



ANGER

IN THE THERAPY ROOM

Express that you are angry and most people take a step back. Why? Because anger is usually connected with **violence** which may make some feel frightened or threatened

Did you know that anger is a **secondary emotion**, sometimes thought of as the *bodyguard of other emotions*?

Shame, fear or sadness can make people feel very vulnerable. Sometimes when these emotional buttons are triggered, it is anger that rushes out to provide a **defence mechanism**, which can sometimes mask what is going on for a client. As the saying goes, 'Attack is the best form of defence'.

Individuals may use anger as a way of *relieving stress* or *solving a problem instead of enduring it*.

Everyone at some point in their life will experience anger to varying degrees, from mild irritation to full-blown rage.

Triggers can be:

- unjust treatment
- feeling criticized
- not getting what you want
- feeling just plain old boredom

So, is anger a good or bad emotion?

Well, to paraphrase the punk singer Johnny Rotten, anger is an energy that can be used for positive as well as negative behaviours.

Civil rights campaigner Rosa Parks was rightfully angry when told to give her seat up because she was sitting in the 'white only section' of the bus in racially segregated Alabama in the 1950s.

The anger generated by this injustice sparked what became known as the Montgomery bus boycott which lasted 381 days and was a significant milestone on the journey to racial equality in the USA.

So how do counsellors work with anger in the therapy room?

First of all, consider any **risk issues** (*If you are a placement counsellor, this should be done by the referrer.*)

If you are a private practitioner, especially someone who works alone, trust your gut instinct if you have a clearly angry client making an appointment.

- **It's useful to use the boundaries of the contact to put in place some form of safety** for you the practitioner. Consider inserting a clause that '*you can be as angry as you like in the session as long as you don't trash me or the room.*'
- Try to carefully **assist the client in identifying the** triggers for anger and the underlying emotions.
- **Give the client space.** If they feel themselves getting angry, an option may be to cut the session short or to take a break.
- **Explore with the client what their view of anger is.** Sometimes being told that anger is a negative emotion never to be displayed, may make someone angry.

It's worth remembering that anger management and counselling someone who feels angry are very different approaches.

Anger management is a structured program which may include group therapy, education-based input in a classroom-based setting, as well as one-to-one therapy.

Remember that **anger, like any other emotion, should be welcomed** in the therapy room. It takes both patience and courage to work with a client who may present with anger issues.