

The Process of Anger in Relationships: A Personal Perspective *"I hate you because I need you"*

Angela Burper

Abstract:

Anger is a complicated affect. This paper reflects on how the therapeutic relation can help to explore its function as a psychological protection and the several issues that are underneath it. In this personal case study, the dyad mother-daughter is also described.

Key Words: genuine anger, cover-up emotions, pain, self-protection, therapeutic relationship, healing process

What I am presenting is the description of the therapeutic experiences, lived by me as a client in which I realized my intense level of rage and also its function as my main psychological form of protection. The acknowledgement of the anger is the easiest part, what is underneath, not as easy.

A good reason to go through this process of discovery is that I work as the director of two Group Homes for teenage girls, age ranging from 16 to 21. In the capacity as director, I deal with 12 adolescents with the support of a team of social educators. Most of the everyday conflicts are due to difficulties in managing their anger. Although I don't engage in in-depth interventions for anger, I realized it was essential that I had to improve my knowledge about the use and the expression of anger, in order to become a more effective professional, for both the teenagers and the staff. One way to do so was to begin with the angry person I know best, myself.

Another important reason for me to write this paper was to analyze and to solve the problems I was experiencing in my own relationships (intimate, professional and social); I was aware of often experiencing strong feelings of anger. I needed help to go beyond just the expression of that emotion, and also to deal with how confused, scared, lost and insecure I became inside.

I want to clarify that the content of this material was developed in a crucial moment of my life. It came up when I was highly vulnerable due to a personal

incident that I had just suffered; and although I was reluctant to allow myself to face and cope with what that event triggered deep down in me, I decided to go through it in my psychotherapy. Before starting this inner journey that I am sharing, I had already done several sessions of therapy in training workshops, which I attended since 2000. Some of those earlier works included therapeutic interviews with my parental introjections. For references of therapy with the Parent ego state I recommend reading chapter 4 in *Integrative Psychotherapy in Action* (Erskine & Moursund, 1988) and the therapy with an introjected other in *Beyond Empathy* (1999).

In order to elaborate in this paper I have been compiling all the excerpts from personal work that took place in the experiential groups from November 2009 to October 2010 and that related to anger. The purpose was for me to reflect on my process and also to analyze that affect, not just the “why?”, but the “what for?”. Recording and transcribing the transactions have become almost as important as the sessions themselves, in the sense of providing a continuation of my therapeutic work done with my therapist.

The theoretical model applied, Relational Integrative Psychotherapy (Erskine, Moursund & Trautmann, 1999), prioritizes the contact that can be developed in the common intimate space with mutual trust that two individuals create together: the relationship. The quality of this relationship is enhanced by the dynamic that the therapist establishes through inquiry (“I want to know more about you while discovering yourself”), attunement (“I am respectfully here with you, at your own pace”) and involvement (“You do matter to me and I’ll show you that”). The main focus of the psychotherapy is the therapist’s attention to the client: the *interactions* that are developed with rhythm, timing, respect, authenticity, honesty, sensitivity; the *internal process* taking place in the client such as feelings, sensations, physiological reactions, thoughts; and also the level of *personal closeness* reached that are reflected on proximity, openness, spontaneity, and vulnerability. These aspects will be displayed throughout each of the excerpts with examples of how the therapist maintains the contact with me as an angry client in different ways: a combination of steadfastness, firmness, patience, calmness, limitations, restrictions, encouragement...depending on the specific transactions between us based on my forms of anger. And the end result was to help *me* to experience the authentic emotions beneath that rage and its influence in my life and my relationships.

One of the key points to be considered is that I was expressing a non-genuine anger, which I describe as a cover-up for the genuine feelings laying beneath the anger. Somehow my sense of identity depended on that pseudo-anger. I grabbed on to it in a desperate attempt to survive my early childhood and adolescence in an environment that did not meet my basic relational needs. The in-depth ongoing therapeutic process throughout the five pieces of work has revealed all these sequential phases; sometimes they overlap, sometimes they go back and forth:

1. Discovering and realizing my *very intense* level of anger while linking this emotion to my early experiences in life.

2. Facing the feelings of pain, loneliness and fear hidden by my way of protection: a self-created strong teenager persona.
3. Becoming aware of the decisions taken during my childhood and adolescence, and their consequences in my current life such as: "I am not important", "I don't need anything", "I want to be angry" and "I give up, it's useless".
4. Resolving and deciding new ways of relating to people and myself: being authentic; from now on it is my personal challenge that will allow me to break with the past.

Discovering and realizing my intense level of anger

As a therapist, it's vital to develop the ability to guide a client towards the awareness of the original transactions in which the expression of that level of rage makes much more sense. I have regarded myself as an angry person my whole life, but it wasn't until this course of therapy that I discovered the source of that emotion. I dared to take the step toward not just describing or articulating but expressing the feelings (without running away...) because my sensation during this work was a profound conviction that no matter what, I was not going to be left by myself. I was safe. That safety allowed me to trust; trusting helped me to relax; relaxing gave up my need for control. This is how it starts, in the first excerpt. You will notice from the first transactions presented here, that rejecting the therapist was more bearable than admitting the indifference that I have been suffering from my busy mother. Just thinking about it (still far away to be ready to "feel" it) was so intolerable that I was about to get stuck at the beginning of the session.

Something that amazed me while transcribing this dialogue was the length of our pauses. That took me by surprise! In my phenomenological experience neither of us was quite for long. That space gave me the opportunity to be more in contact with both myself and the therapist at my own rhythm.

I have written in bold the sentences that helped me feel his presence (the opposite of an empty silence):

A: *(After sharing about her difficulties...)* *(Holding a big pillow and hiding under it, keeping a shrunk body position and rocking).*

TH: *(45 sec, very mild tone)* *I am right here Angela, even though it feels that you are all alone and no one is there, I am gonna listen to you even if there are no words (15 sec)... that's it...just rock yourself...put your arms around the pillow...because if momma is too busy to be there...or momma is not interested in you...or momma thinks you're too needy, you can always hold the pillow (9 sec)...at least the pillow is better than nothing...*

(13 sec, Angela is alternating rocking with total stillness)...uh hum...and when you need tender touch you can always rock...(9 sec) and I'll stay right here and listen even if there are no words ...even if you cry in silence... even if you're saying to me (imitating Angela's tone):" no, no, no..."

A: (firm) (to therapist) I don't want you to be important for me, (almost inaudible) I don't want to.

TH: (19 sec, Angela is sitting on the mattress, keeping her head under the pillow) (repeating Angela's words). "I don't want you to be important for me" (9 sec)...because something bad happens if people are important (14 sec)...

So important right now to do something to soothe yourself (25 sec)... if somebody is important, then something bad happens (14 sec)...but I'll stay right here even if you try to make me not important (29 sec, Angela is looking with just half of her head up from the pillow and then going back to hiding)...yeah, that's it, just go back inside...

A: Hum...

TH: ...and just say it again: "I am not important, I am not important to you, momma".

A: (angry, child-like tone) No, because that hurts.

TH: (empathetic) Yes, it hurts so much...right down to the core of your being (8 sec)... (Switches tone, assertive) "I am not important to you, momma".

A: (from under the pillow, low, weak) Shut up.

TH: (7 sec) "My twin brother is more important to you momma".

A: (very loud, sharp tone) SHUT UP!

TH: (Angela is using the pillow to cover her ears, alternating stillness with rocking) "Cleaning the house when I am sick is more important for you, momma (5 sec) ... the boys in this family are more important than the girls, momma (4 sec)... keeping peace with my father is more important than protecting me, momma" (28 sec)...if she is important to you, then something bad happens, some big disappointment (45 sec)...

In one more minute you can put your façade back up again if you want (10 sec)...I'll be here either way (17 sec)... (Switches tone, softer) "I am not important".

A: (screaming, angry) SHUUT UUUUUUUP!

The significance of the session rests on the fact that, for the first time in my life, I was conscious of the rage towards my mother (until then, I always blamed my father for my problems). This has become one of the most important insights to help me move in the right direction to continue my growth. My willingness to change, beyond my own old blocks, and the consistency of the therapist made possible a turning point that has remained a crucial part of my treatment: to undo the blind loyalty to my mother.

The following excerpt comes from a session that was the continuation of the preceding one, three months later. It shows the difficulties for me to face my mother's emotional abandonment. The previous discovery was a breakthrough about the impact of what I really considered my relationship with her. I needed more professional guidance to continue exploring that. What was the role of my mother in my early life? Why did I deny the effect of her relationship on me? Of course it is not just denying the effect of that lack of quality; I was in a dark hole of denial. Maybe the only "good place" for a little girl to be. Here in the next piece of therapy, one step further; I can perceive my mother's absence, but rather than

suffering because of it, I put my hatred on her... and on all human beings. Protections, protections firmly kept. My intense feelings of anger were finding their root:

A: *(crying, angry tone) (to mother) You are not with me, you are never with me, (sad tone) I never see you, I am not so strong. Aaaahh!*

TH: *I need...*

A: *(screaming in despair) Arrffgggg, aarrffggg, aarrffgg (coughing).*

H: *(calmed, slow) "Momma, I need".*

A: *(10 secs, angry tone) I hate you, I hate you mother.*

TH: *Tell her about it.*

A: *(faster, increasing volume) You are invisible, I am invisible, you are invisible, I am invisible and I am invisible and (shouting really loud) I DON'T WANT TO BE INVISIBLE. (Crying) AAhhhhh, aahhh!*

TH: *"So, I hate you momma".*

A: *(crying) Yes, I hate you, shitty useless, useless, you are good-for-nothing. (In despair) And I am not that bad, I am not that bad. AAhhhhh, aahhh! But you don't see me, you don't see me. AAhhhhh, aahhh...*

TH: *Must be easier to hate her than to feel how much you need her.*

A: *(sad tears) AAhhhhh, aahhh... (Back to angry tone) I don't want to need you, useless, you are useless; what am I going to need you for? Useless, you are good-for-nothing, you are good-for-nothing. And I am alone, I am alone; you have left me alone since you had me, stupid. I don't know what a momma is for. AAhhhhh, aahhh... you are useless, you are useless as a mother, good-for-nothing. I am not your mother. I am little, I am your daughter, I am your daughter. AAhhhhh, ahhhhh...*

TH: *(calmed) And I need...*

A: *(crying, in tears) AAhhhhh... (Screaming angrily) I DON'T WANNA NEED!!!*

TH: *(neutral) So, I don't want to need.*

A: *(angry tone, louder) NO, I don't want to need you, stupid, neither you nor anybody, stupid. (Shouting) Everybody out! STUPID!*

So, up to this point, I can clearly perceive that my conflicts have originated in a very early stage of my life. The therapeutic challenge is to get there. The continuation is related to connecting the function of my anger with the events that triggered it at the specific developmental phases, with the purpose of proving that the wall I once built is not necessary anymore. But not that fast. In the next follow-up of my process, a glimpse of my thwarted baby is showing up.

I consider the vulnerable self in all of us to be the most delicate, fragile one: it represents the basic needs, the emotional nakedness, the vulnerability, the crying out for help, the lack of self-sufficiency, the dependency, the helplessness, etc. I did not want to be in contact with the vulnerable self in me. As much as I was protecting myself at all costs from the feelings of fear, pain and loneliness, I was rejecting that inner part as well: the needy baby. I believe now that the anger was providing a *false sense of power* while making me unable to be truly intimate. For me, being vulnerable and authentic meant being weak. So, prior to this, I completely refused to acknowledge it, because I was also averse to

admitting the reality of not feeling loved by my mother. Too much to handle, too painful to digest, too awful to accept.

The therapist is quite insistent that together we bring this part of myself to the therapy and he was even willing to like my vulnerabilities! What a challenge for me to understand! So different to my early experiences.

This session was developed in a workshop on Attachment Patterns, five months after the first one:

TH: *I want you to think about the baby...*

A: *(agreeing) Hum uh, hum uh.*

TH: *...and not particularly to feel her now in your body.*

A: *Hum uh, hum uh. It's completely hopeless, helpless, passive, almost dead... without vitality. That's not me and at the same time it is a part of me; it is not me.*

TH: *But it was you. Keep going.*

A: *(complaining) I don't like that part, but it's there. I cannot deny that.*

TH: *Let's take some time to like her.*

A: *(teenager tone) I don't want to like her. (About to get angry) I don't want to.*

(Despicable) It is just a thing, a baby who does nothing.

A: *And I was also really ugly and my twin was really cute, so...I didn't have anyone paying attention to me when I was a baby.*

(Teenager tone) I would like to erase me as a baby, erase that part!

What I can remember about the way babies were treated in my family (11 children), is that my mother was careful about the feeding and hygiene measures, but did not have a sense of how to bond or relax with them. My father did not pay attention to them at all at that age. Besides, in my case, being defined as the ugly twin of a sweet baby boy, did not help much to get strokes (physical and recognition).

A: *(8 sec) I don't like her. I don't like myself as a baby. (Lower) I couldn't do anything. I was about to die. I don't like that.*

TH: *Keep going.*

A: *I can do something different now with my power. I can do something to survive, I can fight, (louder) I can complain. I couldn't do anything as a baby.*

(Faster) I don't like her, I don't like being so tiny, tiny, tiny. It's useless, it's hopeless. Argh! Argh! (Lower) I don't like her.

TH: *So now I know when that tough teenager came around.*

In order to erase my experiences as a baby, I self-created the defiant pre-teenager, who is the one talking in the next excerpt. When that persona appeared in the session, it caught me totally unaware. Now I have an explanation of why it is relatively easy for me to get along with real teenagers, especially the insolent ones, *I was one of them!*

In the next workshop, four months later, through therapeutic encouragement and permission, I allowed myself, to express with articulated words one of the previously mentioned functions of my rage, to avoid the pain and the fear of abandonment while rejecting close relationships, including the one offered by the therapist:

A: And then, here you are. (Angry tone) I don't know... I don't wanna need you. And that, that...I told you: "I don't want you to be..." I've been telling you (broken voice, angry tone) "I don't want you to be important for me!" And now it's too late.

A: (6 secs) (cold tone) I hate you, I hate you. You got... (Disdain) argh, gosh! You always provoke me, you always provoke me. Don't, don't...

TH: (firm) I am just trying to talk to you, kid. (Pause) What am I provoking? ... I know you hate that baby.

A: Because she (the baby) is much worse, is much worse. (Increasing tone, high-pitched, faster). Because I am much stronger than the stupid baby. (Louder) I am much stronger and you don't want me to protect the baby. (Screaming) The baby should die!

TH: How...?

A: (interrupting, very loud) I am the strongest here.

TH: (interrupting, firm) Wait a minute, wait a minute, that's a contradiction.

A: NOOO, I am the strongest here.

TH: (louder) You are making a contradiction. You said you are protecting the baby...

A: (talking at the same time, fast) I am not making a contradiction. You are always saying the last word.

TH: (loud, firm) You said you are protecting the baby and now you say the baby should die. How is killing the baby protective?

A: (lower, slower) Because she is not going to feel.

TH: (surprised) Say that again?!

A: She is not going to feel!

TH: (Loud) So if you kill her...

A: She is not going to feel, (louder) **THE PAIN.**

There I was, like a clumsy surgeon trying to amputate an infected limb of myself without knowing that I was rejecting the essence of my being. I was facing such a struggle...to trust, not to trust; to go deeper, to stay at the surface with my external social façade. At that moment it was really hard for me to form the integration of those two parts: the defiant angry pre-teenager and the lost needy baby. I wanted the process to continue, because at least, I was able to connect with both, to identify them.

Facing the emotions hidden by my way of protection

My level of anger was so deep, that the search for another covered up emotion that is equally (or more?) felt should to be explored: the feeling of pain. Although I was holding on to the anger, the expression of my profound suffering started coming to my conscious awareness. Being in the presence of a caring, powerful therapist made explicit the inner battle between my split ego:

A: (childlike voice, faster, louder) I don't need anything, I don't need anything, I don't need anything (inconsolable cry) ahhh...ahhh...ahhh... (Childlike voice, faster, louder) I don't need anything (childish tone, angry). Silly!

TH: (calm, soft) OK, if you insist...

A: (inconsolable, lower, softer, child-like voice) No, it is a lie (crying) ahhh ...ahhh... ahhh...

TH: Tell me about the lie.

A: (inconsolable cry, child-like voice) ahhh...ahhh...ahhh... Yes, I do need, I need her, I don't feel well, ahhh...ahhh...ahhh... (Screaming, childlike voice) I don't feel well and she is not here, and I am alone! (Louder, angry) And I don't like to be alone (crying, despair, even louder) and I don't want to be alone, I don't want to be alone (inconsolable cry, childlike voice) ahhh...ahhh...ahhh...

TH: You were, you were.

A: (shouting while sobbing) ARGH! You, don't tell me, man. It hurts already, it hurts already! It does already hurt, it hurts a lot!!!! (Louder) It hurts a lot, it hurts a lot (inconsolable cry, child-like voice) ahhh...ahhh...ahhh...

I can remember, every time I read or listen to this session, the profound level of pain. And my therapist is not taking it away nor easing its impact on me, but the opposite: he is compassionately there with me while I am going through this moment of experiencing the true feeling. The depth and intensity of this session make me realize that I have been trying to run away from an old pain that was still influencing me in my current life.

If there is a sensitive way to show a vulnerable self in a practical perspective, it is well displayed here while moving on to the next interactions:

TH: Yes.

A: It does hurt.

TH: It hurts even more than you're telling me.

A: (inconsolable cry, child-like voice) ah...ouch, don't tell me that... ahhh...ahhh...ahhh...it hurts, (faster) IT HURTS, IT HURTS, IT HURTS! I cannot control it, (faster) IT HURTS, IT HURTS, IT HURTS! IT HURTS, IT HURTS A LOT, IT HURTS A LOT!

In another session, following that one, more feelings are associated underneath the anger; the same inner struggle is still quite intense and active. The genuine interest that I perceived in our dialoguing is helping me to arrive to my own understanding, to have the sense of it. My attempt to avoid what I had already experienced is still present, though. I knew at that time where my vulnerability was coming from, but I was not ready to give up my need to be on guard, so I kept my teenager on the stage:

TH: She (the baby) has got lots of needs.

A: (increasing tone) Uh, hum. (Cocky) So you got it, so...

TH: Lots and lots of natural needs.

A: (despicable, taunting) Not natural needs, just needs, stupid needs. (Worse taunting) "Natural needs". Babies, babies; whatever.

TH: (7 sec) So every time you call her (imitating Angela's tone) "stupid baby, nyi, nyi nyi, nyi nyi..."

A: Uh hum.

TH: You discount her needs in hope that she'll shut up.

A: (nodding yes) Uh hum.

TH: *Because what happens when she doesn't shut up?*

A: *(silence for 6 secs) When the baby doesn't shut up?*

TH: *Yeah!*

A: *Oh! Whowh! (Sarcastic giggling) Ha, ha.*

TH: *What does "whowh" mean? (Louder) What happens when that baby doesn't shut up?*

A: *(much lower) The tears come, the loneliness is there, (broken voice) the look for support is there.*

Little by little, step by step I am gradually preparing myself for the vital experience of a profound damage that I have been carrying out within me. But this is not just about intellectualizing the process, this is about going throughout that process in order to heal me: connecting with the primal pain will allow me to let it go, so I will not need extra energy to decrease it. I have the idea that it's kind of saying goodbye to my wild teenager persona in order to say hello to my mature adult without fearing my vulnerability.

Making the awareness of the decisions and their consequences in my current life

In the same way the anger is functioning as a protection, the self-generated statements about myself are strengthening the hiding of feelings. While I am saying all these messages to myself I block what is underneath; I don't have to confront neither the emptiness from the abandonment nor the pain and the fear that it caused. The decisions made under the early stages of anger are kept active unless the anger is treated in a straight way. While dealing with primary anger, something to take into account is that effectiveness increases when we address it in the regression state. "Regression is of interest when it represents a fall-back to old patterns of dealing with the world, patterns that were learned earlier in life and remain available to us when our current strategies are not working" (Moursund & Erskine, 2004, p.103). I *experienced* the intense emotional feeling going back to the origins of the anger, while being accompanied by the therapist. Those patterns are based on the messages and conclusions that were meaningful for me under the pressure of the past circumstances. Most of them remain active in the present out of full awareness. So regression not only helped me to contact with the feelings, but also to capture how I had been programming myself.

In the therapeutic process I became aware of several beliefs about myself, that I will describe in chronological order:

"I am not important"

Somehow I kept the child-like hope that if I were able to become important, my mother would see me. Since she didn't, I concluded "I am not important". Not

being important served the purpose of not admitting that she prioritized others over me. Today, while writing these words and progressing in my therapy, I have already started to wonder whether I will have to face what might be beneath: “I am not important, because *“there is something wrong with me”*. I still have some difficulties considering myself as a person who deserves full recognition (for my achievements, my skills, my degree, my unique way of being...)

A: *But the word (switches to English) unimportant...*

TH: *I didn't understand your tone of voice on that.*

A: *(switches to mother language, soft voice) I am angry. I did not want to see it.*

TH: *(tender) Did not want to see what?*

A: *(mother language) That I felt not important.*

“I don't need anything” (The recurrent subject)

What I am basically denying is the need for relationships. As an adult woman, I am generally considered to be quite strong and functional; “independent” too, of course. Those external values cover well my old insecurities. Because both my father and my mother sent enough messages related to “grow fast to help at home”, “take care of your siblings”, “do it yourself”, it was clear for me that neither of them were going to be available to fulfill the requested needs of a little girl. They even got upset sometimes or indifferent the few occasions I remember myself asking.

TH: *(interrupting, loud, firm) Momma, I need...*

A: *(shouting loudly, fast) WHY DID YOU HAVE ME, I AM YOUR DAUGHTER, I AM YOUR DAUGHTER AND YOU DON'T SEE ME, YOU DON'T SEE ME...!!!!!!*

TH: *(louder) I NEED, (firm tone) I need...*

A: *(screaming violently) SHIT, I DON'T NEED ANYTHING FROM YOU.*

TH: *(firm, loud) I need...*

A: *(very angry, faster) I DON'T NEED ANYTHING.*

TH: *(firm tone) Momma, I need...*

A: *(interrupting, shouting) NOOOOOOO!!!!!!*

TH: *(firm tone) Momma, I need...*

A: *(interrupting, shouting) NOOOOOOOO, I DON'T NEED ANYTHING.*

TH: *(firm tone) Momma, I need...*

A: *(screaming) NO, SHUT UP (6 sec)... (Broken voice, lower, softer) I can't (crying inconsolable)... Ouch...*

I also became aware of “I want to be angry” in another session, three months later:

Since this whole paper is about anger, I can add few new things about how I have made it my main way to express what I feel, covering up the rest of the emotions. These transactions provide the sense of how I maintained my decision as a whole protection. I didn't even respond to the therapist's invitation to express what I needed from my mother; I rejected that possibility.

TH: *(firm) And I need...*

A: *(5 secs) Don't go there; (crying) ouch.*

TH: *“You don't listen, mother...”*

A: (screaming with rage) Aaaaarrggghhh, aarrffgggg!!!

TH: "...but I need..."

A: (retching)

TH: (10 secs) "Even though I pretend I don't need anything from you what I need is..."

(Angela's breathing heavily and fast) (28 secs) Just let that shake come.

A: (6 secs) (Screaming furiously) Bitch, you don't see me. YOU DON'T SEE ME! You neither see my suffering nor nothing. Shitty asshole, what are you useful for? What are you useful for? Shitty stupid. Why the fuck have you had me? Shitty asshole, "victimish", depressed, ARGH! Asshole. Blah, blah, blah...SHIT! Phew!

(Teenager tone) I don't want to need anything, **I want to be angry.**

"I give up, it's useless":

Still, rather than accepting the absence in the mother-daughter relationship, I focused on my own skills as a girl to provoke a change. But that change never occurred, so while growing into adulthood I learned not to even try (to express my feelings, to get things for me, to protest in a righteous way...)

A: (broken voice, almost in tears) How am I going to repair that? There is no mother, there is no mother. There is just pain, so, so...

TH: (faster) Keep going, I wanna hear that anger; come on!

A: (louder) There is no mother! What's the purpose of talking about that? (Broken voice) There is pain, pain, pain, abandonment, pain, pain, pain, pain. What's the purpose of talking about the mother?

TH: ...and what about the anger?

A: There is no mother! (Very loud, harsh tone) The anger's been also with me my whole life but I'm fed up with being angry. I can be cruel, I can be dangerous and I can hit people and I can hate people and I don't want to get like that.

TH: And what about demanding "momma, come here, now"?

A: It's useless.

TH: Mom...is what?

A: It's useless.

TH: Is WHAT?

A: (screaming, very angry) USELESS!!!! Useless. Don't provoke me; (shouting) yehyehhhhhh!!!

(Broken voice) It's always painful, I, I...

TH: Listen to that conclusion.

A: (Broken voice) It's always painful...

I gave up, I gave up.

Somehow the following transactions summarize the work:

TH: Let's go back to that little girl's decision, facing a big sense of disappointment and betrayal... "you (mother) weren't there when I needed you, so therefore..."

A: (lower tone, adult) I'm not gonna need anything, I'm not gonna ask for anything...I will withdraw.

TH: *Withdraw...what else?*

A: *I will not fight for what is fair for me, I will not express my feelings, I will not show who I am; (louder) I will be NOTHING, YUCK!*

Resolving and deciding new ways of relating to people and myself

Facilitating the expression of the anger has been necessary for my contacting with its real dimension: the full awareness of the intensity and the effect on me, getting so overwhelmed that made me unable to contact with anything else. That would have not been possible if the therapist had shown fear or if I had not trusted him enough. The therapeutic relationship is in itself reparative because it provides a new experience in which the old patterns don't work anymore since they don't have the effect I am used to expecting. The strong solid presence of the therapist marks the difference in the sense of fostering the opposite scenario from the original one: *I do not get rid of him*, no matter how angry I get or how hurt I feel. As the object of my emotional outbursts I was able to understand my feelings. The acting-out of my inner pre-teenager continues:

A: *(angry) This subject is confusing; babies, babies, babies...needs, needs, needs...And then here you are. And then I can be held by you. And then (faster, louder) I really like that and then I miss that and then, WHAT????*

TH: *(firm) So you are angry at me.*

A: *Smart ass.*

During this dialogue my thoughts were related to the fact that my therapist was not reacting against me at all. "Why is he still with me?" came to my mind once and then again.

TH: *You are angry at me.*

A: *(pretentious) No, I - am - not.*

TH: *Yes, you...*

A: *(interrupting) (very fast) You are nothing.*

TH: *(laughing) Oh, c'mon, if I were nothing you wouldn't be talking to me in that tone. You've started to get close to me.*

A: *(mumbling) I hate being close to you.*

TH: *Hum?*

A: *(screaming) I hate being close to you.*

TH: *(challenging) I thought you hate being close to anyone.*

A: *Especially YOU.*

In the process of helping a client to change the unnecessary old ways, the therapist, has the responsibility of setting limits on the behaviour that could cost harm to one of them or both; in my case, once the sessions are progressing it is important to reflect on my responsibilities for my misconduct towards the therapist and others and its consequence. The following excerpts belong to the last session that took place under a specific therapeutic contract to connect with the teenager (not in a spontaneous way as before) for fifteen minutes. The

dialogue is very fast, there is no other way for the therapist to keep it up, but to be fully present:

A: *(interrupting, fast, despicable)* So here you are, and you are going to show me how to be in relationship. WHOAAAAA, whoooooaa...sure, you show me today and then you leave and here we go. Clever, very clever, very clever, very, very clever; yeah, very smart *(sound with the tongue meaning mockery)*.

TH: Well, thanks for the compliment.

A: *(fast)* Don't be sarcastic; I am the one who is going to be sarcastic. You have to be the adult.

TH: *(very firm, serious)* Don't – you – dare – tell me – how – to behave

A: *(imitating)* “Don't – you – dare – tell me – how – to behave”. *(Very fast, defiant)* I am going to tell you whatever I want to.

TH: That's obvious.

A: *(interested)* What is obvious?

TH: *(neutral)* That you are going to do whatever you want. Even if it hurts you.

A: *(6 secs)* *(defiant)* I am not going to hurt me; I am going to hurt YOU.

TH: *(calm, assertive)* You don't think I am going to put up with that, do you?

A: *(lower, slower)* I don't know. I never tried.

One more example from the same piece of work in which I continue revealing my bad temper while the therapist is in a firm-balanced-provocative tone.

An escalation of my anger triggered, as a final result, an in-depth regression to my earliest stage of life, the real and deeply hurt inner baby:

A: *I am going to hit you.*

TH: *(very firm)* Well, you won't like the result of that. Do you think I am so foolish to not defend myself?

A: *(restrained)* Maybe, who knows? *(5 secs)* *(Switches tone, imitating the tone)* You said “you can get nastier” so if I can get nastier and I am using my words with you, and I am cursing to you, *(cocky, provocative)* you want more?

TH: *(lower, calm)* If it is necessary, yes; if it's absolutely necessary for you to deny...

A: *(big sigh)*

TH: ...the depth of your pain... yes, give me more.

...and this is all the nastiness has been about: distract, distract, distract. *(a 12 sec silence)*. Such a lonely pain.

A: *(wiggling slightly while sitting with the arms around the legs, head down)* Making sounds like sobbing, going into a deeper regression. Starting to lie on the floor... *(The step that followed next included body work.)*

I sense in myself the core of this healing experience: inviting me to re-establish a new way of relating to someone, someone who is already important for me (he has proved that I can trust him!). One single well established therapeutic relationship makes it possible to generalize the new way of bonding with others. The isolation and the need to withdraw are not necessary anymore as I am developing an alternative pattern:

A: *(10 secs)* *(harsh tone)* If I needed my mother, and my mother was not there...

TH: *Ouch. Put it in your own words. You need your mother and she is not there and it seems that often she is intentionally not there. (Angela is crying). What do you feel?*

A: *Ouch. (Very low, head down) I cannot feel. (8 secs, crying) Ouch, I am blocking myself. (Sighs, tears, 36 secs) I NEED TO FEEL YOU CLOSER, is that OK for you?*

(The therapist leaves the armchair and moves to the mattress). (Broken voice, in tears) I cannot go by myself to that pain; that pain again (Angela is now leaning her head on the therapist's leg). I feel so lonely (crying).

Another example from a session following that one:

A: *I'm having a...I am having a very important experience with you.*

TH: *What is that, Angela?*

A: *To allow myself to be with you.*

TH: *That's fine.*

A: *(nodding) Uh, hum.*

TH: *(gestures of "come here").*

A: *(very low) I am heavy... (Snuggling up to the therapist) (Very big and relaxed sigh).*

I don't remember experiencing moments like these as a little girl, nor getting into this kind of initiative to contact with another person in order to find comfort.

Although there are more steps to take and more wounds to be healed... now I know that I don't want to hurt myself or anybody else; now I know I can think about what I need, what I am missing and what I want before losing myself in the anger; and now I know that I can change. There is a solution!

A: *(4 secs) Hum...OK. So my anger, inside...OH, I got it! My inside anger, all my struggle, I am acting out outside, what I just did to you, right? Wow, my holly molly. Ooh! OOHHH! OOHH!*

TH: *Say it again, so I can hear all your words.*

A: *(13 secs) (three big sighs) (touched) What I have done to you right now, is what I have been doing in my marriage, with my husband (and other people). Acting out the anger that I have inside, all my struggles, my inner struggles. About being a baby, not being a baby; dealing with my teenager. (silence for 10 secs) Wow, that part is my responsibility. That part... I have the solution.*

TH: *Absolutely!*

A: *(4 secs) I love you.*

This is the sentence that I choose to end the transcripts. This is what I want to cherish: my willingness to keep saying "I love you" and the hope that I am learning how to get "I love you" back in my heart.

And before finishing up, let me share some final ideas:

During the 4th IIPA Conference in Slovenia (2009), Richard Erskine, in his keynote address, said: "The healing of stress, neglect and trauma occurs through a contactful therapeutic relationship". These are, what I believe, the basic

elements for a well established healing relationship in general and specifically to deal with anger:

- Time invested in getting the information about the specific functions of the anger and its origin for this unique client (“there must be a reason”).
- Quality of the transactions (honesty, spontaneity, authenticity, genuine interest...) based on the full presence of the therapist that allows the client to be herself.
- Willingness to accept the level of anger from the client that may include personal attack.
- Skills to maintain a firm position during outbursts to protect both, the client and the therapist, without breaking the bonding.
- Special sensitivity to appreciate and differentiate regression states in the client (sometimes spontaneous, some others under contract).

Author:

Angela Burper, PhD, is a psychologist working in the social field. She is interested in applying Integrative Psychotherapy principles in her position as director of two group homes for teenage girls in Catalonia, Spain.

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