

ARE YOU ANXIOUS OR ARE YOU ANGRY?

Anxiety is very limiting and disabling. It squashes human potential and condemns its sufferers to a life of unhappiness, a life with little purpose, devoid of fulfilment. There are few things worse than anxiety. The iron grip it has on the mind's thinking is like a ruthless dictator. In the handout 'Anxiety Disorders', we talked about 'known fear', things that one 'believes' to be true about oneself. It is important to note that these things are generally inaccurate, often distorted and therefore not true but once the individual buys into the illusion s/he then lives under the canopy of that belief and is left feeling powerless to do anything about these misconceptions, masquerading as the truth. If we start working on our 'known fears' with the right support and resources, we can begin to engineer our recovery. It's the unknown that is our greatest enemy because it lives in secrecy, lives in the dark, doing untold damage, all we see are the results of its work as we struggle to understand how we keep finding ourselves back in the same position. This is why we are asking you now to consider the question, are you anxious or are you in fact angry?

Over the years with ever closer examination and scrutiny, experience has taught us (at Reach) that many people suffering with anxiety are in fact afflicted by anger. Their anxiety is the symptom of stockpiled anger (see Anger, How to Use Your Anger and Anger in Relationships). For years and years, they have accumulated the feelings of not being heard, valued, understood, nurtured and respected and these feelings have become internalised and as a result the sufferer is less able to function effectively in the world. This is due to the raging storm taking place within the mind, which is completely disorientating, preventing any calm or composure as the internal storm creates havoc and turmoil. This inner turmoil distorts one's perception and perspective making it impossible to assess events as they unfold with any clarity or sense of proportion.

Imagine living your life in the daily chaos of a hurricane, constantly tossed around by ferocious winds, always looking for a place to hide, a place of refuge and comfort. Imagine the sense of fear, uncertainty and inadequacy you would feel living in circumstances where you have very limited control or none at all. What a nightmare! Well, this is the painful reality of anxiety.

Although a number of cognitive and behavioural interventions have proved useful, and some limited 'containing' benefits have been found using certain medication, as we've pointed out, what has often not been understood is that anxiety for many is really a symptom of their anger. Anxiety then becomes the focus for any treatment programme and the anger remains. This is why so many anxiety sufferers are unable to find a solution because the wrong sickness is being treated. Once the individual is helped and supported to face and resolve the build-up of anger, anxiety slowly begins to subside because the very fact the sufferer is being heard, valued and respected brings about positive change. If they can be helped to both forgive themselves and others, anger evaporates further still and with that comes the opportunity to use what was once negative, self-limiting energy in more creative ways (see Focusing with Faith, From Pain to Power and Miracles are Made). So, whilst standing in the scary vortex of anxiety, ask yourself "what am I really angry about?" It might take some time for the answer to emerge but really listen and if this does apply to you, your heart will speak loud and clear. For most this journey needs to be taken with another because of the immense value of feedback. Anxiety robs its sufferers of rational thinking, perspective and clarity, hence getting the right support is invaluable.