



06 Anger Fighter Skills Builder
Let Go Of Things You
Cannot Change

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Fiore
couples counseling

Welcome to program 6 in the series:

7 anger fighter skills for couples - a practical skill-building program to keep anger from jeopardizing your marriage or relationship.

Written by Dr. Tony Fiore, psychologist, marriage therapist and anger management expert. This audio series was developed by Dr Fiore to serve as a resource for partners struggling with anger issues. It can be used as a supplement for people in anger management programs or couples therapy, or as a stand-alone self-help resource for couples not currently in therapy.

Resentment is a form of anger. The dictionary defines it as “bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly.”

Most of you have probably heard that we should not hold resentments toward events or people who we feel have wronged us in some way. We have heard that holding resentments is bad for our health, our marriages and our families. . Most world religions include teachings on forgiveness, which provide guidance for the practice of forgiveness.

Even Martin Luther King said:

*“Darkness cannot drive out darkness.
Only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate.
Only love can do that.”*

Yet, on a personal level, many angry partners are angry because they are unable to let go of resentment or grievances, even though they agree with the concept in theory.

It is amazing how long some people can hold on to resentments, yet still manage to function in their marriage. But, fact is, resentments are the “elephant in the room.” Imagine a husband and wife sitting on the living room couch trying to hug each other with a huge elephant between them, which both pretend doesn’t exist.

Resentments block love

Resentments block love from being able to exist between two people, just as surely as a cork in a bottle prevents sweet aromas at the bottom of the bottle from getting out. Although not usually seen this way, resentment puts us in a victim position toward the one that we resent.

Holding resentment is a way that we allow the other person to live in our head – rent free – while they go on with their lives. We may live a life of anger and bitterness while they go on unscathed. Sometimes our resentment is constantly fed by their continuing to do what we feel resentment about, but other times our resentment may be based on something that happened years ago which your partner can’t change or do anything about now.

Resentments inhibit our ability to empathize

As hurt and resentment accumulate in a relationship, it becomes harder and harder to empathize with your partner’s experience, because you have so much unheard and uncared-for pain of your own. When too much unattended pain is allowed to foment between people, it can be nearly impossible to listen to, much less care about, each other’s experience. Over time, unhealed wounds create a relationship in which there’s no space left to be heard, and no place where some injustice or hurt from the past doesn’t disqualify your right to kindness and support — and your ability to give your partner kindness and support.

It is difficult to have any semblance of emotional connection or intimacy when one or both partners has a heart of stone toward the other because of accumulated resentment.

The all-time winner of holding on to resentment

Although there is no clear scientific evidence for this, the perception out there is that wives hold on to resentments and hurts more than husbands do. Many beleaguered husbands that have sought us for consultation through the years lament that it is though their wives carry a gunnysack full of resentments around with them often some of which are many years old. Whenever a fight comes up, they say, their wives (“who never forget ANYTHING and remember EVERYTHING ”), reach into their gunnysack, pull out an old resentment and symbolically whack them over the head with it.

Dr Fiore reports that in his 40 years experience, the winner of the “gunnysack” award, hands down, goes to Anna, a 45 year old wife of a teacher who sought consultation for marital conflict. In the middle of the consultation, Ann was asked what bothered her most about her marriage of 25 years. She didn’t mention money problems, household chores problems, parenting conflict or sex problems.

Her biggest complaint after a 25 year long marriage was: “He didn’t buy me the wedding ring he promised me during our engagement.”

In protest, her husband chimed back: “That was because I was a poor teacher at the time. However, if you will recall, 10 years later I bought you a \$20,000 ring that I thought you would like.”

Her angry response: “The ring was nice but it wasn’t there on our wedding day like you promised.”

THE FABLE OF THE WOLF

Reminds us of an old story: The Fable of the Wolf.

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is angry, has envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

Learning to Deal With Resentment Is a 4-step Choice called the DARE Process:

Step 1 - Decide to give up your resentment. Resentful partners can only be less resentful if they decide to be. Resentful partners can only be less resentful if they decide to be; at some point the offender partner can do no more to fix things or take away the hurt . He or she often cannot change what happened that is causing the resentment. The ball is in the court of the partner holding the resentment.

Step 2 - Acknowledge your feelings and talk about them instead of trying to ignore them. If something is bothering you about your partner or what they did or didn't do, tell them. They have a right to know!

Step 3 - Remember your tools of giving up resentment and practice them daily. For instance, keep a gratitude journal. Or, make a conscious attempt to focus on the positives of your partner instead of the negatives.

Step 4 - Execute winning communication strategies such as the "communication wheel" instead of sitting in resentment. Using the communication wheel you start by calmly telling your partner what he or she did that bothered you. You then tell them how that made you feel and what you told yourself about what happened. Finally, you make a request as to what you would like them to do instead in the future. Works great once you learn how to do it!



Letting go has huge payoffs

The payoff of letting it go is huge! Forgiveness is an essential component of successful romantic relationships. In fact, recent studies show that capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most significant factors contributing to marital satisfaction and a lifetime of love.

Forgiving yourself and others is about being willing to acknowledge that you are capable of being wounded. It also means that you are willing to step out from the role of victim and take charge of your life.

Couples who practice forgiveness can rid themselves of the toxic hurt and shame that holds them back from feeling connected to each other. Dr. John Gottman, a leading marriage researcher, explains that emotional attunement is a skill that allows couples to fully process and move on from negative emotional events, and ultimately create a stronger bond. Create that bond by letting go of those resentments!



This was the sixth program in a series of 7 Anger Fighter Audio Programs for Couples available at fiorecouplescounseling.com/angerfighters.