

Anger Management - Expectations Can Be the Enemy

By Neca C. Smith

As children, we are very open and happy creatures. Excited about life (or what we perceive it to be) and rarely disappointed for prolonged periods of time. The most earth-shattering thing to some children is not getting what they want when they want it. Thank goodness children are resilient! As adults, you'd think we would be more resilient but children don't hold on to heartache and grudges as long as we do. Over time, we learned to hold on to those things that hurt and disappoint us, particularly when those things aren't going our way.

One of the biggest causes of conflict and anger are unmet and unrealistic expectations. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying not to have expectations, but quite often they are not always rational. We become disappointed by what we think people should do, how they should treat us and how they should act, instead of being realistic and realizing that we have no power or control over any of these things. Recently, I conducted a workshop on Anger in Relationships and the overall theme was how to move our thoughts from unrealistic, irrational, unhelpful thoughts to more rational thoughts. One of the participants could not wrap his mind around the fact that he might have to accept a person for who they were and not for what he wanted them to be.

Expectations will only disappoint if they are unrealistic. Don't lower them but be realistic about them. If your children never clean up after themselves and you always find yourself stressed and frustrated about it...even though they didn't clean up last week, last month or last year...why do you keep getting upset about it? Does it make a lot of sense to continuously get upset if you are pretty sure of what the outcome is going to be? If the same things continuously anger you, then it might be advantageous to change your expectations of it to reduce your level of anger and not be so stressed.

If disappointment through conflict and anger has become the story of your life, think about how to be more realistic. Here are 7 tips that might assist you in not making expectations your enemy:

1. Realize that people are human and fallible and they WILL make mistakes AND so will you.
2. Not every situation will turn out the way you want it and it is NOT the end of the world.
3. Compromise, negotiate, and collaborate as often as you can because at the end of the day, we won't always get what we want all of the time.
4. Be Easy! Don't be so hard on yourself. I myself am a victim of "I should have done better". You may have done the best you could at the time and know that the next time you will do better.
5. Don't put anyone or anything on a pedestal, if you do, you are sure to be disappointed.
6. Talk to whomever disappointed you; let them know how you feel in an assertive manner.
7. Set realistic boundaries. Let others know what is accepted within these limits and what is not. But even if they go out of bounds, it is not the end of the world. You might learn something about yourself in the process.

Accepting people and situations as they are is hard, no doubt. However, if you are often frustrated due to your expectations not being met, then doing the hard work of changing the way you think may not be a bad idea.