

HOW TO LET GO OF ANGER, OURS AND OTHERS

Natacha Joubert, PhD

Everyone carries anger – from young children to grown-ups. Anger is an emotional reaction stemming from our interpretation of situations where we feel attacked or threatened by someone or something. The intensity with which we experience anger can vary from mild annoyance to rage.

Attacking or blaming others or our circumstances is the usual way we defend ourselves for feeling attacked and angry. Thus it becomes anger against anger. Whatever form it takes, anger always hurts, us and others, because it reinforces our fears and our feelings of vulnerability, guilt and misery. Furthermore, we all know that while blaming others may provide momentary relief, it does not solve anything or bring peace.

When anger seems to be taking over you, creating confusion, inner tension and conflict in your relationships with your family, friends or colleagues, it's an indication that something inside is troubling you and requires your immediate attention and care.

Understanding where anger comes from, how we experience it and get stuck into the vicious cycle of attack and defense allows us to decide to progressively release it and restore our inner peace. Once we've learned how to recognize and deal with our own anger, we can also more easily disengage from others' anger and let it go. Everyone is responsible for their own feelings, including anger.

Everything we experience in life, our joys as well as our fears, results primarily from our view or interpretations of ourselves, others and the world around us. In other words, how we react emotionally and behaviorally to our various life circumstances depends not on the circumstances themselves but on how we view or interpret them based on our thoughts and beliefs of ourselves, others and our surroundings.

The thoughts and beliefs we have accumulated since childhood are either positive or negative. They are the raw material with which we construct our understanding of our self (self-concept), others and the world we live in. When we have thoughts inspired by love, trust, openness and solidarity, we feel good about ourselves, others and our circumstances and we experience a sense of self-worth, joy and life satisfaction. However, when we harbour thoughts based on fear, vulnerability, guilt, judgment, unworthiness and separation, we feel bad about ourselves, others and our circumstances and experience confusion and conflict.

When the tension created by our negative thoughts and emotions becomes unbearable, we lash out at others or our environment. While others may appear to be provoking us or pushing our buttons, in reality we are reacting to our own interpretations. Most of the time, we are not aware of the part we play in creating our anger and continue to blame others or our circumstances for our misery and feel justified in doing so. This is how we create and maintain the cycle of attack and defense and reinforce our anger and misery.

Yet, from the moment we recognize our role in the making and reinforcement of our anger and its vicious cycle, we can decide to release ourselves from it and regain our peace of mind. Peace comes from within. This process requires time, vigilance, patience, gentleness and determination but it is worth it!



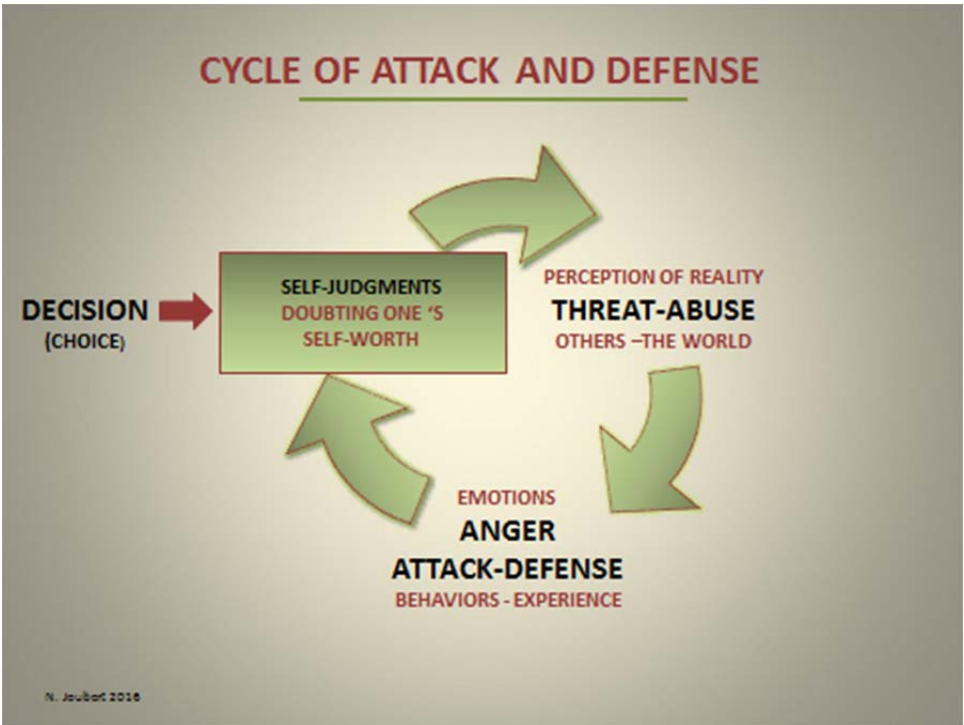
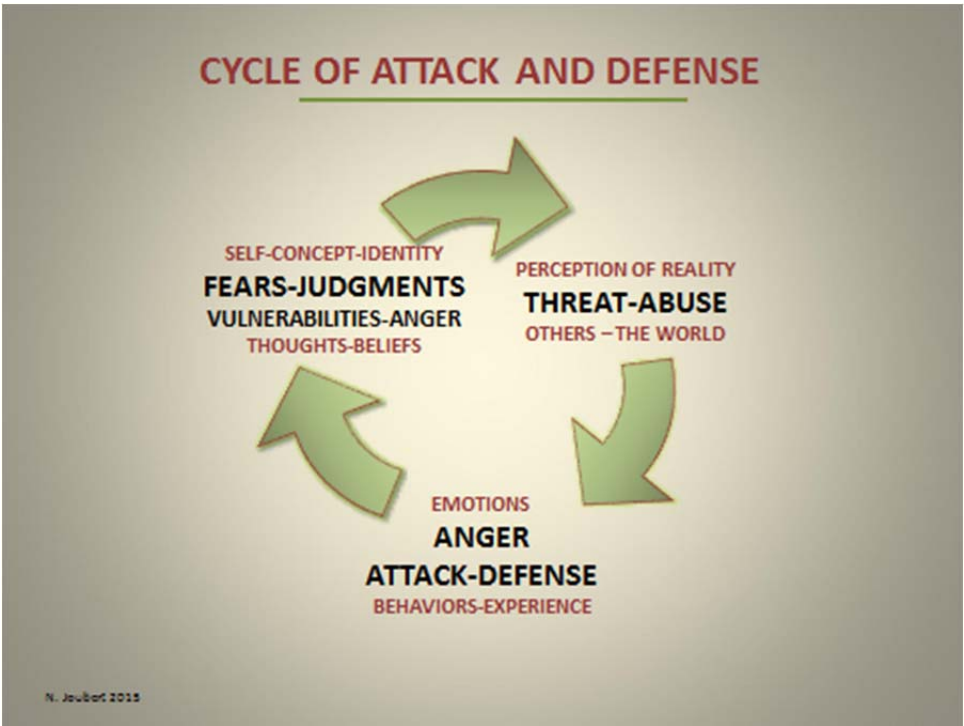
There are three steps to letting go of anger:

The first step is to become aware of our negative thoughts and how the fear, vulnerability, guilt and judgment we harbour about ourselves, others and our world trigger and feed into our anger and its cycle of attack and defense (see schema next page). We *don't* have much control over others and what happens around us in the world but we *do* have control over our interpretations and reactions. No one has the power to hurt us unless we give it to them.

The second step is to decide to let go of these negative thoughts by intentionally and progressively reducing the value and attention we give them until they weaken and disappear. The reason we can get rid of our negative thoughts and various fears, once we are aware of them, is that they are no more than thoughts. Although we may have believed them to be true or identified with them for years, they have never been truly part of us or defined us. We can all decide for ourselves what is true or not. We can always change our mind and choose differently.

The third step is to put this new awareness and decision into practice in our day-to-day lives in order to progressively apply it to all our relationships and life situations, one day at a time. We will have plenty of opportunities to practice with others or in the situations we find ourselves in!

Lastly, it is important to monitor our progress and to not get angry at ourselves if we had a bad day or do not progress as rapidly as we wish. We cannot get rid of in one day the negative thoughts we have carried for years. The objective is not to be completely without anger but to reduce it and clear our mind so we can stay calm, make good decisions, be in charge of what is ours and detach from what is not and be more at peace with ourselves and others. Other activities that we enjoy and help us find inner peace, breathe better and relax, such as yoga, music, a walk in the woods, arts or meditation, are also definitely recommended!



January 2016