

Living with anger

Despite the growing body of evidence of the need for help there is no comprehensive domestic violence counselling service in the Lower Mainland. Referral to Goldenberg's groups come from probation officers, doctors, psychiatrists and government agencies. It is a promising start, but there are a mere six to eight men in each group and he is the only one I can discover who is doing this type of work.

It is understandable that there should be a slow start. Most men are defensive and uncomfortable with the idea of control of anger. Says Goldenberg, "This is a new way of looking at this. Men are not well managed in their own house, because that is the rule. They rule by might."

Goldenberg has a masters degree in humanistic psychology and 10 years of counselling experience in consciousness raising for men and women. How does he teach his group members to cope? Having once established that their tempers are a problem, what can they do about it?

"First they need to establish and identify high stress situations and learn to say to themselves: 'I am now in a state of arousal'. Once they do this and identify that their anger is aroused, they can immediately leave the situation. After this comes the coping strategy, which is whatever works for them on a safe object — pound a soft pillow, leave the room, go for a walk."

The secret of controlling anger is the awareness of what causes it and then to catch it in its early stages — when it is just an irritation, or a surge in the pit of the stomach and long before it blasts out as a snap temper tantrum. This takes practice and the willingness to try and fail and try again. Why did Goldenberg develop an interest in this particular area? "Because men were hurting," he says.

Men and women, hurting themselves, hurting each other, living in empty vacuums, resenting and yet clinging to what they may feel is pulling them to

pieces. It isn't a happy story, but it's a very common one.

Women must stop feeling guilty about expressing their own anger and they must stop being the passive recipients of other people's. This is easier said than done and it is perhaps too late for many older women to break their ingrained habits. It certainly seems too late for Ann Landers at any rate.

Instead of feeling guilty because the man who beat her up must suffer consequences, the writer of the letter should be taught to feel that she may be protecting other women from similar treatment at his hands later if he has to face the penalties now.

Individual women can do little in the short term about assault and rape, but by talking about the problem together, by educating their husbands, sons and lovers, by writing to law enforcement and legislative bodies, by supporting crisis and anti-rape groups and — above all — by never allowing anybody anywhere to say in their hearing "she must have asked for it", they can change expectations and attitudes which sooner or later lead to changes in actions and laws. Unfortunately, for some at least, women may have to do this at the expense of personal popularity, both socially and at work.

We can help each other most if we take time to think about what we feel instead of reacting blindly or accepting dumbly. Even forgiveness is useless unless it brings about a change in behaviour.

I met a neighbour in the local supermarket just after the incident on the street with the car. She said of the driver and his wife "They had a counsellor out to talk to them. The husband is really a very nice man, you know". I couldn't answer her. A very nice man just doesn't try to injure his wife or anyone else with his car and

excusing him doesn't help him one little bit.

Once we become aware of what we really feel we can help ourselves and other people most if we talk honestly, leaving aside guilt and blame, excuses and accusations. Once we can take responsibility for who we are and what we are, we can begin to accept others in the same way. We can admit that no one can control us except ourselves. No one can live, pur lives except ourselves.

Because I am nobody's slave, nobody can take away my responsibility for living my life as an independent and controlled human being. And I have very often wished that they could since, like almost everyone else, I would love to be protected from life's harsh realities. Nobody can do my living for me, this means nobody can destroy me, but it also means that nobody can save me or totally protect me either.

If we can each get this far in our personal philosophy of life we can make progress as thinking, feeling human beings. We have to try because we are all hurting too much in our mute and often desperate personal cells. There has to be a way, there just has to be one.

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