

## Angry Neighbors Make for an Angry Community

We all have expectations about everything in our life. We expect our family, friends and neighbors to behave in certain ways and when they don't, we often fall into a state of anger. Our expectations are not just limited to those people who we know, but also to just about everyone we come in contact with or depend upon. We expect our leaders to make decisions that we believe to be right. We expect the cashier at the store to be quick and competent. We expect the driver of the other vehicle to obey the rules of the road. When they fail to meet those expectations we get angry. Often, what we expect of others is a reflection of what we ultimately expect of ourselves. When I am in a hurry I expect others to respect that and get going. When I am frustrated I expect others to understand that and make everything right. When I am overworked I expect others to sympathize with me and help out. When others don't behave according to our expectations, we get angry. Learning to be gentler with our selves goes a long way towards being gentler towards others.

For most of us, anger is not an emotion that feels good at all. It disrupts our daily flow and brings out the worst parts of ourselves. I never want to say a bad word to my family. I love them dearly. However, when angry I have been known to say mean-spirited words directed at those same family members. Anger makes us more aggressive and limits the way we think about and treat others. Anger is usually one-pointed: outward towards someone else. In the act of being angry, instead of feeling closer to the object of our anger, we create even greater distance. We isolate them, but more importantly, we isolate ourselves. Anger is like a prison that binds us and keeps us from making choices that reflect compassion and caring and understanding: Attributes that contribute to the happiness of ourselves and of those around us.

One of the keys to avoiding anger is to transform our habit of expectations. This does not mean that we allow people to run all over us, or our community. *It means I transform what I expect of others into an understanding that no one can read each other's mind and their reasons for doing what they do usually have nothing to do with me.* My daughter didn't clean up her room because she wanted to make me angry, she was late getting ready for school this morning. The cashier at the store was slow and distracted not because she wanted to make me angry, but because her child is sick today and she is upset that she can't be home to care for her. The neighbor doesn't let his dog poop on my lawn to make me angry, he does so because he hasn't read or understood our community's rules. Transforming our expectations into a greater understanding of other people's challenges and sufferings will do quite a bit to disarm our anger and increase our own happiness.

If your family member or neighbor behaves in a manner that fails to meet your expectations and makes you angry, the only way you are going to really resolve the situation is not by creating an even wider distance between yourself and them (anger), but by making a choice to get closer and put forth an honest effort to remedy the situation "together." Effective communication can only occur when there is a process of two-way listening. Anger prevents us from honestly listening to anything but our anger. When we transform our expectations and reduce our opportunities to get angry, we put ourselves in a position to make better choices about how we relate to the people around us and, in turn, how they relate to us. When everyone works together, anything is possible!