aggressive behaviour is ♣ passive behaviour. What do you do if you're the passive type? Why, nothing! And if the waitress asks you, "How's your steak?" what do you say? "It's fine, thank you!"

In between the poles of aggressive at one end of the spectrum, and passive at the other, what do you find? ♣ Passive-aggressive behaviour!

When the waitress asks the passive-aggressive person, "How's your steak?", he will reply that it's not cooked right. If she offers to take it back and get him another one, he will say, "Never mind, it's OK". At the end of the meal, does he leave a tip? Of course not! And he's likely to accidentally run over the flower beds as he backs his car out of the restaurant parking lot.

But passive-aggressive behaviour happens all the time. I'm in a meeting at work; my wife beeps me on the pager; I check the number, it's my home, OK, I'll call when the meeting finishes. But then it beeps again, same number. This time, I think it's an emergency, and I excuse myself from the meeting to call home. My wife answers, "Henry, I forgot to get bread when I was shopping today. Be a dear and pick up a loaf on your way home from work."

Now, I may be angry at her for calling me out of a meeting for a loaf of bread, but I don't want to start a fight, so I just say OK. Later that day, I arrive home empty-handed. "Did you get the bread?" my wife asks. "Darn! I forgot!"

This kind of forgetting is passive-aggressive behaviour.

I used my wife in the example, but I want to emphasize that it's entirely

How hidden anger develops

- **Classical conditioning**
 - **Unconditioned Stimulus (US): mommy's absence**
 - **Unconditioned Response (UR): panic**
 - **Conditioned Stimulus (CS): anger**
- **Anger will subsequently trigger panic**

So angry behaviour, not the anger itself, creates problems in our relationships.

We can assume that the aggressively angry person is aware of his anger. But it may be that both the passive and the passive-aggressive types are unaware of their anger or of their angry behaviour. It's unconscious, as the psychoanalysts say. This hidden anger is another of the impediments to good relationships I showed you earlier. How can it be ♣ that someone could be totally unaware of their anger?

Consider a six-month old infant in a crib; it's 3 am, and the baby wakes up, with a wet diaper, the blanket off, in the dark, feeling hungry. What does the baby do? Cry, of course. And when the infant cries, Mommy usually comes. What does the baby do if mommy doesn't show up? Most babies become enraged in this situation; they begin to scream. What if mommy still fails to show up? At this point the infant panics. After all, its entire world consists of itself and mommy, and mommy is a robot who responds when baby pushes the buttons on the remote control, that is, cries. If mommy doesn't respond, for the baby, its world has just come completely apart. It's as if you woke up one day and learned that the entire world, except for yourself, had been destroyed in a nuclear war. The psychoanalysts have a word for this kind of panic: annihilation anxiety. When mommy doesn't show, the baby experiences, after its anger, an overwhelming fear.

Those of you who remember your psychology 101 course, will know that we have here ♣ the elements of classical conditioning, like Pavlov's dog: ♣ the unconditioned stimulus is mommy failing to show up, ♣ the unconditioned response is panic. ♣ The conditioned stimulus here is the sensation and

One-trial Learning

- **A form of classical conditioning**
- **No repetition necessary**
- **Does not extinguish**
- **Requires one of:**
 - **Extreme nausea**
 - **Intense fear**

Big deal, you say. The effects of classical conditioning wear off, don't they? Not always. Who has heard of one-trial learning? ♣ This is a kind of classical conditioning, except that it only takes ♣ one trial for the learning to take hold, and it ♣ never extinguishes. In the case of lab rats, it occurs in two situations ♣ : after eating something that makes the rat ill, the rat will forever after avoid that food; and the second situation is when there's intense fear. The experiment the rat doctors use involves a cage with a floor that can be electrified so that the rat will receive an electrical shock. When the experimenter applies the juice at the same time as ringing a bell, the rat will scurry around like crazy until finally finding a little platform in the cage where he no longer gets the shock. Forever after, when the rat hears the bell ring, he will head straight for that platform, even if the floor is never electrified again. If you could ask the rat why he continues to jump on the platform even though he's not getting any shock, he would tell you it's because he's on the platform. It's like this schizophrenic patient who was always sitting on his hands in the hospital's dayroom. The staff asked one day why he was sitting on his hands; he said, "it keeps the CIA away". The staff responded, "but that's silly; there's no CIA around here!" To which the patient replied, "See? It works!"

So, to go back to this 6-month-old baby who woke up, got angry at mommy for not showing up, and then panicked: these are just the right conditions for one-trial learning to take place. The baby will believe forever after that becoming angry leads to intense fear. It may even develop the fixed notion, born out of its omnipotence, that its anger actually caused mommy to disappear forever!

Because it's one-trial learning, the baby will remain under the very powerful influence of this association, even years later as an adult. And it's almost a certainty that the adult will have no insight into this response within him or herself, much less any memory of how it came about. In other words, this will be part of the unconscious. Why? Because a six-month-old has not yet developed the capacity for symbolic thinking, which is necessary for speech, and I believe is the basis of



I am now going to talk about negative personality factors, which in severe cases are called personality disorders. How do these come about?

First off, what is personality? I think that personality is how we relate to other people. We're not born automatically knowing how to relate, although babies possess two hard-wired characteristics that help a great deal: they can smile, and they can imitate. By doing these two things, it's almost guaranteed that they can get mommy to pay attention to them.

But smiling and imitating aren't enough when you get older; people learn a whole repertoire of behaviours that are helpful in relating to other people. Most of this learning takes place through imitation. Children imitate their parents: how mom and dad relate to each other, how each of them relates to the child and to any brothers or sisters. Children will also imitate any other adult or child that they're in contact with. But the bottom line is: choose your parents very, very carefully!

Seriously, though, problems in personality development can arise in a number of ways. I won't even get into the very severe relationship difficulties of autistic children or adults, who may not have the hard-wired capacity to smile or to imitate in an adaptive way.

♣ Relationship behaviours cannot be adequately learned if there is an absence of good teachers or role models in the child's life: for example, parents divorce or die; they may be sick and hospitalised; or they may be emotionally unavailable because of depression.

♣ If the part of the child's brain that learns personality is somehow defective or damaged in a minor way, personality learning will also be defective. This is analogous to other types of specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.

♣ Finally, the role models may have had personality defects themselves. For example, children who get physically abused by their parents grow up to abuse their own children.

The point is, there are perfectly valid reasons for many people to be the way they are, reasons which are not within their control. These people thus have no reason ♣ to feel

Overcoming problems in personality development

- Time
- Energy
- Motivation
- A skilled, experienced psychotherapist

How can a person overcome personality difficulties? Consider someone with dyslexia. He or she can eventually learn to read adequately, but it usually requires a lot of time and effort, a skilled and experienced teacher, and a highly motivated pupil. The same is true of personality problems ♣ : motivation, effort, time, and an experienced psychotherapist. Time alone often helps: people who learn from their mistakes will improve, but it may take many years.



Finally, the first item in my list of impediments to good relationships: blind spots. Blind spots are dysfunctional patterns of behaviour of which the individual is unaware. They are much like personality problems, but are less pervasive. They often occur only in specific interactions with specific people. For example, a woman may get along very well with her husband, her children, co-workers, etc. but have a difficult time with her elderly widowed mother. Mother frequently accuses daughter of not caring about her, of not loving her, even though daughter visits daily, does all the grocery shopping, brings over several cooked meals weekly, and drives mother to all her doctor appointments. Daughter is unable to recognise that her mother is pushing her guilt button, and that she is being psychologically abused, but when she feels near the end of her rope, what with two children at home and a husband to look after, as well as a job, she does on occasion get a little nettled and speaks sharply to mother. Mother, of course, uses this tiny bit of anger as further evidence that daughter doesn't love her or care about her. Do you recognise in this scenario the vicious circle of guilt and anger, all over again? Pervasive, isn't it?

So, what to do about possible blind spots? First, ♣ accept that you, like everyone else, has one or more blind spots. Second, ♣ enlist the help of a caring individual such as a close friend, to help you identify them. Write out and sign a written promise that you will not express your anger at them ♣. Have them tell you in a constructive way what they see as the repetitive behaviour patterns in your life that cause you grief ♣. They should simply hold up your written promise when you react in disbelief and anger to what they tell you. When you've calmed down ♣, figure out what you can do or say differently in the situation that triggers your counterproductive response. Practise ♣ the new behaviour in front of a mirror, and in role-playing with your helper. Then try it out ♣ with the real-life individual.



I mentioned psychotherapy when talking about personality problems, and I spoke about a very specific self-help technique for dealing with blind spots. Of course, there are many other self-help approaches. For example, companies such as CareerTrack offer seminars aimed primarily at businesspeople, on subjects such as getting along with difficult co-workers, being an effective negotiator, and so on. The same company, along with many worthy competitors, offer the same types of programmes on video or audiocassette for individual use. Then there are self-help groups, ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to the sessions for caregivers of Alzheimer patients offered at your local CLSC.

How do you decide ♣ whether to go for self-help strategies or get psychotherapy? Well, it's a little bit like car maintenance. Many people like the do-it-yourself approach for routine maintenance and minor repairs. But there's an investment in time, energy, and tools, including learning. Even the most ardent do-it-yourselfers, however, will go to the mechanic when there's a major breakdown and they need the vehicle.

Then there are people who feel that life is too short to make everything a do-it-yourself project, and they will take even minor problems to the expert.

Which type are you? If you have difficulty deciding, ♣ read the book by Robert Pirsig titled "Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance".

What I'd like to do now is cover some specific techniques for achieving the four determinants of happiness. I'm willing to bet good money that all of you already know these techniques. And to

Sufficient money

He who pays the piper ... calls the tune

Beggars can' t be ... choosers

A fool and his money ... are soon parted

The early bird ... catches the worm

Nothing ventured, ... nothing gained

First, techniques to help ensure that you have sufficient funds. Tell me how this sentence should end: he who pays the piper ... ♣ calls the tune.



Perceived good health

God helps those ... that help themselves

An apple a day ... keeps the doctor away

Eat to live, but ... do not live to eat

Hope for the best ... and prepare for the worst

**Early to bed, early to rise, ... makes a man healthy,
wealthy, and wise**

**Six hours sleep for a man,
seven for a woman, ... and eight for a fool**

Let's try the same exercise to test your knowledge of how to have perceived good health. Complete the phrase: God helps those ...



A project or passion

What is worth doing ... is worth doing well

All work and no play ... makes Jack a dull boy

Make hay ... while the sun shines

A stitch in time ... saves nine

Too many cooks ... spoil the broth

Now, how about keeping active in your life, having a vocation or avocation that gets you up in the morning?

How does this proverb end: What is worth doing ...



Good relationships

**People who live in glass
houses ...shouldn' t throw stones**

Actions speak louder ...than words

Birds of a feather ...flock together

The proof of the pudding ...is in the eating

Forgive ...and forget

To thine own self ...be true

And now, what do you already know about forming and maintaining good relationships?

Try this one: People who live in glass houses ...



The Golden Rules

Do unto others ...as you would have them do unto you

**Whatsoever a
man soweth ...that shall he also reap**

And finally, the Golden Rules. I suspect that they're both found somewhere in the bible.

Do unto others ...

See, I told you you already know everything you need! But seriously, proverbs are helpful as catchphrases, but they're a little weak when it comes to details.

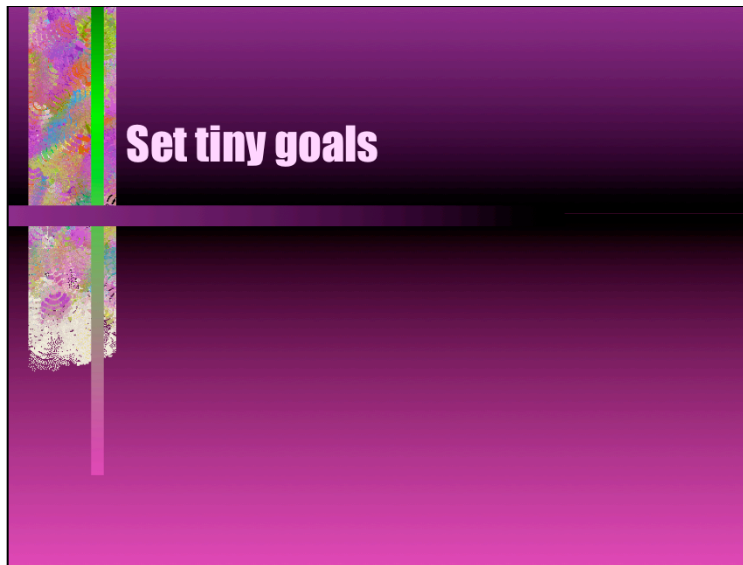
So, if there's any time left, we can look at a couple of specific techniques.



Some strategies

Ask others for help

When you're sick or otherwise troubled, you have a responsibility ♣ to ask others for help. It's your job. Why? Because it gives them the opportunity to feel good about themselves. It's your obligation to your family and to the community that you are a part of. Take it seriously. It's also your task to tailor your request to their capacities and degree of motivation.



Ever been faced with a difficult task and failed? For example, stopping smoking. I can tell you all about stopping smoking: I'm an expert; I've done it dozens of times!

There's a principle here about setting goals in general; I'll use smoking as an example to illustrate the point. Nicotine, as you know, is probably the most addictive substance known to man, so kicking the habit is very, very difficult for most people. Many individuals tell themselves one day, that's it, that was my last cigarette, I will never smoke for the rest of my life. And for a short while, they feel good about their resolution.

Think about the implications, though. When will this person find out whether he's been successful in sticking to his resolution? Not until he actually dies! He will know right away when he fails, but he will not taste the sweet taste of success for a long, long time, if ever. He might be comatose when he dies, and never realise his success!

Try this instead: instead of not smoking for the rest of your life, set yourself the goal of not smoking for the next minute. Think you can do that? And when the minute's up, you can congratulate yourself on your success. That was easy! Let's go for another minute! And when one minute at a time becomes too easy, stretch it to two minutes, and so on.

Instead of never being successful, you will enjoy success in meeting your goals many times a day. And nothing succeeds like success!

It's like a big salami sausage. Much too big to eat! But once it's sliced, each slice looks easy enough...

The principle is: ♣ break the overall task into tiny little goals, so



I talked earlier about hidden anger, how it might come about, and about how it might manifest as passive-aggressive behaviour. Another way in which people express hidden anger is through crying.

Now, there are several different kinds of tears. There are tears of sadness, tears of anger, tears of joy, crocodile tears; maybe more. How can you tell if someone is crying tears of anger and not tears of sadness?

Imagine that it's a kid crying. Those of you who are parents will have no difficulty with this. If the kid is sad, their best friend has just moved to Vancouver, what is your gut reaction to their tears? Right, you want to put your arms around them, hug them, comfort them.

What if the child is crying angry tears, having a tantrum? You've just said "no ice cream before dinner!" What is your gut reaction? Yeah, you just want them to go into another room!

Your instinct is usually pretty accurate, so ♣ pay attention to how you feel, when someone is crying. Unfortunately, some people, for example those who were abused as children, do not have normal gut reactions to a child's crying. Any tears make these people angry. This seems to be one of the factors which causes abused children to become abusers themselves with their own kids.

You need your gut instincts to be aware of others' hidden anger, as well as your own. Recognition is the first step to dealing with it, for example, to break out of the vicious circle of anger and guilt.



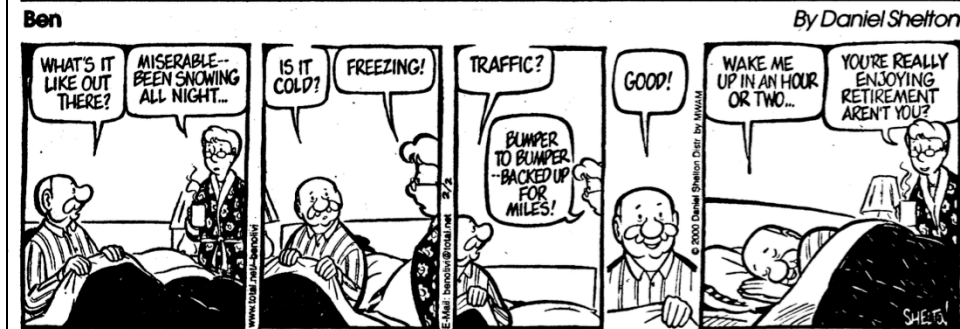
This next one is something I learned from a CareerTrack audiocassette program. The speaker told a story about this golf foursome; they were good friends, played together regularly. One was teeing off; his friends were off to the side, waiting their turn. The man at the tee swung and sliced his ball way off into the woods. Well, he started jumping up and down, yelling at one of his friends: "It's all your fault! You were talking - you distracted me!" Now his friend could have responded in any number of ways. He could have said, "You're crazy!" He could have said, "Cool it - you got up on the wrong side of bed this morning". If the golfer had been a woman, he might have muttered something about PMS.

Well, he did none of these things. What he did instead was to say, "My friend, I apologise from the bottom of my heart". ♣ What could the angry golfer do? Well, not much, of course. He just sort of muttered to himself, and the game went on.

♣ The apology acts as an appeasement signal. It turns off aggression. Other species have appeasement signals which are highly effective. Humans seem to have lost these somehow, but apologising seems to work.

So if somebody is angry at you, whether it's justified or not, you can get them to stop their angry behaviour towards you by apologising. This works only if the apology comes across as sincere, however.

Retirement



To close, I'd like to share with you a couple of my favourite comic strips. In the mornings, when I'm reading the Gazette, right after the Quote of the Day I immediately turn to the comics.

That's because laughter causes endorphins to be released in the brain. Endorphins are substances like morphine and heroin, except they're perfectly legal. Endorphins take away pain and make you feel good. Besides laughing, there are a couple of other things that stimulate endorphin production: exercising vigorously for at least 30 minutes; singing; and eating hot chili peppers. I do all of 'em.

Even if you don't laugh, at least smile. Smiling can make us feel better in at least two ways: by direct pathways from the facial muscles to the centres of emotion in the brain, and by way of other people, who are likely to smile back at us when we smile at them. So smile a lot!

♣ Here's what Ben has to say about looking after yourself:

Key to long life

Shoe

By Jeff MacNelly



And Shoe's take on living for a long time:

Rising early



And for those who've heard me talk about the benefits of early rising, you'll appreciate this one.

Thank you for being a great audience!