How to Express Yourself and How to Communicate Your Anger

Review lesson two: Noticing your feelings allow you to express your anger, irritation, or frustration before the feelings become explosive. If you ignore your feelings they do not just disappear. Someone else cannot make you feel a certain way. He/she can know the things that trigger feelings for you, but in the end, you are the one to allow the feelings. Your happiness or anger is not dependent on another person. Domestic violence occurs when anger is expressed in a violent manner. Violence can be more than physical assault. It can include yelling, calling names, and throwing things. The way you express your anger was learned while you were growing up, and you are now modeling how to express anger to another generation.

Once we begin to notice our anger, irritation, or frustration, we can express it early. Just a word, statement, or even a breath can dissipate the feelings and allow you to remain cool and keep your power. If you go off on someone, then you are losing your power. Each time you notice a feeling of anger, frustration, or annoyance, express yourself out loud in some way. You can simply sigh, scream in your car, or use your words, “I hate this.”
Some sound must come from you to dissipate the negative energy.

In the work place, you could use the restroom to express. You can give yourself a personal expression “code” that will tell your body you are letting off “steam.” This could be a word, sigh, or just a certain kind of breath. Be creative and learn to let it out instead of “stuffing” it in.

Scientists formerly believed that ventilation of anger would help it to be reduce or dissipate the anger. New research shows that for many people, ventilation of anger can increase the level of anger. You rehearse and review the situation and refresh the anger for yourself. Every situation that precipitated anger presents you with a choice. You can blame others for what happened, or you can use coping skills to reduce your anger and assert your needs in a healthy, non-blaming way. Again, voicing that you're upset early instead of letting it brew inside will facilitate expressing assertively. This can leave us with a dilemma: do we vent or stuff? Actually, neither is beneficial to your health and well-being. Talking over a difficult or upsetting situation with friend or spouse will help if you include your part of the dance. Talk about your responses and feelings. Venting just to feel the anger again will only increase your ability to get uncomfortably angry and upset the next time.

Using your words in an appropriate manner takes more power and concentration than just exploding, so keep your power. This class will give you more tools to stay cool and keep your power.
Changing a behavior is not easy. We have communicated in a certain way since birth. Changing that method of behavior takes concentration and time. The change could mean we become more effective in letting others know our needs and feelings.

Adopting a new way of communication can be tedious. It is as though you went to the dentist and the dentist told you that the way you have brushed your teeth for years was all wrong. The dentist told you, “Don’t brush up and down, brush down, down, on the top and up, up, on the bottom.” Changing that method would force you to slow down and concentrate. At first, the new behavior seems strange and difficult. After, you practice for a while, the new method becomes increasingly familiar. Soon it becomes as automatic as the old way. Think of a time you learned a new dance or learned to ride a bike for the first time. It took attention, concentration, and slowing down until it became automatic. It will be the same with changing your way of communication and expressing your anger. You must slow down and pay attention.

We may have learned behaviors in childhood that helped us to survive the particularly difficult childhood. We can acknowledge the behaviors worked for us in childhood but are now hindering relationship success.

If we learn to communicate in an effective way, then any issue can be resolved. This does not necessarily mean the resolution will feel positive. For instance, if we resolve an issue with our spouse, we may discover we are not happy with the relationship and must move on. When we are
upset, if we communicate assertively and effectively, we are more likely to be content with the outcome.

If the communication is effective, the chance of working through issues and making things work is much higher. Sometimes couples come to see me, and they have been having routine disagreements and arguments. Once they slow down and listen, they begin to realize they are on the same page. They learn the concept of “different” -not "right" and "wrong."

If you have to be “right” and someone else has to be “wrong,” then you are setting yourself up for failure. Think about agreeing to disagree. Think about allowing the other person a difference. Think about slowing down and really listening to the other person’s words and feelings. The formula for communication in this chapter will help you with that new behavior. Communication is the key to informing others of our feelings and needs.

We communicate in many ways. Our body language and our walk can communicate who we are, how we are feeling, and our state of health. Our eyes communicate feelings and opinions, and even our sighs or groans communicate. The way we touch or do not touch tells others about us. Our words are not the only communication tools we use. If someone is angry, it is likely to show on his/her face and how he/she sits or stands. We can communicate our feelings without words. However, using our words help to resolve things for ourselves. Using our words can dissipate the angry feelings
early before we feel out of control or before we get ourselves into trouble by giving a negative response.

This lesson will teach you to use your words so you can communicate in a way others can hear and in a way you will also feel heard. You will learn to communicate in an assertive way that gets your needs and wishes heard. Perhaps these needs and wishes will be met in a healthy way that will enhance your relationship and bring you closer to your partner. Remember, you may agree to disagree, and there does not have to be a wrong. There can be a right and a right. You can experience the same event as another person and have a totally different memory of the event. One reality is not right and the other wrong; they are just different.

**Communication can be aggressive, passive, assertive or passive-aggressive.**

Here is an example of the different communication patterns:

You are sitting at dinner and want the salt.

**Aggressive Communication example:** Aggressive communication style means you are trying to get your needs met through force-verbal, emotional, or physical. Here is what your statement will sound like (bossy and loud):

“CAN’T ANY OF YOU STUPID PEOPLE PASS THE SALT!?!?”
Aggressive styles of communication can feel violent. Yelling, swearing, and calling names is a form of violence. When you express your anger in an aggressive way, you are being violent. You may get your way, but you are losing your power and perhaps the respect of the other person.

**Passive Communication example:** When you communicate in a passive manner, you may not make a statement. You may only hint at what you need. You sit quietly, wishing someone would pass the salt.

**Assertive Communication example:** When you communicate assertively, you increase the chance of getting your needs met without hurting anyone else or using force. This is what an assertive statement would sound like: "Would someone please pass me the salt?"

**An example of Passive-Aggressive style:** Your boss asks you to file some things, and filing is not your job. You are irritated and file them all wrong. Passive-aggressive behavior is an unhealthy form of communication because it utilizes victim thinking and is not a proactive action toward achieving your needs. If you are expressing your anger in a violent manner, your partner may be intimidated into a victim stance. You then feel powerful, but in reality, it is easier to go off on someone than to keep your power and use your words in an assertive manner.

Some people have the talent of mind reading, but most of us are not able to read another’s mind. So, even though someone loves you so much, he/she probably still cannot read your mind. Passive style of communication relies on
the wish our mind can be read and our needs magically met.

It is your responsibility to ask for your own needs. This is assertive communication, and it is also the healthy form of communication. Assertive communication gets us what we need or want without hurting anyone. It expresses your anger in a way that will be most likely be heard. It will gain you respect and power.

**LIFE FILTERS**

We listen and talk through our “life filters.” Life filters are ways we learn to speak, listen, express anger, and use other communication methods.

Here is a little story to help you understand “life filters”: John grew up in Sweden. When he graduated from college, he moved to New York City to work. He was there about six months before he became extremely home sick. One morning he was riding the subway to work when a blond woman got on the same car. He was struck with the beauty of her blondness, and it increased his home sickness. Oh, he did miss Sweden and all the Swedish blonds.

As they stepped off the car, they were next to each other, and John turned to Kate and said, “You have beautiful hair.” Now Kate grew up in the Broncs, and when someone mentioned her hair, it was to indicate they thought she was an “air head blond person.”

Kate could have given John a wicked eye and stomped off to work telling her co-workers about the “jerk” on the
subway. Then John would have really wanted to go home. He could have talked to his co-workers about the rude woman he had complemented on the way to work. But this is my story, so here is how it goes. Kate turns to John and says (this is reflective listening—a clue for you later), “What, you think I am an airhead?” John was a little shocked and said, “No, I think your hair is beautiful, and it makes me lonely for my home, Sweden.”

Well, Kate and John had lunch, got married, and lived happily ever after. Yea! You and I both know there is much between lunch and happily ever after. Reflective listening helps us clarify, for ourselves and the speaker, that the statement made was heard the way the speaker intended.

The next section will give you a format for basic communication. This format is very simple, but yet it is hard. It is a simple formula to express yourself. But remember, you have been expressing your anger in the same way since you were born. Learning a new way to communicate your feelings and needs is like learning a new dance or how to brush your teeth in a totally different way. It takes attention, practice, and hanging in there until you have it, and it becomes automatic, like dancing, or riding a bike, or learning a new computer program.

This format will help you to talk to someone else without your finger wagging at him or her. He/she will not feel intimidated and stop listening. It will help you identify your feelings when certain events occur. It will help you clearly identify your needs and wishes. So, it is more for you than for the listener. The second part of the format
will teach “reflective listening.” This will slow you down so you are actually listening to the speaker instead of thinking of what you will say next. It will then tell the speaker if you have heard the statement they way it was intended to be heard.

**Example:**

You say-“Could you help me with the yard this weekend?” The listener hears- “You never do anything!”

Reflective listening means the other person will say, “What I hear you say is I am lazy.” And you will clarify, “No, I just wanted to be sure we were both available for yard work this weekend.”

Our life filters can help or hinder our communication, both speaking and hearing. Just as the example with John and Kate, we may hear something totally different than the speaker intended. The speaker is not wrong, and he/she did not say it wrong. The listener is not wrong, and he/she did not hear it wrong. Both are speaking and listening through their life experiences.

Next, you will find the Communication Guide. This tool is an excellent tool to talk to anyone: your kids, your boss, your mother, your father, sister, and/or your friends.

**Communication Guide**

First person-person “A”:

When________________________________________________________ (this happens),
I feel _____________________________
(emotional feeling) (See included “feelings cheat sheet.”)
because ________________________________,
and I want ________________________________.

(Keep it short and to the point. This identifies what feeling comes up when something happens, why they come up, and your needs in response to the action.)

Second person-Person “B”:

What I hear you say is ________________________________.

(This is “reflective listening.” You state back the jist of what you heard or the emotion you heard. Keep it short.
Then, if that is not what the speaker meant for you to hear, Person A will say “No,” and repeat the statement, trying to change it in a way that his/her meaning can be heard better.

We talk and listen through our life filters. What one person says and intends to be heard may be totally different than the receiver hears. So the reflective listening confirms if the message was heard in the way the speaker intended.

Find someone who will practice this tool with you. For at least ten minutes each day, practice the communication tool. Each person taking turns being Person A and being Person B. Keep the statements about you and your feelings, not about the other person’s shortcomings. Maintain clarity in all the sections of this exercise.
The “I feel” part must be an emotion, not a physical feeling or a “think.” Use your feelings cheat sheet (included in this lesson) and take your time. Some people are not in touch with their emotions. Remember, feelings just are— they are not right or wrong. They are not good or bad. Oh yes, they feel good or bad. Feelings are always there. They are sometimes quiet, calm, and not obvious. Sometimes they are like a hurricane. But no matter what, you are always feeling something. If you have trouble getting in touch with your feelings, practice all through the day. Ask yourself every few minutes or on the hour, “What am I feeling now?” Noticing your feelings, especially anger, irritation, and frustration, will help you make the choice to communicate your angry feelings in an assertive manner.

“Because” will help to identify, to you and your listener, why you are feeling this way. Again, keep it short.

“And I want, well tell what you really want instead of the event, or more of the event.

This is how it will sound when it is done correctly; 

When -you come home and start yelling.
I feel- angry
because -I am tired too and we are in this together,
and I want- to know what you need to make your mood different because I want a peaceful evening, too.

This is how it will sound when done “incorrectly”:

When -you come home and start your nasty yelling,
I feel-like throwing up my hands in disgust
because -you are always (“always” and “never” are a clue
this is out of control and not on track) yelling and never take me into consideration, **and I want** -you to stop your loud mouth.

Do you see the difference? The first is about you, your feeling, and what you want. The second is an attack on the other person. Remember, you get what you notice! That is true in any relationship. If you continue to notice only the negative, you will get more of that. If you acknowledge the positive and the behaviors you want to see more, you will get an increase in those behaviors.

Practice makes perfect. You will not use this new communication formula when you get upset or angry if you have not practiced. You will not use it if you are not comfortable with the rhythm, how the words go together, or you are not in touch with your feelings. You will not go into the appropriate format if you have not practiced enough to make the new behavior feel automatic. Old habits of survival or old ways that are more familiar and easy will take over, and your progress will suffer. The old way of expressing your anger will slip out, and you will potentially get yourself into trouble. So, give yourself the gift of change and growth. Give yourself the gift of new beginnings. Give yourself the gift of happiness. Practice expressing in a way others can hear what you need them to hear. Practice expressing in a way that helps you identify what is happening for you. This new way of expressing will work for you in all of your relationships: parenting, employment, friendship, significant other relationships, and even with casual contacts.
Remember, you learned to communicate in your family of origin where you grew up. You learned to express anger, ignore or talk about it, scream or pout, etc. Change will not happen automatically or instantly. You will be catching yourself “doing it again.” Noticing that you are “doing it again” is the first step to change. Noticing your are “doing it now” is the second step. So, when you realize you have done it again, rewrite the story in your mind. Give yourself other options or choices that you “could” have made, not “should,” but “could.” Then, when you catch yourself doing it again, you will already have an idea of how you would like to change your reactions or choices.

Once we begin to notice our anger, irritation, or frustration, we can express it early. Just a word, statement, or even a breath can dissipate the feelings and allow you to remain cool and keep your power. If you go off on someone, you are losing your power. Using your words in an appropriate manner takes more power and concentration than just exploding. Keep your power, stay cool, and be safe.