



**ANGER IS THE OUTWARD SIGN OF
SOMETHING DEEPER.**

ANGER

The outward sign.

What's underneath the anger?

HURT

The intense pain.

When we, or someone we love are suffering.

FEAR

Of the unknown

"I am so scared. What does this mean to me now and what impact will it have on my future?" "Where will I go, how will I get there and who will help me?"

**GUILT /
REMORSE**

Feeling responsible

For things we FEEL we should have done, could have done, or the things we DID do.

**DESIRE /
NOSTALGIA**

I want my world to be the same

"I want to know my world will go back to the way it was before this all happened." (This is very common)

**NEED TO GIVE
OR RECEIVE
FORGIVENESS**

The real need to forgive those who have died and left them alone. Also the need to forgive oneself for all the "if onlys" and "should haves".

This chart does not mean that we move from one area to the next until we reach forgiveness. It simply means that there are several layers and reasons for anger and that we may experience one or more of them at a time. Once we acknowledge the feeling or feelings that provoke the anger, the anger will dissipate and disappear. It may come back again, but each time it does, we can more easily understand where it comes from and how to deal with it more effectively.



FAMILY DYNAMICS: HANDLING THE ANGER

Nursing home residents may deny it, hide it, swallow it, or openly express it, but anger is present in displacement. They may not know it, they may not show it, they may disguise it, but anger will be there. Dealing with the anger will be the toughest part of the adjustment to their new home.

When I say anger, I do not mean temper fits. We tend to identify temper and anger as the same emotional expression. Anger in the sense used here means hurt, frustration, rejection or disappointment.

In a very real sense, the problem with anger will not be expressing too much of it. The problem will be the presence of the anger with no way to express the feelings it causes. Very few people will have the freedom to simply say, "I am mad". A large number will not even realize they are mad. They will be aware of being unhappy or feeling depressed, but they will not connect these feelings to anger.

Those who move to nursing homes who do recognize their anger will probably not know what they are angry about. It is often difficult to identify the anger we feel. If the anger is identified, it is often difficult to find proper ways to express it. If people try to do so, someone will tell them how wrong they are to feel as they do.

In a setting where there can be no expression, the anger must be swallowed. Swallowed anger will either come out in some other way or it will make the person sick. Depression is usually the result of swallowed anger. When we swallow feelings long enough, we begin to go through periods of feeling blue or down. When these periods are ignored, we then experience a shutting off all feelings. The mind protects itself from going crazy through this process. Depressed people seem to have no emotions left about anything. They seem to lose their ability to care. Emotionally detached probably best describes people suffering from depression caused by swallowed anger.

Anger, which is not swallowed, will focus somewhere. Often it focuses on an area separate from the real cause of the anger. A nursing home resident may feel angry over the loss of home and friends. If anything is said, the children will feel bad, so nothing is said. The anger then looks for other outlets. It may focus on the nursing home, on a roommate, or the food, or the birds singing outside the window.

It does not have to make sense. Anger is often irrational. Most of the time it will focus on something safe. By safe I mean something that can be complained about without confronting anyone. Many patients find it too painful and risky to tell their children they're mad at them, so



they complain to the children about the bad food or how the nurses don't care. The anger is expressed, and no one is confronted.

The focus of anger will change. Often people will have several areas of focus. When they talk to the nurses, they complain about the family. When they talk to the family, they complain about the nurses. If one problem is solved, they find another.

When we discover this behavior, it should be evident that the complaint is a mask hiding the real issue. The issue is anger. What do we do with it?

ANGER MUST BE DISCOVERED AND ALLOWED

The first thing to do in handling another person's anger is to unmask it. People may not know they are angry. They may know it and deny it. They may have been taught all their lives that anger is wrong and bad.

The second thing is to recognize the anger is not wrong. Anger is a natural emotion, which needs a natural outlet. Our society has reacted to anger with such horror that it is hard to handle it with any sense of normalcy. People get angry, and they should. When they are angry, they should say so. They should say so without getting a lecture on the evils of anger.

In the case of the nursing home decision anger is the best discovered by someone gently drawing out and helping people involved define their feelings. The gentle drawing out is done through conversation and gradually confronting the real issue. We must be careful not to pick up on their arguments and go chasing after their conversational hooks. They will throw hooks out for us to grab. If we grab one, the conversation is gone. Our side of the conversation will progress something like:

"You seem to be unhappy here. What do you think caused your unhappiness?" (No matter what the reasons are, we do not bite.)

"I am sure all of this is so, but how does it make you feel?" (Again, no hooks.)

"But how do you feel inside?"

"Do you feel angry?"

"What about moving here makes you angry?"

It sounds like a broken record repeating the same statement over and over. No matter what is said, we come back to feelings. Don't expect one conversation to accomplish very much. It will be a gradual process over several conversations. The goal is to help them discover what their real feelings are, to express the, and to have them be accepted.

--From *When Love Gets Tough*, by Doug Manning