Anger

**What is anger, why do we get angry, and how do we manage anger?
It's not others who make us angry or hurt us; it's the story we carry with us**

By psychiatrist and chief physician at the Psychotherapeutic Clinic, Psychiatric Center Copenhagen,
Sebastian Swane
(Updated 23/08/2024)

Indholdsfortegnelse

What Are Emotions and Why Do We Have Them?

Anger is an emotion. The primary function of emotions is to help us meet our needs by guiding us to make choices that ensure our survival. Feelings of fear or physical pain prompt us to avoid danger and prevent injury. Pleasurable feelings, such as joy or orgasm, encourage us to seek out what is enjoyable, as this promotes the survival of the species. Therefore, we cannot prevent emotions like anger from arising automatically, but we can learn to manage and deal with them in a healthy and appropriate manner.

The oldest layer of the brain, the brainstem, is commonly referred to as the "reptilian brain," though this is misleading since it also shares traits with amphibians and fish. It controls basic functions like breathing, blood pressure, wakefulness, heart rate, etc. These reflexes are autonomic, meaning they operate outside of conscious control.

The next layer of the brain, the enlarged limbic system, has mistakenly been called the "mammalian brain" or the emotional brain. In these regions, the organism's threat responses (amygdala) and states of activity, defense mechanisms, flight and avoidance behaviors, aggression, and instinctive behaviors, as well as learning and memory, are regulated. It also controls body temperature, salt and sugar levels in the body, hunger, sexual arousal, and erection. This, too, occurs autonomously.

The outermost layer, the cerebral cortex or neocortex, is often wrongly described as the "new mammalian brain." However, the different parts have not been added on like building blocks, and you can trace areas that are present in most vertebrates, such as fish and mammals. In the frontal lobe (prefrontal cortex), our conscious thoughts and self-awareness reside. This is where the most significant development has occurred in the evolution from chimpanzees to humans. Despite its name, the neocortex is approximately 50 million years old, while the species Homo only began to develop around 2.5 million years ago.

Can Emotions Be Wrong?

Automatic bodily defense reactions, emotions, and thoughts are processed (formed) in different parts of the brain, and therefore, they can be in sharp contrast to each other and even be in disagreement. This can be illustrated by the example of a phobic person who may fear harmless butterflies (the emotion) while rationally knowing that they are harmless (the thought).

It can be difficult for the "rational brain" to understand that one's feelings or gut instincts can indeed be wrong (that the butterfly is not dangerous). There is always a bodily reaction, an emotion, and a thought behind a conscious action, and one must understand all the components to understand the behavior.

It is primarily the unconscious layers of the brain that control our behavior, despite our frequent perception that our choices are conscious, controlled, and rational. If we interpret a harmless situation as dangerous, we may subsequently react inappropriately to similar situations that are not actually dangerous or problematic. The emotions we typically experience in such cases would be fear, depression, or anger, but the interpretation behind them is incorrect or exaggerated. Since automatic bodily reactions influence and color our emotions and thoughts, we end up acting on them, even though the basis for them is mislearned, misinterpreted, and wrong.

Disorders such as anxiety, compulsions, depression, etc., are almost always based on irrational emotional interpretations, which are largely responsible for the psychological condition. Examples of such emotional interpretations, also called "negative automatic thoughts," include the belief of a person with panic disorder that they will lose control and go insane, or that they will faint, choke, or have a heart attack and die. Depressed individuals often have negative automatic thoughts about being inadequate, failures, and burdens to others, and those with social phobia may believe that others will think poorly of them. Anger, as we will see, is also associated with misconceptions in the form of negative automatic thoughts about oneself and others.

Since we often use feelings as evidence that something is true ("because I can feel it," "because my gut tells me so"), we also act on them as if they were true. But just because an emotion feels right does not mean it is a good proof that what we feel is always true. For example, we wouldn't accept a judge who sent us to prison because they felt we were guilty without any logical evidence. Since bodily reactions and emotions largely govern us, it is difficult to go against strong emotions, and mislearned emotional interpretations therefore hold considerable power over us, even when we can sometimes see that they do not benefit our lives.

Schemas

If, during childhood/adolescence, one did not have all the basic psychological needs met, such as love, security, acceptance, understanding of emotions and needs, empathy, realistic and relevant boundaries, etc., then some scars may form on the mind. These scars are called "schemas" or prejudices, triggers, life traps, as they are reactivated when we, as adults, find ourselves in situations that resemble a past we never learned to handle as children or teenagers. We therefore react more as we did when we were small children, called a child-mode, even though we are adults, when triggered by an underlying schema. The schema feels right but is wrong. Schemas tend to confirm themselves and find evidence that they are true. For example, if, as a child, you were repeatedly misunderstood and not listened to, and you developed a defective/wrong/inferior schema, you will also feel weak, insecure, and not good enough in certain situations as an adult. If, as a child, you were often abandoned or neglected (divorces) or emotionally neglected by parents, you may develop a "fear of loss schema." The schema constantly seeks evidence that it is correct (selective attention) and overlooks facts that disprove it. A mistrust schema can form if parents never kept their promises and you were punished unfairly without understanding. When you become an adult, the schema persists, and you now transfer the mistrust to others, which can ruin friendships and romantic relationships.

There are similarities between schemas and negative automatic thoughts. For example, if, as an adult, you get stuck in an elevator and think that there may not be enough air for you to survive, and therefore you will die. This is, of course, a misinterpretation, as an elevator would not be constructed so that no air can enter if it gets stuck. The next time you are in an elevator, your old misinterpretation (negative automatic thought) will be triggered again: "If the elevator gets stuck, I will die," which you then experience as "fear." This feeling then "falsely proves" that your thought is correct, and you must avoid the elevator. Avoidance behavior increases survival in real danger, but in mislearned anxiety, it maintains the misinterpretation and the negative automatic thought. If you get stuck in the elevator, your anxiety increases further because your avoidance behavior, which normally reduces your anxiety, is now blocked. Negative automatic thoughts can usually be quickly unlearned through cognitive/behavioral therapy.

Schemas are also learned on a false basis but are deeper-rooted fundamental misconceptions about oneself and the world, often formed over a long period during childhood and adolescence because basic needs were not met. This is during a time when the brain is being shaped and developed, and when you reach your early 20s, these

schemas are more or less set in stone, unlike the more situationally triggered negative automatic thoughts, such as "I'm going to choke and die in the elevator." Schemas also often concern self-esteem and issues related to relationships with others. Since schemas are more cemented than negative automatic thoughts, and cannot be unlearned to the same extent, one must learn to manage them.

When we categorize the types of damage in childhood, 18 different schemas can be formed. Here are the most common: "Fear of being abandoned, betrayed, and lost." "The belief that I will not be understood, am alone, and will always be lonely." "Feelings of inferiority, that I am weak, unlovable, defective, wrong, and there is something wrong with my inner self, outer self, or both." "The feeling that I don't belong in a group or society and am an outsider." "Fundamental mistrust and suspicion of others and the world." "The feeling that I am dependent on others and cannot take care of myself." "An excessive fear of illness and/or disasters." "An inner conviction that I will fail in my career." "An excessive need for control, perfectionism, and justice in the form of rigid norms and often a tendency to be hyper-critical of others." "A strong need for recognition and affirmation." "An excessive tendency to worry and possibly pessimism." "The feeling of special status and privileges because one feels better, smarter, or more valuable than others." "Restraint in expressing feelings or any feelings, such as vulnerability, anger, or joy." "A need to punish oneself or others and possibly seek revenge."

Schemas are categorized on a scale from 1 to 6, depending on how strongly the schema influences and dominates one's life and behavior. A schema at level 1 is considered normal, while a level 6 corresponds to the feeling that the schema is 100% true when triggered in specific situations in the present, similar to the negative situations it was formed by in childhood.

Anger can arise from all schemas, but it is particularly triggered if you have strong schemas like special status, punishment, rigid norms and a need for control/perfectionism, and defective/wrong/inferior.

Coping Modes/Behavioral Strategies

When we, as adults, are "reactivated" or "triggered" by an old schema formed in childhood due to unmet needs, we often manage them just as poorly because we didn't learn to process and heal these scars in a healthy, adult manner.

There are three overarching dysfunctional ways or strategies by which schemas are often attempted to be resolved, circumvented, or avoided. These are called dysfunctional coping strategies or coping modes (i.e., ways of managing or coping). The three are:

1. The overly compliant or pleasing mode,
2. The overcompensating, dominating, or aggressive mode, and
3. The shield, which results in excessive safety behavior or inappropriate avoidance behavior.

Here are three examples of three different individuals who developed the same schemas in their upbringing but handle them differently using their respective coping strategies:

1. **The Overly Compliant Coping Mode**

If someone grew up in a family where their basic needs for understanding and empathy were not met but learned that they only received praise and recognition by submitting to their parents' needs and suppressing their own out of fear of being abandoned or unloved, this strategy might continue into adulthood. The schema of "unlovable" or "abandoned/fear of loss" may, for example, be triggered when interacting with others, causing them to fear that, like their parents, these individuals might abandon them unless they please and are overly compliant. When managing the schema in this way, they are in the "overly compliant coping mode." By suppressing their own opinions, feelings, and needs, they are not equal in relationships, leading to an accumulation of inner frustrations and anxiety, which can explode   into   anger.

The Overcompensating Coping Mode

The "overcompensating coping mode" can also develop from the same schemas: "unlovable" or "abandoned/fear of loss." However, in this case, the person learned that the only way to get attention and feel loved was by overachieving, striving for perfection, and maintaining control (conditional love). Some learned that they only received attention if they shouted, dominated, and attacked; otherwise, they were ignored. This overcompensating strategy can, therefore, also continue into adulthood if healthy ways to manage their schemas are not found. When one suppresses and undervalues others' opinions to assert their own and feel seen and heard, they are often dominating, angry, or aggressive.

2. **The Shield Coping Mode**

The last dysfunctional coping strategy is the shield, which can also develop from schemas like "unlovable," "abandoned/fear of loss," or "withholding emotions." If, as a child, one senses that parents do not provide care and love when needs are expressed but instead become irritated or angry, the child easily learns to withdraw from situations that could lead to conflict and "puts up a shield." A variation of the shield is the "angry shield," where one learns to push others away with anger to prevent them from "getting too close" to vulnerable issues that are difficult to discuss (the withholding emotions schema). The price is that the problem remains unresolved, and others are punished with anger, being shut out without being able to explain themselves.

Later in life, the shield can take various forms, such as the "numbing shield" when one abuses substances, alcohol, or sedatives, or a self-stimulating shield if one uses cocaine, etc. When using the shield, anger is often directed inward (self-blame or even self-harm) because one is too afraid to express their needs on an equal footing. Passive-aggressive behavior occurs when one has withheld their needs long enough and becomes so frustrated that the pressure overwhelms the shield, followed by intense shame, which then reestablishes the shield and the passive and restrained coping strategy.

We all use coping strategies to varying degrees, but some tend to dominate more than others. When feeling angry, many will adopt the overcompensating coping mode, scolding others for not acting in line with their own values and punishing them by shouting, dominating, attacking, devaluing, criticizing, using irony, giving orders, belittling, or slamming doors.

Anger

Many perceive emotions, or certain emotions, as their worst enemies, but emotions ensure our survival and enable us to sense our needs, which significantly distinguishes us from computers or robots. We chase after positive emotions and avoid negative ones. This is one way that nature "controls us," and we become slaves to our bodily reactions, emotions, and needs, even though we often believe that our behavior stems from rational considerations. It is very difficult to go against an emotion, such as fear or anger, but if we are given tools to manage anger in a new way, and this gradually leads to positive new experiences, it becomes possible to constructively channel anger and truly fulfill the underlying need that drives it.

The goal, therefore, is not to prevent or stop the feeling of anger but to manage it so that the need that triggered the anger is met. We often believe that by reacting to anger, we will have our needs met or find relief, but outbursts of anger are often a false release that prevents our real needs from being expressed in a way that can be heard and addressed. There is a difference between feeling anger and reacting with anger. The real feeling behind the anger is often a "wounded inner child." It is this child we must reach. We wouldn't get angry at a small child who is angry with us because we are leaving on a business trip, as we understand that behind the anger is sadness and a feeling of abandonment.

The Cause of Anger Is Not What We Think

The great misunderstanding and cause of much anger is the belief that others are to blame for or are the cause of our feelings, including anger. Others can only trigger our anger, but they are not the cause. It is the story or schema and the coping style we carry with us that causes us to react angrily. When we press a doorbell, we are the trigger that makes it ring, but the cause of the ringing lies with the manufacturer and the prior installation of the bell.

For example, if I tell someone with schemas like defective/wrong or outcast/not belonging that they have a hole in their sweater, and the person interprets this through these schemas, they might perceive it as criticism, as if I am trying to belittle them and emphasize that they are not good enough and don't belong here. If the person has learned to manage their schema activations with a coping strategy of domination/attack, they might go on the defensive and either verbally or, in the worst case, physically attack me.

If I say the same thing to someone without these schemas, they might respond by saying, "Thank you so much for telling me, that was really kind of you, and it makes me happy

because if you hadn't said anything, the hole could have gotten bigger and ruined my expensive sweater."

This example shows that when two people react so differently to the same statement, I cannot be the cause of one person getting angry and the other being grateful. I am only the trigger.

Even if I speak harshly to someone or unfairly scold them, there will still be different reactions to my behavior, as some will go on the defensive while others might shake their heads with a smile and simply say, "Did you get out of the wrong side of the bed today?"

The way we react depends on our schemas, background stories, and temperament, but the cause lies within us, not in the other person.

The real cause of anger is often that a need has not been met. The emotion arises automatically, and we cannot prevent it, but it is also a valuable emotion that can be used constructively to understand that we need to focus on what need is at stake so that our chances of having it met increase. However, our focus will be derailed as long as we believe that others are the cause of our anger because then we shift the responsibility for our unmet needs onto others and "abdicate responsibility." We also become more out of touch with what our needs are because we instead focus on the anger. The point is not that if the other person has treated us poorly, we shouldn't express our need. On the contrary, the point is that anger is not the need, either for ourselves or the other person. Anger is an emotion, and when we react outwardly with anger, it is the coping strategy of domination/attack.

Example: I once asked someone why he got so angry, and he replied, "Because you placed the plate the wrong way in the dishwasher." I asked again why that made him so angry. After discussing it, he realized that the anger wasn't about me but about his underlying need for control, and when things weren't done exactly his way, he felt discomfort and irritation. He had an "inflexible norms and hypercritical schema." The schema gave him a sense of security because if he had control over everything and everyone else, then everything, the world, and his life would be in order. This, of course, is not possible, and as a result, he constantly had conflicts with his partner and others because when something wasn't perfect or done his way, it triggered feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. This led to him becoming even more overcompensating, and the coping mode of domination/attack became the way he tried to control others to conform to his schema. He could then abdicate responsibility for the discomfort by blaming others, in this case, me, with "righteous indignation." With this distancing behavior, disconnected from the need, we feel justified in condemning others for what we are not getting, playing the role of judge by condemning and feeling entitled to act out in anger and punish others.

The reason for punishment is to make people suffer for what they have done and, through that suffering, regret and change. The likelihood of the other person wanting to change, especially when it's delivered with anger, is minimal. In this way, we block the other person from understanding our needs, and we often trigger the other person to become angry with us, which then prevents both from being in touch with the needs behind the anger. When this escalates, we risk even greater distance in communication, violence, and hostility. It's always good to understand or ask ourselves what we can do to make the other person want

to meet our needs. It is unlikely to be through anger or punishment, and it requires that we also learn to see the need from the other person's perspective. Anger toward others cuts us off from this.

Since emotions cannot be prevented from arising, as they have an important function related to needs and survival, it's not about avoiding anger or suppressing it. Instead, we should use anger as an emotional guide to become aware that there is an unmet need that we need to connect with, which fundamentally involves understanding and being understood. My previous coping strategy should therefore shift from getting angry at others to expressing my unmet needs and feelings in a non-critical, non-judgmental, and non-blaming way while being aware that my feelings are not caused by what others do or say. Our message also gets lost if we make demands or issue orders. It's not that "I'm angry because you…", but rather "I'm angry because I need…".

Statements like "You make me angry" or "I feel like you're provoking me" suggest that we believe our emotions are caused by what others do in the situation, but in reality, our emotions are automatic and react based on the past that has shaped our personality combined with our innate temperament. Moreover, the statement "I feel like you're provoking me" is not actually a feeling but a disguised thought, pretending to be an emotion. Again, the other person is only triggering the story I carry with me, but they are not the cause. "I feel that…" rarely conveys what we are actually feeling, but rather how we interpret the other person. This interpretation is often judgmental and gives us the self-confirming feeling that our anger is justified, but in reality, it prevents us from understanding what lay behind the other person's statements or actions and what the real cause of our emotion and anger is.

If I suppress anger, or punish and blame others with anger, or even become angry at myself, I fail to distinguish between judgments and observations, and instead, I become preoccupied with what is wrong with others or myself. This alienates us from the needs of others and our own needs.

When we judge, belittle, label, compare, or give orders, we create resistance and distance from the needs and let others understand that we have the sole right to evaluate the situation and therefore the right to declare that if they do not act according to our values, then something is wrong with them. When others do not behave in a way that aligns with our values, we moralize and let others know that our opinion is the correct one, and if they do not change, we feel justified in judging and scolding them.

Anger is disconnected from needs and is therefore the false release because the energy is focused on punishment, revenge, and acting out. Anger and violence arise because we mistakenly assume that others are responsible for what we feel, and therefore, they deserve our anger.

Anger Toward Ourselves

When we criticize, blame, punish, or get angry with ourselves, it does not help us understand our needs. On the contrary, the inner demanding or punitive voice, also known as the "critical

modes," is the reason we fail to connect with our needs and, therefore, do not feel better. For instance, someone might have an inner "critical mode" that, in certain situations, triggers thoughts like: "You are a failure, fat, and ugly" or "Others will surely think you are weak and insecure." When one is captured by this inner "voice" directed against oneself, it can eventually lead to stress, anxiety, depression, or even substance abuse. These inner critical modes echo messages from childhood and adolescence schemas that we mistakenly learned to believe. They were not helpful then, and they are not helpful now. It is, therefore, important to understand which schemas underlie these self-punishing and self-blaming critical modes, as this reveals that the issue is not with oneself but with the schemas we have unwittingly inherited.

Anger and punishment toward ourselves are triggered when we do not act in accordance with our own needs. Irritation and anger are also triggered when we condemn others for not acting in line with our needs. Self-hatred and self-punishment prevent us from learning from our mistakes, which reveal our limitations and are thus the only opportunity to understand ourselves and grow. If we are not allowed to make mistakes, we cannot learn anything new. If we are also punished for them, we lose touch with our needs and growth. Feelings of shame arise when we are angry with ourselves for crossing our own boundaries, and guilt arises when we have crossed others'. Self-blame and criticism thus generate negative emotions, which, when used correctly, can guide us to change our behavior toward greater self-understanding.

How Can One Express Anger So That Needs Are Met?

To use anger constructively, the first step is not to react by blaming others or oneself, but to try to take a "time out" and become aware of what the actual need is. Then, express the need and one's feelings without criticizing, demanding, or judging. This requires a lot of practice. As one begins to master this art and experiences that one's needs have a much greater chance of being heard, understood, and fulfilled in this way, one will gradually find that the anger is released and reduced. Anger then becomes an emotion that we can learn to understand as a signal that an unmet need exists. We now have an opportunity to address the need instead of judging, scolding, blaming, and giving orders.

For example, if I feel anger when someone points out that I have a hole in my sweater, and I scold the person for pointing out my flaws and deficiencies, I might be defending my schemas: "inferiority, mistrust/misbelief." This happens because my schema interprets the intent behind the comment based on the story I carry with me, where I might have experienced as a child or young person that criticism was associated with many traumatic experiences. My anger today is easily an overreaction because I was so often unfairly criticized as a child, triggering more of my past than the present situation. I then handle it by punishing the other person in the moment with anger for everything I have experienced earlier in my life. However, I am rarely aware that it is actually my past that causes me to react more strongly in the situation than it warrants. My "overreaction" also prevents my need from being heard, which in this case is to understand the other person's intention behind pointing out the hole in my sweater since I preemptively interpret it negatively based on my "inferiority/defective/wrong schemas." The other person will also not have their need

met, which was to help ensure the sweater didn't get more damaged, but may go on the defensive and also react with anger and counteraccusations. Their response might be, "You're just so mean and nasty when I'm just trying to help." The conflict escalates, and what was originally intended as help becomes distorted and misinterpreted by the schemas we both carry from the past and the coping mode we have learned to handle them with, which in this case is anger directed at the other.

However, if I had paused and taken a time out, recognizing that others are not the cause of my anger but only the trigger, and that anger is an expression of schemas from my past being triggered in me, I could practice becoming aware of this in the situation. If I can learn to see that my anger stems from my difficulty with criticism, but that my actual need is to understand the other person's intention with their comment, I can articulate this: "When you say I have a hole in my sweater, I feel a bit uneasy because I need to know why you're telling me this." Since this is descriptive and not accusatory, merely explaining what I feel and need to know and understand, the other person is far less likely to feel attacked or criticized. The likelihood of the other person then expressing their need in a friendly manner is much greater: "I was just worried you hadn't noticed the hole and didn't want you to risk it getting bigger and ruining your sweater."

When I don't judge others based on my schemas and emotional interpretations, and instead use my inner anger as a compass to identify my needs and express them in a non-judgmental but descriptive way, I have a much greater chance of connecting with the other person's true intentions and needs. The conflict is now transformed into a constructive dialogue.

How to Handle Situations When Others Get Angry and Verbally Attack Us

If we take others' anger personally, we focus on what they think of us and fail to understand that anger is not caused by us but by the history (schemas) and coping style that the angry person carries with them. It is therefore liberating to understand that others' rejections do not need to be taken personally, and we do not need to hear what the other person says as an attack but simply as an expression of their feelings and needs. This opens the way for us to listen to what the other person needs rather than what they think of us.

For example, if I gently and non-critically turn down a date and say that I'm flattered by the offer but am looking for something different, my rejection might trigger an angry reaction in someone who takes it personally and has an abandonment/rejection schema: "Fortunately, there are plenty of others who can appreciate me, and you're not my type anyway."

Just as it's not the other person who makes me angry but the history (schemas) I carry with me and the coping style I've learned to handle them with, I can also learn to see that the other person's angry reaction is not about me but the history (schemas) and coping style they have learned to manage them with. From this perspective, the other person's anger is not a personal accusation but their personal history, which I do not need to feel hurt by or responsible for.

Instead, I can learn to listen to what the other person needs rather than being preoccupied with what they think of me, going on the defensive, or reacting with anger myself, even if I feel my own anger being triggered.

The more I show interest in understanding the other person's feelings and needs instead of going on the defensive—and not interpreting it as a personal attack but rather as schemas and coping modes being activated in the other person—the greater the chance I have of entering into a dialogue and achieving understanding.

I can therefore say: "When you say that many others fortunately can appreciate you, I get the sense that you hear my message as a rejection of you as a person? (Here I try to show that I want to understand what's going on with the other person and that my intention was different from how I believe they interpreted my words. I can do this because I do not react to my inner anger or feeling of being offended since I am practicing not taking it personally and recognizing that the other person's reaction is not about me but how their schemas interpret my statement based on their personal history. This could involve schemas like abandonment, unlovable, not good enough/defective/wrong/inferior.)

The other person: "Yes, that's clear when you don't want to see me."

Me: "You should know that what I'm looking for in a relationship doesn't say anything about you as a person or your worth or appearance. It's just that what I need and am looking for is something different. But I get the impression that you feel as though I'm saying you're not good enough for me or that something is wrong with you. Is that correct?" (I continue to show interest in understanding the other person's needs and feelings.)

The other person: "Yes, maybe a little."

Me: "Can you understand when I say that it's not about you but rather my needs, and you therefore don't need to take it personally?"

The other person: "Yes, when you put it that way."

After showing interest in understanding the other person, I now have a much greater chance that they will also hear what I'm saying and listen to my needs. I can therefore now also address how they spoke to me earlier, but still without criticizing or blaming, just describing and then expressing what I feel, what my need is, and how I would like it to be met.

Me: "When you say that I don't appreciate you and that I'm not your type, it makes me sad but also angry because I need to be respected for my needs, and I also need us to be able to talk to each other on an equal footing in a respectful tone since I'm not rejecting you because you're not good enough. Can you see where I'm coming from?"

The other person: "Yes, I'm sorry, I guess I overreacted a bit."

If someone reacts with anger to rejection or criticism, and we respond to the anger, we miss the need behind the other person's reaction and also forget our own needs. Anger creates distance, and when directed inward, it can lead to self-hatred (critical and punitive modes),

and when directed outward, it can lead to violence and harm (domination/attack coping mode).

Of course, it's not always possible to achieve understanding or have our needs met, and in these cases, it's important to maintain the "healthy adult platform" in communication and continue not taking it personally or reacting with anger. If the other person is too upset, you can hope to address it at another time when emotions have calmed down. If this doesn't work, it's helpful to understand that you are not the cause but the trigger, and that you've done what you could to understand the needs behind it. You can still look yourself in the mirror.

A story about Buddha can illuminate the above:

A young man was displeased with the influx of visitors to his village, believing they were only there to take advantage of the locals. Seeing Buddha, who had stopped under the shade of a tree to teach, the young man shouted angrily, "Go away! You're just here to exploit us by saying a few pretty words and then begging for food and money."

Buddha remained completely calm despite the insults, displaying loving kindness. He asked, "Young man, if you had acquired a lovely gift for someone, but the person refused to accept it, to whom would the gift then belong?"

The young man was somewhat surprised by Buddha's reaction and replied, "I suppose the gift would still be mine since I was the one who bought it."

"Exactly," Buddha responded. "You have just cursed me and been angry with me, but if I do not accept your curses, and I do not become offended or angry, then those curses will fall back on you, just like the gift remains with the giver."

The young man realized that he had received a valuable lesson and bowed before Buddha.

Buddha concluded, "A mirror reflects an object, just as a lake mirrors the sky: Be mindful, for what you say or do lasts forever. Kindness will always reflect kindness back, and anger will always reflect anger back."

Sebastian Swane 23/08/2024