

UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH ANGER

If you think about the things that make you angry, you'll probably find there are between two and six themes that show up with some frequency. At the root of all the themes is the notion that people are behaving in ways they shouldn't be, and that you have a right to be angry with them.

But what if that weren't true? What if provoking people are doing the only thing they know how to do to take care of themselves and survive? What if they are doing the best they can, given their own needs, fears, pain, and personal history? What if people are behaving based on what they find most rewarding, and their available resources?

The following exercise explores how most annoying and provoking behavior actually represents the other person's best coping solutions, given all they know.

Exercise: People Are Doing the Best They Can

There's a simple way to prove that this is true. Think back to something you did that really angered another person. Now write down how the following influenced your behavior and choices:

1. Your needs at that moment:

2. Your fears at that moment:

3. Your pain or stress at that moment:

4. Any personal history or experiences that influenced your behavior or choices:

5. What you knew or didn't know at the time:

6. Your skills or lack of skills that influenced your choice at the time:

7. Any physical or emotional limitations that influenced you to act as you did:

8. Personal values or beliefs that influenced your behavior:

9. The prospects for rewards or pleasures that influenced your choice at that moment:

10. Resources that you did or didn't have at that moment that could have influenced your choice:

If you've really worked through this exercise, it should be clear that your behavior seemed the best available choice *at that moment*. You might, with hindsight, do something different. But it appeared to be the best response when you made it.

If you are still uncertain that you make the best choices available to you (even though they anger others), do the exercise with another situation or two. Or do it for a situation where you were angry, and try to identify the main influences on the other person's behavior.

A key understanding from this exercise can greatly reduce your anger response: *We are all doing the best we can to take care of ourselves.*