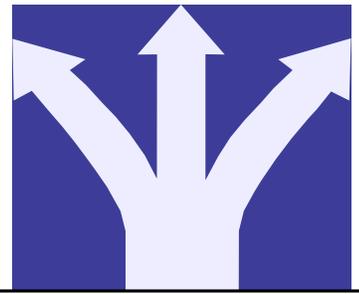


OUTLOOK ASSOCIATES of New England

94 Pleasant Street, Arlington, MA 02476
781-643-5251
www.outlookassociates.com



Volume 7, Number 3

November/December 2007

Entitlement: A Road to Anger

The dynamics of anger involve a complex interaction of biological, psychological, environmental, and cultural influences. One factor in the development of anger is the feeling of entitlement. Entitlement occurs when individuals or groups of people believe they occupy a superior place in the world and deserve special treatment. Their expectation is that other people will believe this about them and will act accordingly. Aggression is often used as a way to assert dominance in situations where this elevated status is questioned. The message communicated by this type of aggression is as follows: “my feelings and beliefs are most important, and your feelings and thoughts are inconsequential or at least not as important as mine.”

A sense of entitlement can play a part in contributing to a person’s anger. Interactions with other people are misinterpreted, beginning the anger process. Other people’s behavior is believed to be inadequate or not deferential enough to the person’s wishes and demands. What might be perfectly reasonable to another person is seen as a challenge to the entitled person’s elevated sense of self. Possible situations include a life partner giving advice during a discussion or a supervisor asking for the rationale behind a decision at work. This type of anger reaction is not based on a realistic defense of self, as in a true fight or flight situation. The perception of threat is - an unrealistic assessment of the situation.

A Theory of Entitlement

Albert Ellis, one of the early founders of cognitive therapy, noted how individuals often experience a false set of beliefs that contribute to greater negativity about situations. He described a couple of “internalized commandments” that can give rise to a sense of entitlement: 1) “People I care about *must* love and admire me completely, at all times, and if they don’t, they’re completely rotten and deserve to be blasted straight to hell or; 2) The world *must* always treat me

well and give me exactly what I want when I want it”. These beliefs can lead to anger and rage as well as low tolerance for life’s inevitable frustrations.

Types of individuals whose feelings of entitlement lead to anger include: 1) persons with narcissistic personality traits, 2) persons with substance use disorders and, 3) individuals who are controlling in their relationships with others. All three have an exaggerated attitude of self-worth along with unstable self-esteem. They are very sensitive to any type of personal feedback or criticism, especially insults. When the person’s status is questioned, aggression is a common response and can have serious, even fatal consequences. This behavior can also occur if other people are perceived as barriers to the achievement of expected status or rewards.

Changing Thoughts/Beliefs

An approach that alters a person’s cognitions is part of any effective anger management plan. Techniques have been developed that allow people to understand the causes of their anger. By examining false beliefs, the “myths” of distorted thinking, people can begin to more realistically perceive interactions and situations. Using self talk to work against these myths is essential. When the thoughts and beliefs underlying feelings are changed, behavior will change as well.

Strategies to manage anger caused by false beliefs of entitlement certainly involve altering negative thought patterns. An approach that can assist individuals is the behavioral analysis called the ABCD model:

- ⇒ “**A**” is the ACTIVATING event, for instance being ignored by a friend in a social situation
- ⇒ “**B**” refers to the BELIEFS and interpretations of the event such as assuming that the friend desired to be hurtful
- ⇒ “**C**” represents the emotional CONSEQUENCES

(Over)

(continued)

Experienced as a result of the beliefs about the event, such as feeling disrespected, hurt, or humiliated.

⇒ “D” means the process of DISPUTING any irrational beliefs and substituting them with more reasonable explanations such as considering that the friend may not have noticed that you were attending the event.

Other Coping Thoughts

In addition, individuals who deal with a sense of entitlement think in terms of “must,” “ought to” and “should.” It would be more helpful if persons could think in terms of “preferences,” “wishes,” and “desires.” So, “She should be more respectful of my needs,” would become, “I would prefer if she had more respect for my needs.” Other examples of coping thoughts to counter entitlement type thing include:

- ◆ “It does not have to be my way-I just prefer it.”
- ◆ “What I want and what I has to be are two different things.”
- ◆ “Nobody appointed me God. So give it up. Be human and focus on your wants.”

With regard to dealing with persons who may become angry because of their sense of entitlement, one can acknowledge the need that the person may have about a particular event and be aware of why they are behaving in a demanding way. It would also be important to be strategic and point out what you will do but then set reasonable limits on the person’s demands. Clearly, if there is some sort of power differential such as between a manager and an employee, the person with less “power” has to be sensitive to the consequences of pushing back at the person who is behaving in an entitled manner.

(This article was done with the research/writing assistance of Alice Miele, LICSW)

FROM OUR FILES:

Self-Inflicted Injuries in Adolescents

Emergency department medical records of adolescents presenting with traumatic injury were screened daily by a designated follow-up nurse for the presence of a precipitating historical event (such as an argument or a fight) in which anger or an uncontrolled temper resulted in self-inflicted injury.

FROM OUR FILES (Continued)

The study was conducted between January and December of 1998 in a suburban, tertiary care, university-based medical center emergency department.. During the study period, 3,370 patients were between the ages of 13-18 years including 1,762 males and 1, 608 females. Of the adolescent encounters , 1,702 (50%) were secondary to traumatic injuries. There were 1,031 injuries in males and 700 injuries in females.

Of all traumatic injuries, 214 (12.4%) were self-inflicted in response to anger resulting from a preceding argument or interpersonal conflict that caused the patients to lose their temper. Loss of temper was a cause of 165 injuries in males (16.0%) and 40 of injuries in females (7.0%). Injuries included 96 contusions, 61 fractures, 55 lacerations and 2 subdural hematomas.

The authors note that actually the estimated proportion of adolescent injuries that are self-inflicted as a result of an inability to control anger may be significantly under-reported and they recommended that greater emphasis should be placed on documenting the etiology and precipitating events leading to injuries.

Journal of Forensic Nursing 2005: 1 (1):20-22.

Workplace Aggression

According to a survey that was cited in the Handbook of Workplace Violence that was published in February 2006 by Sage Publishers, nearly half of American workers are victims of workplace aggression with customers, clients or patients the most likely source of attacks.

The findings were drawn from a comprehensive national survey of workers on the prevalence of U.S. workplace aggression. The survey found that more than 40% of American workers at the time of the survey (about 47 million people) experienced acts of psychological aggression, such as being screamed at, insulted or threatened with physical violence, while at work. Acts of physical violence at work, such as being slapped, kicked or attacked with a weapon were less common, with about 6% of workers-nearly 7 million people-reporting exposure.

Nearly one quarter of respondents indicate that they were victims of aggression from members of the public (customers, clients, or patients), while 15% report being victims of aggression from other employees and 13% experienced aggression from supervisors or bosses.