
Is Anger Ever Okay?

Thoughts of the Month: November 2007

After a while, as people are grasping the Imago concepts of relationship and connection, the question often comes up, "What about anger?" It's as though people feel that if they really get it, if they are really moving toward a conscious relationship, then they shouldn't feel angry anymore, or that their partner shouldn't feel angry anymore.

Indeed, Harville Hendrix himself is currently saying that the expression of anger is not constructive in intimate relationships. He told us last week that the new edition of *Getting the Love You Want* has all the exercises expressing anger removed (or exorcised, if you will.) "End all negativity" is his new mantra.

Here's what I want to say about anger...

It is true that just venting anger only leads to more anger. (Remember when we were supposed to beat on pillows to rid ourselves of rage and anger? It didn't work!) It is also profoundly true that anger is a secondary emotion, a symptom of a deeper hurt or fear. Now I'm sure you remember last month's "Thought..." about the most important question of all which is...which is...okay...I'll tell you again. It's "What am I afraid of?"

Hey, guess what?! This month I even have the answer to "What am I afraid of?"

For most women it is, "I'm afraid our relationship is going to hell!" (or to pot or wherever relationships go when they are ruptured.) For most men it is, "I'm afraid that once again I'm going to be shown to be inadequate...a lousy husband...a failure!"

Women tend to express their fear/anger with criticism while men tend to express their shame/anger with lashing out or hiding. (Now, we've polled our many lesbian and gay couples and it seems like their experience is similar...one partner comes with fear of disconnection and the other comes with shame of inadequacy.)

But what does this have to do with anger? And is anger okay? Just answer the question, David!

Of course, anger is okay! It is real. It is natural, even if it is a symptom.

Anger is like fog...it may be undesirable; it may cause difficulties; it may be all too common in some places (it may keep us from seeing the city of Vienna for six expensive days and nights during the Imago conference last week even though everyone said, "You'll love Vienna...it's such a beautiful place!"). But to say it is not okay is to deny something about the real world in which we live.

Also, anger has a useful purpose in terms of protest. And, you might ask, "Protest of what?" Anger is an emotion in protest of the rupture of connection which creates fear in all of us...apartheid, for instance...or women's rights...anyone's rights...a baby screaming on an airplane. Do we muzzle them or is their anger (their protest) okay even if it makes us uncomfortable or scares us? We deal with it.

"Be angry, but do not sin" is a rather abstruse verse of sacred wisdom that probably means, "Of course, you're going to be angry. Dummy, but you don't have to stink up the relationship because of your secondary and symptomatic reactivity to some small thing that triggered your reptilian childhood response!" (I'm sure that's what Paul would have said if he had known Imago language!)

In other words, be yourself with all the feelings that arise, use the tools, and always honor the space between you. I, personally, am a good ways from ending all negative thoughts and feelings in myself. (Give a hailstorm a break!) But I am getting closer and closer to maintaining positive and abundant thoughts and behaviors at all times in our relationship space. Hooray! (This is Donna... and he really is!!!!)

Please share your thoughts about all this with us and let us know what things you would like us to consider in future "Thoughts for the Month".

Hope you have a wonderful, relaxed, and connected Thanksgiving...a conscious time for practicing abundant thinking!

With great encouragement and hope,
David and Donna

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