

Beyond Anger Management Techniques

The Real Causes of Anger and How We Can Eliminate (Not Just Manage) It

By Greg Baer, MD

Note from John Williams: I highly recommend Dr. Baer's perspective and encourage you to investigate the many free articles and videos on RealLove.com, and to read his books. Dr. Baer is my own personal coach.

Anger is one of the most divisive and destructive forces on the planet.

Anger

- is the fuel of every conflict and even every war.
- inflicts the deepest wounds.
- is a poison that spreads with astonishing power and speed.
- turns crowds into mobs.
- eliminates love and happiness like no other influence.
- destroys marriages.
- crushes the spirit of children.
- makes learning impossible.
- isolates us from everyone around us.

Many courses have been developed and books written for the purpose of helping us manage and control our anger. There are extensive anger management resources for mental health and anger management techniques are a dime a dozen. But those have generally proven to be quite ineffective. Anger still rages over the face of the earth like a consuming fire.

We need far more than anger management techniques or anger control. We need to better understand the cause and nature of anger and thereby gain the ability to eliminate it. Fortunately, in recent years we have acquired an understanding of anger that has given us the ability to do just that.

Anger: A Common Emotion

Anger is an emotion so common among us that it has become like a background noise. We see it almost everywhere we look, so we scarcely notice it anymore. We're angry

- when our spouses fail to do what we want.
- when our children are loud, resistant, or disobedient.
- when people fail to appreciate what we've done.
- at other drivers on the road who get in our way.
- at people who make us wait.
- when people break their promises.
- when our bosses are demanding.
- when things are "unfair."
- at the idiot who just took our parking space.
- when people fail to meet our expectations.
- when people try to control us.
- when people criticize us.
- when people are angry at us.
- at people who get in our way.

When we consider how often the above events occur, we realize that most of us are angry many times every day. A friend once said to me, "I don't believe people are as angry as you think."

"Really?" I replied. "Walk into any Wal-Mart and cut in line." People are either angry or they're just a slight provocation away from anger. Anger is so common that it has come to be accepted as normal. And all the anger management techniques in the world will do us no good unless we understand the cause of anger.

Questions:

1. *Does this broader definition of anger make sense to you? Why or why not?*
2. *Are you comfortable with recognizing anger and its variations within your own life? Or do you like to see yourself as someone who does not get angry?*

A New Definition of Love: Real Love

Because of the widespread incidence of anger, and the terrible effects it has everywhere it is found, we must understand the real cause of anger and thereby learn an approach to treating it that is much more productive than those we have been using to this point. You'll find that this simple definition is much more effective than all the anger management resources for mental health and anger management books on the shelves.

Before we can really understand elimination of an emotional problem — like anger — we must first understand what leads to the creation and maintenance of emotional health. In short, we must understand what makes us happy, a subject that we have on the whole neglected sorely in favor of studying disease.

In order to be happy, what we all require more than anything else is the feeling that we are loved. Our souls require feeling loved in just as real a way as our bodies require air and food.

But not just any kind of love will do. The only kind of love that can fill us up and make us whole emotionally is Real Love.

Real Love is caring about the happiness of another person without any thought for what we might get for ourselves.

It's also Real Love when other people care about our happiness unconditionally. With Real Love, people are not disappointed or angry when we make our foolish mistakes, when we don't do what they want, or even when we inconvenience them personally.

When I use the word happiness, I do not mean the brief and superficial pleasure that comes from money, sex, power, and the conditional approval we earn from others when we behave as they want. Nor do I mean the temporary feeling of satisfaction we experience in the absence of immediate conflict or disaster.

Real happiness is not the feeling we get from being entertained or making people do what we want. It's a profound and lasting sense of peace and fulfillment that deeply satisfies and enlarges the soul. It doesn't go away when circumstances are difficult. It survives and even grows during hardship and struggle.

True happiness is our entire reason to live, and it can only be obtained as we find Real Love and share it with others. With Real Love, nothing else matters; without it, nothing else is enough.

Conditional Love

Sadly, few of us have sufficiently received or given Real Love. From the time we were small children, we observed that when we didn't fight with our sisters, didn't make too much noise in the car, got good grades, and were otherwise obedient and cooperative, our parents and others smiled at us, patted our heads,

and spoke kindly. With their words and behavior, they told us what good boys and girls we were, and we felt loved.

But what happened when we did fight with our sisters, made too much noise, got bad grades, and dragged mud across the clean living room carpet? Did people smile at us then or speak gentle, loving words? No — they frowned, sighed with disappointment, and often spoke in harsh tones.

Just as the positive behaviors of other people communicated to us that we were loved, we could interpret the withdrawal of those behaviors only as an indication that we were not being loved. Although it was unintentional, our parents and others taught us this terrible message: “When you’re good, I love you, but when you’re not, I don’t — or certainly I love you a great deal less.”

This conditional love can give us brief moments of satisfaction, but we’re still left with a huge hole in our souls, because only Real Love can make us genuinely happy. When someone is genuinely concerned about our happiness, we feel connected to that person. We feel included in his or her life, and in that instant we are no longer alone.

Each moment of unconditional acceptance creates a living thread to the person who accepts us, and these threads weave a powerful bond that fills us with a genuine and lasting happiness. Nothing but Real Love can do that. In addition, when we know that even one person loves us unconditionally, we feel a connection to everyone else. We feel included in the family of all mankind, of which that one person is a part.

(To learn more about where your anger comes from and how to replace it with peace and happiness, [download a free chapter of Real Love and Freedom for the Soul: Eliminating the Chains of Victimhood.](#))

Questions:

Does this definition of real and true love, unconditional love make sense? Why or why not?

- 3. What questions does it raise for you, if any?*
- 4. Have you experienced unconditional love? If so, when? With whom?*

What We Do Without Real Love: Getting and Protecting Behaviors

If we don’t have enough Real Love in our lives, our subsequent behavior is then often determined by our need to be loved and our fear of not being loved. Without Real Love, we do whatever it takes — Getting Behaviors — to fill our sense of emptiness with Imitation Love. To eliminate our fear, we use Protecting Behaviors. The Getting Behaviors include lying, attacking, acting like a victim,

and clinging. The Protecting Behaviors include lying, attacking, acting like a victim, and running.

Emptiness	Fear
↓	↓
Getting Behaviors	Protecting Behaviors
Lying	Lying
Attacking	Attacking
Acting like victims	Acting like victims
Clinging	Running

Lying

We use lying as a Protecting Behavior when we make excuses, shade the truth, or do anything else to avoid the disapproval of others. We don't lie because we're bad; we lie because we've learned from countless experiences that it works. People really do disapprove of us less when we hide the truth about our flaws, and we'll do almost anything to keep from feeling that withdrawal of acceptance.

We use lying as a Getting Behavior when we do anything to get other people to like us — when we tell people about our accomplishments but not our flaws, communicate positive feelings that are not true, change our physical appearance to attract people to us, or tell people what they want to hear so they'll like us. We don't think of these behaviors as lying, but they are, because we don't tell other people we're manipulating them. We lie so often that we don't even realize we're doing it most of the time.

Attacking (Including Anger)

Attacking is any behavior that motivates another person through fear to behave in a way we want. We attack people when we criticize them, physically intimidate them, withdraw our approval, make them feel guilty, and use our

positions of authority at work, at home, and elsewhere. We use these behaviors to get Imitation Love — usually in the form of power — and to protect ourselves from fear.

The most common form of attacking is anger. With anger we can get people to give us attention, respect, power, flattery, approval, even sex. When we don't have enough Real Love in our lives, we feel empty, alone, and helpless. When we're angry, however, for a few moments we feel a little stronger and less helpless.

Acting Like a Victim

If we can convince people that we've been injured and treated unfairly, they'll often stop hurting us and may even give us their sympathy, attention, and support. [That's why we act like victims](#). Victims communicate — verbally and with their behavior — with variations on the following three themes:

- a. Look what you did to me;
- b. Look what you should have done for me (and didn't); and
- c. It's not my fault.

Victims have excuses for everything and blame everyone but themselves for their own mistakes and unhappiness. We all act like victims at times. Whenever we're confronted with a mistake we've made and say, "I couldn't help it," we're acting like victims. When we complain that we've been treated unfairly by other people, we're acting like victims.

Running

If we simply move away from a source of pain, we're less likely to be hurt. Withdrawing from conversations (verbally and physically), avoiding people, and leaving relationships in a state of fear or anger are all forms of running. When people say they're shy, what they're really saying is, "I've felt empty and afraid all my life, and I've learned that when I allow people to see who I really am, they criticize me or laugh at me, making me feel even more unloved and miserable. So to minimize that pain, I simply stay away from people or avoid speaking." Drugs and alcohol are other ways to run.

Clinging

Clinging is obvious when a child grips tightly to his mother's skirt, but as adults we also cling emotionally to the people who give us attention, hoping we can sometimes squeeze even more out of them. We may do this by flattering the people who do things for us, or by being excessively grateful. Sometimes we're clinging to people when we tell them how much we love them and need them — we hope our words will encourage them to stay with us and return our expressions of love. Effectively, we're begging for more Imitation Love.

Questions:

5. *Where do you see Getting Behaviors in the people around you? In yourself?*
6. *Does it make sense that this is all about trying to get conditional approval, acceptance, connection—Imitation Love? Why or why not?*
7. *What about Protecting Behaviors? Where do you see them in yourself and others?*

The Real Cause of Anger — No One Ever Makes Me Angry

One of the greatest obstacles to our happiness is that we believe we actually understand the cause of our anger. Our mistaken perception makes all anger management techniques ineffective. Our most common belief is that other people and circumstances make us angry. We demonstrate that belief daily when we say or think “You (or he or she) make me so mad.” That belief is uniformly wrong, but we hang on to it for at least three reasons.

First, the evidences seems to support our belief. Our reasoning might go something like this:

- All was well in my world. I was fine.
- Then that bone-headed, inconsiderate, selfish fool _____ (whatever he or she did to “make” me angry).
- Immediately I became angry.
- Because I would not have become angry if he had not behaved in that way, and because my reaction immediately followed his behavior, it’s obvious that he caused my anger.

Second, all our lives we have observed the people around us blaming others for their anger. Look at the list at the beginning of this article, immediately under the heading, “Anger: A Common Emotion.” From the time we were small children, we have seen people in those situations blaming other people for their anger. It’s only natural that we would follow their examples.

Third, blaming other people for our anger is by far the easiest course available. When I become angry at you, I really have two choices:

- I could look at myself for the cause of my anger. I could investigate the possibility that I am being selfish and loving and therefore need to alter the course of my life.

OR

- I could blame you, after which no effort is required on my part. All the responsibility for change is yours.

For most of us, the latter choice is far easier and therefore more attractive.

Regrettably, it is precisely because we believe that other people make us angry that we continue to become angry. If I believe that other people make me angry, I will always be angry until other people stop making their foolish mistakes, and that will never happen. I am now absolutely trapped.

It is therefore critical that we dispel the deadly myth that other people cause our anger, because only then can we be freed from this trap and create the possibility of the happiness we all want. There are many proofs I could offer to demonstrate that other people never cause our anger — which you can find in the books [Real Love](#), [Real Love for Wise Men and Women](#), and [Real Love in Parenting](#) — but allow me to present just one of these proofs here.

Two Dollars

Imagine that you're hungry and have only two dollars left in the world. Putting the money on a table, you're getting ready to go out and buy something to eat. Suddenly, I burst into the room, grab the two dollars, and run away before you can stop me.

Almost certainly you'd be angry, and you'd probably say that I caused your anger. Most people would, and that claim seems to make sense. After all, you were fine until I came in and took your money. When I did that, however, you immediately became angry, so I must be the cause, right? No. Let's prove that.

Now imagine a different scene. Again I burst into the room, grab the two dollars that are sitting on the table and run away before you can stop me. But this time you have twenty million dollars in the next room — all yours.

How would you feel this time? The loss of two dollars becomes insignificant when you have twenty million, so it's unlikely that you would be angry. In fact, you might even try to stop me and ask if I could use another two dollars.

We've just proven that I didn't "make you angry" in the first scene. We know that's true, because on both occasions I did exactly the same thing — but you chose to react differently the second time. If my taking two dollars made you angry, you would have been equally angry on both occasions, but you were not. The truth is, you became angry the first time only because you didn't have twenty million dollars.

This is much more than a cute metaphor. We can see the truth of this principle in real life. Every day other people do rude, thoughtless, selfish, inconsiderate things around us, many of which affect us. People inconvenience us, disappoint us, or attack us, and on each such occasion it's as though they're taking two emotional dollars from us. If those are our last two dollars, their behavior is a big deal, but if we have twenty million emotional dollars, losing two dollars becomes meaningless.

When we have enough Real Love in our lives, we feel as though we have twenty million emotional dollars with us all the time. With that greatest of all treasures, the little inconvenient things people do become relatively unimportant. With Real Love, we have everything that matters. Without it, we become afraid and protect ourselves with anger. Our anger is caused by a lack of Real Love in our own lives, not by what anyone does in a given moment.

Anger is a response to emptiness and fear, usually a lifetime accumulation of those feelings. With sufficient Real Love, we simply don't need anger anymore. You've now gained a deeper understanding of the real causes of anger — one that's better than all anger management resources for mental health out there. Keep reading to learn how you can go beyond anger management techniques to eliminate anger from your life.

To learn more about where your anger comes from and how to replace it with peace and happiness, [download a free chapter of Real Love and Freedom for the Soul: Eliminating the Chains of Victimhood](#).

Questions:

8. *“No one causes you to be angry”—Can you believe that? Why or why not?*
9. *“Anger is a response to emptiness and fear, usually a lifetime accumulation of those feelings.” What do you think of this statement?*

The Destructive Effect of Anger

Think about all the times you've become angry at a spouse, a child, a co-worker, or a friend. On a single one of those occasions did your anger ever bring you a sense of genuine peace or happiness? Did your anger ever bring you closer to another person? Or enrich your relationship? Anger is uniformly harmful, both to us personally and to our relationships.

The Destructive Effect of Anger on Other People

When we get angry at people, we're loudly declaring that they have failed to do something for us, or they have done something to inconvenience or offend us. In other words, when we're angry, we are primarily concerned about ourselves, not the welfare of the people around us, and they feel that. When we get angry at other people, they hear us saying I don't love you. That is the principal source of harm to other people when we get angry, that we are telling them that we don't care about them.

We cause the same effect when we use any of the other Getting and Protecting Behaviors. When we lie to people, get angry at them, act like they're hurting us (victim), withdraw from them (run), or cling to them, we are not primarily concerned about their happiness — the definition of Real Love. We use those behaviors — mostly unconsciously — because we want to protect ourselves, or

get something for ourselves, or both. When we use any of the Getting and Protecting Behaviors, our primary concern is for ourselves. On these occasions, the people around us can't possibly feel like we unconditionally care about them, and they're quite right — we don't. That has a terrible effect on them and on our relationship with them.

The Destructive Effect of Anger on Ourselves

Our Getting and Protecting Behaviors — including anger — are also uniformly harmful to us. Real Love is unconditional. It must be freely given and freely received, so if we do anything at all to influence other people to alter their behavior toward us, we cannot feel loved unconditionally. The moment we use any of the Getting and Protecting Behaviors, we are influencing the behaviors of others, and in that moment we can't possibly feel genuinely loved. We can only feel Imitation Love — the acceptance, power, pleasure, and safety we're given after we earn them. That is perhaps the greatest danger of anger, that when we're consumed by that feeling we cannot feel loved or happy.

Anger Is Always Wrong

Our primary goal in life — our very reason to exist — is to be genuinely happy, and we achieve that condition only as we feel unconditionally loved and share that love with other people. Whatever contributes, therefore, to feeling loved, loving, and happy is right, while anything that interferes with feeling loved, loving, and happy is wrong.

From extensive personal experience we've all learned that when we're angry we're never happy, nor do we contribute to the health of our relationships. Because anger detracts from feeling loved, loving, and happy, it is always wrong. Instinctively, we even know it's wrong, because when we're confronted about being angry, we usually deny it.

I am not saying you shouldn't be angry. In any given moment, anger may be the best you can do. I'm only stating in the strongest possible terms that anger — along with all the other Getting and Protecting Behaviors — is destroying our happiness and our relationships. And now we can learn to eliminate anger and replace it with joy.

Questions:

10. How is anger destructive from your experience?

The Elimination (Not Management) Of Anger — Beyond Anger Management Tips

I have now had experience with sharing the [principles of Real Love](#) with hundreds of thousands of people, and I can state categorically that we don't have to settle for the temporary and superficial effects of anger management techniques or

anger management tips. We can learn to actually eliminate anger from our lives, and that is followed by an indescribable peace and power.

The elimination of anger is accomplished by two approaches, one intellectual and the other experiential.

The Intellectual Approach: Seeing differently

Imagine that you and I are having a pleasant lunch together by the side of a large pool. It's a lovely day, and we're having a great time, but then someone in the pool begins to splash you — first on your shoes, then higher up on your pants or legs. You can't see who's splashing you, though, because there's a deck chair between you and the person in the pool. At first you ignore it, but as you become increasingly wet you finally become irritated and get up from your chair to say something to this idiot who's being so thoughtless. As you stand up and look over the chair that was in your way, you see that the man splashing you is drowning. He's splashing you only because he's thrashing and kicking in the water in an effort to keep his head from going under.

Are you still mad at him? Of course not. As soon as you see why he's splashing you, you not only lose your irritation, but you immediately become concerned about him, and you help him out of the water. In one moment of insight, your state of mind shifts from one of anger to one of unconditional concern for his happiness (Real Love).

Such is the power of perspective, and we can apply this power to our relationships with others. Imagine in your mind someone you find irritating. Now imagine his or her irritating behaviors. Is it not true that all of these irritating behaviors are Getting and Protecting Behaviors? Of course they are, and why would he or she use these behaviors?

As we've already discussed, people use Getting and Protecting Behaviors only when they're empty and afraid, conditions that are caused by insufficient Real Love. People who are behaving badly simply lack Real Love, which is just as important to their emotional health as air is to a drowning person. In short, every person who is behaving badly is just drowning.

If we can see people as drowning when they're behaving badly, we'll find it impossible to be irritated at them. How could we be angry at a drowning man or woman?

Question:

11. Does this kind of shift in perspective seem like it could help you to be less angry? Why or why not?

Eliminating Anger with the Actual Experience of Real Love

If we ourselves are drowning, however, a simple intellectual understanding of the behavior of other people is often not enough. If you and I are both drowning, your splashing and grabbing may become life-threatening to me, and my understanding of your situation alone will not help my condition. I need more.

We've already demonstrated that anger is primarily a response to the lack of Real Love in our lives. With anger, we protect ourselves and temporarily fill ourselves with Imitation Love. We're responding to the lack of twenty million dollars, referring to the metaphor we used above.

The solution to anger should therefore be obvious. As we learn to [find sufficient Real Love](#), we gradually acquire the twenty million dollars, which we can carry with us wherever we go. Then when someone takes two dollars from us, it really doesn't matter anymore, and we simply don't become angry.

To make use of both metaphors above, Real Love also pulls us out of the pool, so we're no longer drowning, and then the drowning behaviors of others no longer become life-threatening. This is not a fairy tale. Real Love really does empower us like this, as demonstrated in the lives of thousands of people all over the world. Allow me to share with you a few of their comments:

- "I used to be angry at my husband all the time. I found something wrong with everything he did, but then I found some people who have loved me unconditionally. It has made all the difference. Without my husband changing a bit, I have lost my anger at him. I love living like this, and my husband does too."
- "I have spent a lifetime being angry at people and blaming them for how I felt. Now that I feel loved, my anger has just evaporated. I don't control my anger or manage it. When I feel loved, it just goes away, without my even thinking about it."
- "Anger was destroying me. Without it, I'm happier than I ever thought possible. No techniques, no controlling it, just feeling loved. It's been pretty easy."
- "I've been to several anger management courses. I failed them all. But Real Love has helped me a lot. And it's been simple."

The Freedom of Being Responsible for Our Anger

We blame people for our anger because it seems easier than taking the responsibility for our own lives, a technique we learned from birth. When I blame you for my anger, however, I'm stuck. I'll be angry forever unless you change.

That's unfortunate for two reasons: It's very impractical to have my happiness chained to your decisions, and it's simply untrue that you cause my anger.

When I realize that my anger is a reaction to the emptiness and fear caused by a lack of Real Love in my own life, I can finally do something about it. I won't need anger management techniques or anger management tips. I simply won't BE angry — it's the natural and universal result.

To learn more about where your anger comes from and how to replace it with peace and happiness, [download a free chapter of Real Love and Freedom for the Soul: Eliminating the Chains of Victimhood.](#)

Questions:

12. *What do you think of true and unconditional love being an antidote to a lot of your anger?*
13. *What questions do you have?*

Learn More about Real Love

In order to learn much more about anger and its elimination with the power of Real Love — unconditional love or true love — and how to find genuine happiness and richly fulfilling relationships:

- Regularly learn and use the many educational benefits available to you online at [RealLove.com](#), at live [events](#), and in person through the [Video Chats](#) and [Coaching services](#), etc.
- View the [six DVDs about The Essentials of Real Love](#).
- Read [Real Love — The Truth About Finding Unconditional Love and Fulfilling Relationships](#).
- Take advantage of the many other Real Love educational materials available by visiting the [online store](#).

With literally hundreds of hours of Real Love online education at your fingertips on [RealLove.com](#), we provide new content and instruction on finding happiness in your life. Learn to look at life through the clarifying lens of Real Love and eliminate the confusion and frustration in your life.