

## Peace on the Home-front - Striving for an Emotionally Healthy Home

### **Introduction:**

In contemplating what I would talk about today, I researched all the good books I know and scoured the internet, then came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to do some field research. Where better to start than in my own home! So, trying to be nonchalant and at the same time hoping for some earthshattering truth that would make everything make perfect sense, I casually asked my husband, “so you know this workshop I’m doing, well I wanted to run some things by you and ask you some questions...” I paused as I was somewhat nervous about what he would say and I thought he would be too, given the fact that he is married to a psychologist. I guess I was nervous because I felt that if the answer somehow reflected on me and my inadequacies to have achieved peace and happiness at home, I would have failed. After all, helping people be more emotionally healthy is what I do for a living! After making a joke about the fact that we women should be making more sandwiches and doing exactly as we are told, he then gave me a knowing look and said, “there’s just one thing I would say, in all seriousness, I want the woman to realise how beautiful she is just the way she is, to love herself and for her to stop putting herself down”.

He had not given me the answer I was expecting, and more-so he had gone straight to the core of my own insecurity and put a soothing balm on that wound. Perhaps, it was his chance to make me feel somewhat guilty for the times that I had complained and gotten cranky about him never doing enough to help out with the housework, you know, get some brownie points! But in reality, what he was telling me was that acknowledging my own value and worth was what would make the home a healthier place. After all, this is what we are modelling to our spouses and children.

I hope today to come along-side you to help you feel empowered to go back to your homes with perhaps a slightly different perspective, some renewed thinking, and a sense of your value and worth as a powerful influence in your home.

**SLIDE** What do you think of when I say home?

Ice-breaker: Turn to the lady beside you and tell them how you feel when you think of home (1 minute)

I love what I do for work, but when I get to the end of my day, I love going home. Home is a place where you can throw down your bag, put on your daggiest comfortable clothes, and really remove all the burdens from the day. Home should be a place of tranquility. Somewhere to shut yourself off from the world, feel safe and recharge. For many people though, this is not at all what they experience. I see many clients who are miserable at home. They hate going home as it is a place of conflict and tension. For some of us home can feel more like a battlefield where we have to keep the armour on and can never rest or let our guard down. My house certainly sometimes looks like a bomb went off in it! For most of us, our homes are somewhere in between an oasis and a battlefield, as we strive for peace.

What robs us of having peace in our homes?

Possible responses: Bad communication, being busy and stressed, conflict and anger, suppressing our true feelings.

I imagine many of us will have been fortunate enough to have some healthy and positive experiences growing up in your family of origin, and I'm sure that most of you would have had some negative experiences in your childhood homes to some degree. The good news is that the negative experiences and feelings, if managed in the right way can lead to growth, greater strength of family bonds and development of character. They are almost unavoidable in every home and neither can we ignore them or get rid of them.

In striving for a peaceful home, we as Christians often consider some emotions unacceptable and feel guilty or even ashamed when we experience them.

**Slide 3:**

Geri Scazzero is the wife of Peter Scazzero who many of you would know as the author of the book, 'The Emotionally Healthy Church' and 'Emotionally Healthy Spirituality'. Geri has authored a book called, 'The Emotionally Healthy Woman' and in this she says, "The ways we express and respond to certain emotions are directly related to how they were handled in our family of origin. If your parents or care-givers were limited in their range of thoughts and feelings, it naturally follows that your range of acceptable wishes and emotions is also restricted". We pick up on unspoken rules as we grow up which contribute to our emotional and spiritual formation. We might have been told to 'keep your chin up and be strong' which translated into 'to be sad is to be weak and being weak is bad'. Or even Bible texts such as "the joy of the Lord is your strength" which we may have translated into, "you know you are close with God and have strong faith when you are happy all the time". As wonderful as this sounds, confusion comes when we find ourselves feeling less than happy. So how is it that 'good Christians feel hurt, upset or angry if they have the joy of the Lord as their strength?

The Bible affirms the human experience because Jesus was a man of sorrows, familiar with pain (Isaiah 53:3) and documents the experience of its writers in their lamenting, pain, sorrow, complaint and anger. Scripture considers the expression of these feelings as part of our spiritual growth and an unavoidable part of our human experience. So, sadness, anger or fear become a normal part of our lives and don't lead to shame or guilt but equips us to know how to reach out to others who feel pain or anger too. In Mark 11:15 we read about Jesus driving people out of the temple. He walked into the temple and gave everyone the silent treatment for 40 days and 40 nights. Is that right? No, "He knocked over the tables of money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, and he stopped everyone from using the temple as a marketplace." Jesus was not always meek and mild, and did not deny his expression of righteous anger.

Anger can be an emotion that motivates us to stand up for what is right. But, it can also be used in an unhealthy manner. Because we are flawed as humans we don't always

express our emotions in a healthy and constructive way. It can sometimes look like overturned tables, but it can also look very different in our interactions at home, often coming out as sarcasm, depression from repressed anger, or a critical attitude. The lie we often believe is that

Let's dare for a while to explore these feelings further:

## 1. Anger

**Slide:** What is anger?

Anger is a normal emotion experienced by everyone at different times. People usually feel angry as a reaction to their thoughts about a situation **(Slide)**. Anger is often considered to be a 'secondary feeling' as it is usually an expression of an underlying 'primary feeling' such as:

- Hurt
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Disappointment
- Worry or fear
- Jealousy
- Confusion
- Rejection
- Embarrassment or shame
- Powerlessness

**(Slide)** For example, if someone criticises me (Situation) I often become angry and my immediate instinct is to become defensive (thought about the situation, "how dare they, who do they think they are?" which may lead me to lash out in some way, perhaps a verbal comment or ignore or avoid that person. I may even seek validation from others who might give me more positive feedback. But, when I reflect on what is behind my anger, it is fear of inadequacy. The criticism makes me question whether I am good enough. If my friends organise to go out for dinner and don't contact me to invite me to join them, I feel angry, but behind that anger is a profound sense of rejection and sadness.

For most people expressing anger feels less vulnerable than expressing the underlying feeling. When angry we can ask ourselves, "What am I afraid of? Sad about? Disappointed with? What is really going on behind my anger?"

## **Fear**

**SLIDE:** Let's explore further the underlying feeling of fear from which anger often stems. Being angry at our loved ones in our home can mask the fear we have of admitting our own flaws and taking responsibility for a situation that may be less than perfect.

Fear is designed to be a helpful and natural response to perceived threat and danger to keep us safe. If our heart did not beat faster and our stomachs tighten when we saw a dangerous animal coming towards us, we would not take action to get away from the

danger. This is a 'real' threat. But we can also have a reaction of fear towards what we call 'perceived threats'.

Psychologist Michael Yapko conducted a 30 year study on fear and identified 3 general categories of fear:

1. The fear of making mistakes: the fear of being criticised or disappointing themselves and others lead them to having unrealistic expectations of themselves and others.
2. The fear of rejection: makes a person afraid of meeting new people and trying new things due to appearing inadequate or being judged in some way.
3. The fear of consequences from relaxing: If they let their guard down and fail to defend themselves they will get hurt.

For many families the source of anger and conflict are underlying fears. Fears around money, security, health, children, relationships, the future.

**Maslow's hierarchy of needs** is a theory in **psychology** proposed by **Abraham Maslow** in 1943. Maslow used the terms "physiological", "safety", "belongingness" and "love", "esteem", "self-actualization", and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through.

### **Unmet Expectations**

At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled. ~Marshall B. Rosenberg

Anger can be an indicator of unmet expectations in a relationship. Our expectations about a relationship come from our deeply held beliefs about what a relationship 'should' be like (core beliefs). These core beliefs are shaped by our observations and experiences with relationships as we grow up which teach us what to expect. Because we believe our partner should be attentive to our needs we can often assume that they will know what we want in a situation before we tell them. This assumption is called, 'mind-reading' and is a thinking mistake that we very commonly make.

Consider how you feel when someone is angry with you because you didn't fulfil their expectations, yet they never communicated this to you, they simply assumed you should know. The problem is that we have expectations that are unconscious (we are not even aware of them), unrealistic (we have illusions or idealisation of how things should be), and unagreed upon (the other person was never consulted and never said yes to them).

You may feel angry that your spouse doesn't call you from work during the day to see how you are. You believed they should just know to call you, but you never asked them to so do and they were not aware that you had this expectation.

You ask your spouse to pick up milk on the way home and they come home with full-cream instead of the light A2 omega enhanced milk you always get! Shouldn't he know that?

- ❖ To have our expectations fulfilled we need to be clear and communicate our needs well.

It may also involve adjusting those expectations to be more in line with reality.

If we understand anger to be secondary to other feelings, it can reveal underlying strongholds that could be causing us to sin. Anger may reveal feelings of arrogance, jealousy, criticism, hatred, resentment or vengeance. We can notice these being expressed is cutting remarks, sarcasm, blaming, and when we take out these feelings on someone else who does not deserve it, and this can be sinful.

**SLIDE:** Anger is such a complex emotion, we need to evaluate it more closely by asking a few helpful questions to process it before taking any action: Is this misplaced blame for which I need to take responsibility? Is my anger justified or is it coming from the worst in me? Is there anyone from whom I need to ask forgiveness for wounding with my anger?

Aristotle rightly said: “Anyone can be angry, that is easy...but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way...this is not easy.” Taking responsibility for our anger and the underlying feelings, and processing them in the right way is a huge step towards having an emotionally healthy home.

Whatever the reason behind it, there’s nothing wrong with feeling angry. What is important is how you cope with, and express, angry feelings. Anger that isn’t managed well can have an impact on your relationships, as well as your physical and emotional health.

Men and women often, but not always, manage and express anger in different ways. With men, anger may be the primary emotion, as they may find it harder to express the feelings underneath the anger, like hurt, sadness or grief. For women the reverse may often be true - the anger gets buried under tears.

## Physical effects of anger

The best remedy for a short temper is a long walk. ~Jacqueline Schiff

Anger, fear or excitement triggers the body’s ‘fight or flight, or freeze’ response which helps us to react when we feel under threat whether it be a real threat or a perceived one. The adrenal glands flood the body with stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol.

The brain shunts blood away from the gut and towards the muscles, in preparation for physical exertion. Heart rate, blood pressure and respiration increase, the body temperature rises and the skin perspires. The mind is sharpened and focused.

The body will often tell you that you’re angry before your brain realises. As we learn to manage this state of hyperarousal, we have more opportunity to connect with what we may actually be feeling.

Do breathing exercise.

## Unhelpful ways to deal with anger

**SLIDE:** Many people express their anger in inappropriate and harmful ways, including:

- **Anger explosions** – some people have very little control over their anger and tend to explode in rages, lashing out at something or someone. Raging anger may lead to physical abuse or violence. A person who doesn’t control their temper can isolate themselves from

family and friends. Some people who fly into rages have low self-esteem, and use their anger as a way to manipulate others and feel powerful.

- **Anger repression** – when we consider that anger is an inappropriate or ‘bad’ emotion, we often choose to suppress it and we withdraw from the situation. However, bottled anger often turns into depression and anxiety. Some people vent their bottled anger at innocent parties, such as children or pets. It is then often expressed more subtly disguised as sarcasm, changes in our tone of voice, and rejecting or critical body language. If we feel we don’t have permission to express our anger we find other avenues such as complaining, blaming, criticizing, or defending, because ignoring it will not make it just disappear. If you bottle up your anger, you might find that it comes out in ways you don’t expect.

When we are angry we blame others, which can feel like a temporary comfort, but essentially gives the illusion of helplessness by believing that we don’t have any choice or responsibility to change things.

Source: [http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip\\_sheets/anger](http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/anger)

Some people used to believe that venting anger was beneficial. Researchers have now found that ‘letting it rip’ actually escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to resolve the situation. On the other hand, sitting on your anger and not expressing it may lead to the pressure cooker experience that many people are familiar with. Expressing some feelings of anger in a controlled way, rather than bottling it up, gives you an opportunity to release some of your underlying feelings, so that you can start to tackle the issues that are making you angry.

### **Anger can be healthy**

The world needs anger. The world often continues to allow evil because it isn't angry enough.  
~Bede Jarrett

Anger can be used in a healthy way to motivate you to act on an injustice, assert oneself, and to serve others. It can be a warning light on life’s dashboard to indicate that we need to pay attention to a particular issue, and urging us to stop and pay attention to our internal engine. Geri Scezzaro also points out that anger can also come bearing gifts as it can help us to discover what is really important to us, get us to pay attention to deeper emotions and inner workings, help us to identify unmet expectations and sometimes see where we are doing things wrong. It can allow us to reflect on our values (that which are most important to us in life), what we want and don’t want.

Anger is also a warning sign to let us know that our personal boundaries have been crossed and prompts us to ask, “What is being violated that is important to me”? Think of a mother whose children have been mistreated by the school bully. Would it be acceptable for her to feel angry? And would that anger motivate her to act on this? Anger serves to alert this mother that her value of being able to protect her children and raising them in a respectful and fair environment has been violated.

When we are being disrespected, when too much of our self is being compromised in a relationship, when we are pressured to do more than we want to commit to, or when we say yes when we really mean no our values are being violated.

God also equipped us with creativity and perseverance which means that we often try many different ways of dealing with a situation even if they aren’t healthy. Be kind on yourself and have

grace, we are often more tough on ourselves than anyone else, but we are always learning how to deal with difficult situations better.

### **Self-care**

As busy Christian women we try to take on everything because we are led to believe the lie that unless we are constantly busy we are a failure or we are useless. The pressure and stress we are under can leak out into our homes and begin to break down the sense of sanctuary and safety at home. In Geri's book called, 'The Emotionally Healthy Woman' she challenges women to quit...(SLIDE) She writes, "Traditionally, the Christian community hasn't placed much value on quitting. In fact, just the opposite is true, it is endurance and perseverance we most esteem." She says, "Quitting is about dying to the things that are not of God...quitting itself isn't just an end; it is also a beginning".

1. **Quit self-denial (this is all about self-care).** To quit denying our anger, sadness and fear.
  1. Acknowledge and make room for your feelings: We don't want to be driven by our emotions, but we don't want to ignore them until they fester and build. Explore your feelings in the presence of God by journaling to avoid suppressing feelings and reflect on them sooner rather than later. This can happen a few times a week.
  2. Think through your feelings: "What are the reasons I feel this way?" Is it an indication that your boundaries have been crossed or one of your values has been compromised?
  3. Take appropriate action: Our impulsiveness will make us want to act in a way that won't be helpful such as blaming others and criticizing, and sometimes the most appropriate action will take some time to determine. It may even take time to learn new skills such as listening and communicating well, being assertive or clarifying your values and expectations.

God does not ask us to die to the healthy anger that gets us out of bed to assert our boundaries, but he asks us to die to the unhealthy anger that we hold onto such as judgmentalism, criticism and resentment.

2. Quit over-functioning and overcommitting:
  - Emotionally healthy woman: Understand your human limits and set loving boundaries around yourself to protect your limits. Our gift of service to others is no longer a gift when it comes at a great expense of our own well-being.
  - A flight attendant giving the safety instructions are preparing you for a crisis and what they will tell you is to place the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting others. When striving for an emotionally healthy home we must first put the 'oxygen mask' on before we try to meet the needs of everyone else.
3. Quit dying to the wrong things
  - We die to the wrong things when we set aside or devalue activities that cause us to feel fully free and alive. Things like music, writing, art, being outdoors); when we ignore important relationships; when we care for others to the detriment of ourselves; and when we fail to be assertive and honest about our needs and preferences, always deferring to others first and putting their needs above our own.

**SLIDE** – Your self-care...?

In pairs, talk about some things that you might already be doing to take care of yourself, and talk about how you feel you might be dying to the wrong things.

**4. Quit Faulty Thinking:**

- Faulty thinking is harmful to emotional and spiritual health. Geri Scazzero talks about 3 types of faulty thinking:
- 1. All-or-nothing thinking
- 2. Taking things personally
- 3. Thinking things will never change

Correcting distortions:

<b>Faulty Thinking</b>	<b>Accurate Thinking</b>
My husband will never change	If God can change me, God can change my husband. I can also develop new strategies for relating to my husband that may help our relationship
Our family dinner was ruined tonight when my son's mobile phone went off	I felt irritated when the mobile phone went off, but there were other good parts to the meal and I was able to be with my family
Man can't be trusted	I was once betrayed by a man, but I know other men who are faithful and trustworthy
I'm a loser because my marriage has ended	I have learned some helpful things from the painful end of this relationship. And I am still successful in other areas of my life.
My daughter complains about everything	She has areas of her life that are difficult, but she doesn't complain about her appearance, her friends or her favourite music.
I feel completely stressed out	I am stressed out about having a lot of work to do, but many other areas in my life are not stressful. I have a good church, good health and good friendships.

**Control your thinking**



When you're angry, your thinking can get exaggerated and irrational. Try replacing these kinds of thoughts with more useful, rational ones and you should find that this has an effect on the way you feel. **SLIDE** For example, instead of telling yourself 'I can't stand it, it's awful and everything's ruined', tell yourself 'It's frustrating, and it's understandable that I'm upset about it, but it's not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix it'.

Develop a list of things to say to yourself before, during and after situations that may make you angry. It is more helpful if these things focus on how you are managing the situation rather than what other people should be doing. Psychologists call this type of thinking 'self-talk'.

**Before:**

- 'I'll be able to handle this. It could be rough, but I have a plan.'
- 'If I feel myself getting angry, I'll know what to do.'

**During:**

5. 'Stay calm, relax, and breathe easy.'
6. 'Stay calm, I'm OK, s/he's not attacking me personally.'
7. 'I can look and act calm.'

**After:**

- 'I managed that well. I can do this. I'm getting better at this.'
- 'I felt angry, but I didn't lose my cool.'

5. Quit listening to lies:

- We all have formed an inner voice which consists of our core beliefs about how life 'should' work. This affects the way we appraise or interpret situations and interaction in our lives. More often we tend to lie to ourselves and have unspoken rules that are emotionally unhealthy:
  - Don't show your feelings
  - Don't talk back
  - Always be nice
  - Don't fight
  - Always be good
  - Always be on time
  - Mistakes can kill, never make one

When these rules are unconsciously carried into adulthood and never challenged they can set up unrealistic expectations. How can I be angry when I am supposed to be nice all the time?

Lying on the inside can make it hard for us to love others. The inner conflict created causes us to repress our true feelings and can cause anger to smoulder under our loving external Christian demeanour.

Most of us believe that conflict is a sign of something going wrong, but the reverse is often true. It may indicate that something is going right. Conflict is normal, important and necessary when close relationships are growing and maturing.

So when we die to the lies and speak the truth, it does not always mean that we will have a good response from the listener, but it is necessary in order for the relationship to grow. Truth spoken irresponsibly or disrespectfully almost always causes unnecessary damage. Speaking the truth in love involves choosing the right timing, using words respectfully, taking responsibility for our own thoughts, feelings and actions; and speaking in the "I". We are not born with these skills, they must be learned and practised. When we phrase our truth-telling in the "you" we can almost always be assured that the other person feels blamed or accused.

Think about your last conflict with a loved one at home, and talk with the lady next to you truthfully about what you feel went wrong in your communication.

### **Listening/communication skills**

**Source:** <http://au.reachout.com/tips-for-communicating>

### **The art of truthful communication (read examples from page: 58/59)**

1. **Respectful: Think before you speak in order to describe carefully what you want to say. Be polite, not insulting, taking the other person's feelings into account.**
2. **Honest:**

## **Styles of communication**

Communication can be expressed in an aggressive, passive or assertive style.

**Aggressive Communication** is expressed in a forceful and hostile manner, and usually involves alienating messages such as you-statements (blaming the other person and accusing them of being wrong or at fault) and labelling.

In addition, the person's tone of voice and facial expressions are unfriendly. The assumption behind aggressive communication is 'Your needs don't matter' (I win/you lose).

**Passive Communication** involves putting your needs last. You don't express your thoughts or feelings, or ask for what you want. When you use passive communication it feels like others are walking all over you because you don't assert your own needs. So, you bottle things up and might feel resentful. The assumption behind passive communication is 'My needs don't matter' (You win/I lose).

**Assertive Communication** involves clearly expressing what you think, how you feel and what you want, without demanding that you must have things your way. The basic underlying assumption is 'We both matter – let's try to work this out'.

Assertive communication increases your likelihood of getting what you want, avoiding conflict and maintaining good relationships (I win/you win). When you are assertive you can:

- Express your own thoughts, feelings and needs.
- Make reasonable requests of other people (while accepting their right to say 'no').
- Stand up for your own rights.
- Say 'no' to requests from others at times, without feeling guilty.

## Having difficult conversations

One of the most effective ways of communicating is to use whole messages. This is particularly useful when you need to raise an issue that is difficult to talk about, or makes you feel uncomfortable. A whole message involves expressing how you think and feel, while at the same time stating what you want. It consists of four parts:

### 1. Observations:

Describe what happened:

(e.g. 'The other day when Mike came over you didn't stop and talk to him.').

### 2. Thoughts:

Your beliefs, opinions or interpretation of what happened:

(e.g. 'I thought it looked rude - as though you don't like him.').

### 3. Feelings:

How you feel about the situation:

(e.g. 'I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable.').

### 4. Wants:

What you would like to happen in the situation:

(e.g. 'Next time he comes over, I'd like you to say 'hi' and to make an effort to talk to him.').

## Why listen?

Listening isn't just the part of communication where you take breaths.

Source: <http://au.reachout.com/listening-skills-worth-having>

## How to be an expert listener

### Let them talk

If someone's telling you something difficult or important for them, don't cut over them with a story about yourself, even if it's relevant. Let them finish and try to work out what it means to them.

### **Don't judge**

If someone comes to you with a problem, try to be a friend without saying things that might damage them. Work through whatever they're dealing with and suggest options rather than passing judgement.

### **Let someone disagree**

If someone comes to you for help and you listen to them, tell them what you'd do or give them advice, that's great. But that advice may not work, or they might not agree with what you say. And that's okay, let them do that.

### **Ask good questions**

What are good questions? Open questions that let the speaker go anywhere. Instead of asking "yes/no"-style questions, think about "how does that work" or "tell me about...".

### **Show them you're listening**

People will trust you more if they can see you're listening to them. Ask questions about what they're saying, and put it back to them in different words to see if you've gotten it right.

### **Body language**

Having open, relaxed body language – facing a person, not too close, and making occasional eye contact – will make whoever's talking to you more comfortable.

## **Know when to get help**

If there are problems you can't solve despite your best efforts (or maybe even don't want to hear about), try to find someone who can help deal with it.

### **Developing and having respect**

We develop respect when we model and have respect for others. We need to try and be the change we want to see at home and model that to our loved ones.

“Forget what hurt you in the past, but never forget what it taught you. However, if it taught you to hold onto grudges, seek revenge, not forgive or show compassion, to categorize people as good or bad, to distrust and be guarded with your feelings then you didn't learn a thing. God doesn't bring you lessons to close your heart. He brings you lessons to open it, by developing compassion, learning to listen, seeking to understand instead of speculating, practicing empathy and developing conflict resolution through communication. If he brought you perfect people, how would you ever learn to spiritually grow?”

– Shannon L. Alder

*We live with imperfect people in our homes, which can bring about challenges in keeping the peace. But we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and can be the change we want to see in our homes.*