

# The Freudian Slip

Pathways to Discernment

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## Is There Such a Thing as a Fair Fight?

### Rules of Engagement!

How often have you heard the message don't get angry? Our parents told us not to get angry. Our religions have told us not to get angry. Our family has told us not to get angry. Personally, at times I get angry when I am told not to get angry.

So what's wrong with anger? Nothing. Anger is neither good nor bad. It is just an emotion. Anger is one of many emotions given to us by God. However, how we use anger gives the good or bad connotation to it. Anger functions to signal a person that something is wrong.

Physiologically, anger is a part of the "flight or fright" response in us all. In the "flight or fright" mode, a person's body chemistry changes to handle the threatening situation. Blood pressure increases, heart beats increase, blood goes to the vital organs of the body and hormone levels increase. The body adapts to either fight or flee.

Cardiologists have used anger to categorize people into either Type A or Type B personalities. The type A's are the individuals having a short fuse. They drive themselves and others to the physical limits. These are the individuals who have heart attacks, high blood pressure and possibly a stroke.

The type B individuals have a long fuse, are driven, but are also kind to themselves and others. These type B people are relatively relaxed and tend to roll with the punches. Type A people in contrast fight every punch, instead of rolling with it. When a type A person has a heart attack or life threatening high blood pressure, medical advice is for the person to make major lifestyle changes in his or her life.

Usually these changes focus on diet, fitness, and emotional well being. These type A people are told to become Type B people otherwise they will die. Diet and fitness strengthen the body, but emotional fitness is just as vital. Coping skills are revised, triggers for anger are identified through attitude and behavior changes.

So how does an individual make major lifestyle change? First, an attitude needs to be taken of making lifestyle changes to save one's life, even if no medical condition exists. Second, personal responsibility for

behavior, emotions and attitudes needs to be taken. Third, setting limits with others is necessary. Fourth, a problem solving attitude needs to be utilized to effectively change the situation.

Dissecting each of the above steps shows this process is not accomplished overnight nor is it easily done. The first step implies that a person realizes he or she has a problem and something needs to happen. A person learns to become kinder to himself or herself. This is done by not being so hard on oneself and stop emotionally blackmailing or flogging oneself.

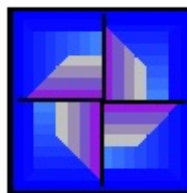
Often, this emotional blackmail or flogging can produce depressing situations. If the person does not adopt a "be kinder" self attitude, then ineffective coping mechanisms surface. These can include self medication through food, alcohol, and/ or drugs to help numb the pain. Self-destructive behaviors, which consist of any behavior taken to extremes, can emerge to redirect a person's depressing situation.

Responsibility in the second step reflects an ability to separate the issues. For example, instead of blaming others for one's problems, the individual takes ownership of his or her part in creating the problem. This does not mean the other person is not responsible for his or her part of the problem. When a person takes personal responsibility for his or her part, the problem can be addressed.

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Written by:

**Kathy Miller, MS, LPC/MHSP**  
**Licensed Professional Counselor/  
Mental Health Service Provider**



**The Mid-South Center  
for the Treatment of  
Trauma & Dissociation**  
4646 Poplar Ave.  
Suite 424  
Memphis, TN 38117  
901-767-4748

One needs to not overcompensate by being responsible for one's actions instead of blaming the other party. For example, if a person is angry about someone being intrusive, appropriate responsibility would be to see if he or she is allowing the other to be intrusive. Inappropriate responsibility would be to feel guilty for being selfish by not allowing this person to be intrusive.

To help separate the issues, asking the simple question of, "Is it true?", clarifies where responsibility lies. This question helps in setting limits with the other person, so you know where you stop and the other person begins. To do this provides a more effective defense mechanism, because the emotional blackmail can be avoided.

A choice is involved in setting limits with others. When making a choice, personal responsibility for feelings, behaviors and thoughts are appropriately placed. The magic word "MAKE" loses its power. In fact no one can make a person do anything he or she does not choose to do!

To develop a problem solving attitude requires two ears. So the key to implementing this attitude is to be able to **LISTEN AND HEAR** what the other person is saying. Usually individuals listen very little and react a lot. When a person is in a react mode, he or she has stopped listening to the other person and is formulating his or her response.

The type of language used can help promote a problem solving attitude. Aggressive statements which have "you" in them, blame the other for your problems. Blaming statements escalate angry feelings. The use of assertive statements can convey the same message, but in a non-blaming manner. "I" statements are non-blaming statements.

By taking an assertive stance, anger can then become a problem solving experience. I have a hunch someone is asking the question, "What if the other person doesn't follow the rules?" I still believe that we each have a choice. I can choose to react or not to react. Having a healthy sense of self, plus being able to separate the issues, allows a person to effectively manage his or her anger.

To tell you not to get angry is silly. It would be like telling you not to eat or sleep. A person can do without food or rest for a short period, but the physiological response returns. A benefit of effectively managing anger is the ability to release the anger. In other words, a person does not get stuck in the rut of always being angry. The person gets angry, resolves the anger and then lets it go.

In a relationship, whether it is marital, friendship or work, arguments are a fact of life. Often conflict can be a forum to get the aggravating issues out in the open. So in this sense, conflict is good. When it turns bad is when the conflict becomes ugly and words are used to inflict

pain on the other person.

Interestingly, the content of the argument is not what really is the true issue of the conflict. Take for instance an argument over what is watched on television, the true issue is about being able to have the power and control to be the one who chooses the program to watch. The major issues of any relationship revolve around these topics: power, control, closeness, distance, dependence, independence, vulnerability and intimacy. When an argument is consistently about one of these issues, an imbalance is felt by one person in the relationship.

It seems as though the little kid in us all is hooked and emotional needs previously not met resurface. Another aspect of relationships is the criticalness of "talking down" to the other person. The parent within us all is then hooked and emerges. Usually people cope in relationships from these two realities.

Communicated messages define the reality of the little kid or the critical parent. Take for instance an exchange that consists of one person asking for help, the other saying okay, then the first person getting angry about being told what to do. To map this exchange out, the communication pattern is: child to parent, parent to child then child to parent.

When communication patterns have ulterior motives, an intended message is hidden. An example of this would be the "would you like to come up to my room to see my etchings?" line used by couples. The ulterior message is "let's have sex . . . who cares about the stupid etchings!"

To fight fair, the adult within us needs to emerge. The adult deals with facts, logic and problem solving. To evolve to the adult reality, individuals need to adjust either up or down his or her usual operating mode. If one person needs to be constantly taken care of, self sufficiency needs to be developed. If one person is the take charge, responsible type, he or she needs to allow the other person to be more responsible for his or her behavior.

By doing this, the equilibrium of the relationship can be restored. Another benefit of having an adult perspective, is the emerging of three entities in the relationship: the two people and the relationship. The communication process becomes more genuine, leading to an increase in intimacy.

### Suggested Readings

*The Dance of Anger* by: Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

*The Dance of Connection* by: Harriet Lerner, PhD

*Who's Pushing Your Buttons* by: John Townsend.

*Happiness is an Inside Job* by: John Powell

*Children of the Self Absorbed* by: Nina Brown