

Angry Stuffers and Spewers in Marriage

*Once again, we hear from TLC World's favourite Marriage Counsellors,
Steve & Cindy Wright*

When we're angry we're often tempted to deal with our anger in two improper ways. We stuff it or spew it; or, put another way: we hide it or hurl it. There are angry stuffers and spewers. These are two extremes, two ruts on either side of the road. *(Dr David Ferguson)*

Steve and I admit that we have both been angry stuffers AND angry spewers at different times in our marriage. We didn't have conflict resolution modeled in healthy ways for us earlier in our lives. As a result, we were all over the place in our marriage in our angry "approaches."

We visited this subject a number of years ago. But feel that we need to do it again. Also, we're adding additional info that you could find helpful. We hope it helps.

It's common to become angry and disagree with each other in marriage. And even though we don't WANT disagreements to happen, they can actually be beneficial to our relationship, if handled properly.

When we clear the air of misunderstandings and/or misconduct, we can use these times to help us build communication bridges between us. But we aren't always good at it—especially in the beginning of our marriages. That needs to change if we want a loving, healthy marriage. It's important to LEARN how to deal with each other's anger in Christ honoring ways.

Angry Stuffers and Spewers

"So, what type of angry person are you? If you are someone who tends to blow-up when mad or who lets out his or her emotions to feel better, then you're most probably a spewer. ...Spewers are the most prone to regret saying or doing things during a conflict.

"Stuffers on the other hand do not think it is right to express anger. They feel more comfortable not dealing with it in fear of rejection, angry outbursts and others." *(Sean Si, from his article, The 3 Types of Anger: Which One Are You?)*

The problem is that spewers cause a different type of damage. Sometimes it is to themselves, as they turn their anger inward. But that can lead to bitterness. Plus it can often leak out at another time in an outward expression.

The Bible says:

"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." *(Ephesians 4:26-27)* "Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." *(1 Peter 2:1)* "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." *(Romans 14:19)*

It's not anger itself that's the problem; it's the way we DEAL with it because of the breakdown in communication it can cause. Anger is a bi-product of an underlying hurt we're feeling deep inside. These feelings make us more vulnerable to handling it improperly.

That's where being a "Stuffer" or a "Spewer" comes into view. It's important to recognize if you're a spouse who handles anger in this way and/or if you're married to one. According to David Ferguson and Don McMinn, from their book, ***Emotional Fitness***

Angry Stuffers:

"Angry Stuffers (or hidiers) have difficulty admitting that they're angry and have an even harder time expressing their anger. They tend to minimize their hurts and are reluctant to share. Why do stuffers stuff? There are many possible reasons:

- They think anger is sin.
- They are uncomfortable with confrontation.
- Stuffers grew up around family members who stuffed their anger, so they've learned the same behavior.
- They grew up around family members who spewed their anger and having been the recipient of that pain, they are doing just the opposite.
- Feelings of low self-worth make them feel as if they're not worthy of being heard.
- Fear inhibits their willingness to express anger."

Lisa Terkeurst gives this insight concerning angry stuffers:

"Stuffing when we feel unglued means pushing emotions inward. A rush of feelings are stopped from going out by being shoved in. We swallow hard our hurt feelings but not in an effort to process and release. Rather we wallow in the hurt. Like an oyster deals with the irritation of a grain of sand we coat the issue with more and more layers of hurt until a rock of sorts is formed. But this rock is no pearl. It's a rock with which we'll eventually build a barrier or use it to hurl hurt in eventual retaliation." (*Lisa Terkeurst, from her article, Exploder or Stuffer: Which One Are You?*,

But then there are:

Angry Spewers

"Angry Spewers (or hurlers) [some call them "exploders" or "aggressors"] are just the opposite. When they're upset, they let you know it, and it's usually not pretty. Why do spewers spew? There are many possible reasons:

- They don't know how to express their anger properly.
- They grew up around family members who spewed their anger, so they've learned the same behavior.

Additionally:

• Personal insecurities cause them to want to intimidate others.” (*Don McQuinn, and David Ferguson*)

On this issue of being a spewer, it’s also important to note:

Unquieted raw anger, can be assaulting to those upon whom we spew it, or throw it. Counselor/author Leslie Vernick likens it to vomiting. And we agree. It’s a type of verbal vomiting. As she says:

“Doing this might provide some sort of relief but it is never beneficial to the hearer or the relationship. ...You do feel better getting it out, but vomit belongs in the toilet, not on another person. [Proverbs 12:18](#) says, ‘**Reckless words pierce like a sword**’ and [Proverbs 29:11](#) warns us that, ‘**Only a fool gives full vent to his anger.**’” (*From her article, Four Lies About Anger*)

We’ve also heard this type of releasing anger compared to a verbal grenade. It is thrown at its intended target and causes a huge explosion with a lot of damage.

Here’s another way of explaining both angry stuffers and spewers:

“Spewers – Have a volatile temper and tend to explode like a bomb. They are usually unable to control or explain their anger.

“Stuffers – Believe all anger is wrong and go to great lengths to bury, minimize and avoid their anger. Some of them don’t even know how to recognize their own anger.” (*Chip Ingram from his article, **How Do You Handle Your Anger?***)

Married to an Angry Stuffer or Spewer?

So... are you an Angry Stuffer or a Spewer? Or are you married to one? Prayerfully look within and ask God to help you to recognize if you’re dealing with underlying hurt that is causing problems within your marriage. Refrain from pointing fingers in a hostile way at your spouse, but instead pray:

“**Search me O God and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.**” (*Psalms 139:23-24*)

Stuffer/Spewer Styles of Handling Anger

We’ve had to personally take our own “styles” of handling anger to God. I have more of a tendency to be a spewer. I want to get everything out in the open and deal with it as it is. The problem is that sometimes it’s better to pray about a matter so you don’t spew out words you shouldn’t say. (And I confess that I have been guilty of that.) Just because something comes to mind, it doesn’t mean you should say it. Sometimes you need to process it with the Lord first. That way you can approach the matter in a kinder, more respectful way. God is helping me to do that.

Steve has more of a tendency to be a stuffer. He'd much rather retreat and get his mind on another subject. He doesn't deal with it then or later; instead he buries it. Perhaps it will just go away in the meantime. Yes, perhaps it will. But if it's important, most likely it will just stay there brewing within. And then when something else happens it piles on top of that buried brewing mess. Eventually something small happens and that's it! It all comes out—to the shock of the person receiving it! The question then comes to mind: where did that come from? In reality, the anger really wasn't the result of the immediate situation. It's an accumulation of a lot of stuffed anger. God is helping Steve in that area of his/our life together.

Work on It and Ask God

Over the years Steve and I have had to work on our stuffing and spewing styles. When we give into our “natural” tendencies it gets messy. All of this reveals that we need God's help to deal with our anger in healthier ways. That's because it's what we should do as marriage partners. We should each work on our issues that cause problems with our relationship.

If you ARE a Spewer or Stuffer, or your spouse is one, ask God to help you to do your part in handling conflict in the healthiest way possible. Keep in mind that we're told in the Bible:

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” (*James 1:26*) “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.” (*Proverbs 15:2*)

“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (*Matthew 12:37*)

Angry Spewer or Stuffer?

If you're a Spewer you need to motivate YOURSELF to get rid of this behavior because the “in your face” hostile damage can cause to your relationship.

A Stuffer needs to deal with their behavior for a different reason. They often deny that they even have a problem. They'll justify their actions by thinking, “At least I don't spew out my anger that way!” But what they don't realize is that by stuffing their anger, it can turn into pride and bitterness. (And God's Word is specific in stating that we're to stay away from being prideful and bitter.) Those who stuff their anger can also highly frustrate others around them and this does not lead to “peace and to mutual edification” as the Bible talks about.

As a marital team, you can't deal with that, which isn't acknowledged. The problem can become like having an elephant in the room that no one will admit is there. And yet it keeps doing its damage none-the-less! Even if the Stuffers intentions are noble in trying to prevent additional hurt, the results (unless Spirit-led) can cause pain in a different way.

So, how can you do things differently?

Drs Ferguson and McMinn say:

“The best way to express anger is to share your hurt, not your anger. This requires discovering the hurt under the anger. For instance, if your spouse shows up two hours later than when they said they’d be home and they didn’t call ahead to tell you they’ll be late, instead of spewing out angry venom, or on the other end of the spectrum, refusing to talk to them about it, find the right time to share your hurt with them.

“Tell them, ‘When you were so late and I didn’t know where you were I was frightened because you said you’d be home. You didn’t even call to say you’d be late. And then when you came home and seemed so uncaring that I was worried I felt confused. I didn’t know whether I wanted to hug you or lash out at you because I felt betrayed and was so angry!’”

Ferguson and McMinn go on to say:

“Even when we properly express anger, it usually takes a measure of self-control to keep from overreacting. That’s why the Proverb says, ‘**A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.**’ (*Proverbs 29:11*)

Avoid these improper ways to express anger:

1. Take it out on someone who didn’t have anything to do with hurting you.
2. Become passive-aggressive. (I’m going to get back at you in very subtle ways: I’ll be late when you want to be on time; I’ll neglect meeting your needs; I’ll do what I know irritates you.)
3. Verbally abuse people by saying hurtful things (for instance, attacking someone’s character because he or she may have made a mistake).
4. Become violent —engage in physical violence (striking someone, throwing objects). It’s important to teach children how to express their anger verbally in a proper way. If not, they may stuff their anger, which is unhealthy. Or they may vent their anger by coloring on the wall, hitting the dog, or other ‘acting out’ situations. We’re often all too quick to try to correct their behavior, ‘Don’t do that’ without first teaching them how to verbalize their anger verbally.”
“Instead we are to ‘**speak the truth in love.**’ (*Ephesians 4:15*) We are to *speak* our anger in ways that are *truthful*, respectful, and edifying. And we are to make sure our motivation is because of “*love.*”

Lastly:

If you need more help with anger issues, please visit the [Communication and Conflict](#) and/or the [Abuse in Marriage](#) Topics of this web site to read what we make available. We hope you will find them helpful.

Our love and prayers are with you as together we make our marriages the best they can be —revealing and reflecting the heart of Christ into ALL we do!

Cindy and Steve Wright

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