

Chapter 2 Why Angry Behavior?

Why do people explode in anger? There are many reasons, but I think the top three are the following:

- Power and Control
- Refusing to Take Responsibility
- Habit¹

Power and Control

Some people explode with anger because they discover they can control others by doing this. "If you don't do what I want I will make you very uncomfortable by blowing up. Then you will realize that you'd better do what I want or else." It's called manipulation: forcing someone to do what they don't want to do. This of course, is a childish way to act, and it is ultimately self-defeating. You may control someone today with your anger, but tomorrow they won't be around to control.

This, of course, is the woman in the opening example. She had found that she could get her husband to do what she wanted if she blew up. When he refused to be manipulated in this way, she realized she had to find another way to get him to do things: love.

Refusing to Take Responsibility

This is the person who says, "It's not my fault. It's *their* fault. Look what they did!"

The truth is that someone else may well have done something wrong. Your feeling of anger may be their fault. But, your blowing your stack is not their fault. It's yours. You have a choice when you feel angry, to either act rationally or act irrationally.

When an animal is provoked, it has no choice but to do something violent. But, when a

¹Adapted from Potter-Efron, Ron, *An Emergency Guide to Anger Control*, New York: MJF Books, 1994, p. 37. He lists six reasons but I consider here what I see as the top three.

rational being is provoked, he or she has a choice. Either respond rationally or go crazy. Only one of these reactions qualifies as Christian.

So, it would be incorrect to say, “He made me lose my cool.” Not true. He made you angry and you chose to lose your cool. You are responsible for what you do.

Habit

Some people have learned to be angry as children because they were so frustrated with the treatment they received from their parents. Or, perhaps they saw their father or mother go wild whenever they became angry, so they copied them. They have always behaved this way and are not even aware that they have a choice with regard to anger. So, they just keep on going with their angry blowups.

However, we are not stuck with our bad habits. We can overcome them. We start by delaying our response to anger. Then, we learn to analyze our feeling as we will speak of shortly. Next, we exercise self control to process our anger rationally. It is not easy to overcome a bad habit. But, it can be done and it's certainly worth it.

The Two Wolves Inside

One thing is certain: losing one's temper in anger tears apart relationships. An old man once said to his grandson, who was angry over an injustice received from a friend. “Let me tell you a story. I too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do.

“But hate wears you down, and does not hurt your enemy. It is like taking poison and hoping your enemy will die. I have struggled with these feelings many times.” He went on, “It is as if there are two wolves inside me. One is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him, and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way.

“But the other wolf, ah! He is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great.

“Sometimes, it is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit.”

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes and asked, “Which one wins, Grandpa?”

The Grandfather smiled and quietly said, “The one I feed.”²

If you choose to go crazy every time someone crosses you, you will be feeding the angry wolf inside and it will dominate your life. If you choose a different response to your angry feelings, you will begin to live more and more in peace. You will be happier, and so will all your friends and neighbors.

²From www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/TwoWolves-Cherokee.html.