

LIGHTEN UP! - Worry and Anger can be healthy

As children we learn that it is important to block the flow of our e-motions (life energy in motion) in order to survive and avoid pain. We heard things like "Children should be seen and not heard", "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about", "Don't you every get angry or talk back to me that way", "Grow up, there's nothing to be scared about." So many messages that taught us to suppress and deny our feelings. And as we grow up, there are more messages about being polite and nice - "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." It's not surprising that we eventually wear Happy face masks, hiding our true feelings.

As infants our emotional energy flowed freely, like a mountain stream. Each time some "Don't feel" message came in or we experienced pain when we expressed our emotions, we put a boulder in the stream. It wasn't long before there was a dam in the stream. The water (emotion) stopped flowing and the pressure built up behind the dam.

Sometimes the water splashes over the top of the dam. When we've had a bad day and the frustration has built up inside, and the mashed potatoes are lumpy, we blow up! Loudly complaining, screaming or crying, we direct all our anger at the cook. The cook, while perhaps needing a reminder to mash the potatoes more, didn't deserve the explosion we directed that way.

Or we keep it all bottled up inside and get upset stomachs, irritable colons, or colds - or sometimes it explodes inside us with more serious illnesses.

Dams are rivers are built with a special gate that allows the pressure to be relived when it gets to be too much.

We need to build our own pressure relief gate so that we don't hurt ourselves or others. One way to do this is to have a specially designated "Worry Day" or "Angry Day."

On that day, we wear a button that says "This is my Angry Day/Worry Day" so that those around us know we are going to be expressing our emotions fully and freely - and they can give us the space to do it.

Usually when someone is angry around us, we either get angry back or try to fix it. On other's Angry Days, we can listen to the anger and be empathetic "Yeah, I know what you mean" "I can see why you are angry" "I'd be angry too if that happened to me" Most importantly, we listen and validate that it is safe to express anger.

On a Worry Day, we can listen to the person's fears or sadness, let them cry or talk it out - again without trying to fix it or give advice. "I can see why you are concerned" "Sounds like you are really worried about that" "I'd be worried too if that was happening in my family" A simple empathic message lets the other person express their feelings safely.

Another fun way to let the feelings out is for everyone to have the same worry/angry day - or assign a special meeting for everyone to worry/be angry together. Then when the energy has run its course and the pressure is off, we can close the pressure gate again and get back to daily living.

I learned about worry days a long time ago in a seminar about money. It was suggested to us that we have one day a month that we worry about money, paying the bills, etc. Then we could spend the other 29 days a month creatively making money and enjoying life. So I took the teacher's advice.

I sat in my office on my worry day complaining out loud about how there never was enough money, I didn't know how I was going to make it, etc. I forgot that my house guest was in the next room and could hear everything I was saying!

Later that day we went to a local burger shop for dinner. As I ordered, she said, "If you don't have enough money for dinner, I can loan you some." I was shocked and replied, "No way! My treat!" As we ate, I asked her why she thought I needed money. She quietly answered, "I heard you in your office. It sounded like things were really bad, so I thought I'd offer to help." I laughed and explained to her about worry days. We both laughed a lot over our chocolate malts!

My money worry day allows me to focus on the positive, creative, playful part of my life on all the other days. I enjoy my worry days now and I find I spend less and less time in worry on those days.

Learning to express our emotions safely and fully eventually takes down much or all of the dam. The pressure then doesn't build up as much. Since for most people learning how to suppress, deny and mask emotion has been a lifelong process, dismantling the dam can be a long and challenging task. So in the meantime, worry days and angry days are a valuable tool for maintaining mental and physical health.

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