

# How to Respond to a Passive Angry Person (PAP)

## I. Definition

- A. The overt angry person displays his anger openly; you can visually see and hear when he is angry.
- B. The passively angry person can be just as full of rage but demonstrates it in covert, secret, subtle or devious ways. He exerts his will passively. He is full of anger but is not loud, harsh or ranting and raving. He is a master at acting out his anger without the slightest hint of being agitated (Let's, p. 66).
- C. In order to identify a passively angry person, you have to look for a pattern, not just a single instance (Let's, p. 65).
- D. Historical root of the PAP: harsh, forceful parent, sibling bullying; unkind, rejecting peer group. A hostile environment never let him learn to develop confidence in healthy problem solving.

## II. Common Traits of a Passive Angry Person

- A. **Evasive**: He will deliberately avoid any attempt to be held accountable for his actions or attitudes. He views the world as a hostile and fearful place and to survive he has to build a solid wall of protection and withdraw (Let's, p. 68). He believes the lie that even God will not give him the inner strength to deal with the challenging issues of life and relationships (Phil. 1:6; 4:13).
- B. **Stonewall**: He will withdraw and give one the silent treatment rather than outwardly display any disapproval. The silent treatment is a way to punish people. It is designed to inflict emotional pain. It is overt rejection.
- C. **Procrastinate**: He will put off indefinitely fulfilling a promise or a task and will give a long list of excuses for not accomplishing a task.
- D. **Lazy**: Because he does not want to invest energy into responding outwardly in anger, he tends to reduce his energy expenditure and becomes lazy. He can appear sloppy or disorganized and have a mess everywhere. He gives things half hearted efforts; just enough to give the vague impression he is trying.
- E. **Break Promises**: In order to get someone off his back or to avoid confrontation, he will make a promise knowing full well he is not going to follow through.
- F. **Outward Compliance**: He agrees or says what he thinks the other person wants to hear, then, turns right around and does the opposite. He refuses to

cooperate or comply with others' wishes. He will say whatever it takes to appease anyone who is a threat to him.

- G. **Denial**: In order to reduce any guilt or shame or incur an obligation, he will avoid becoming knowledgeable of anyone's needs or difficulty. He will seldom acknowledge any of his shortcomings,
- H. **Unfriendly**: Every effort is made to give the outward appearance of friendliness, but over the long haul, he will not behave as a friend.
- I. **Secretive**: In order to avoid any disclosure, he will do things secretly out of others' view. He doesn't trust anyone. He avoids opportunities to be open for fear he will risk losing power or will be emotionally hurt or criticized.
- J. **Disregards Time**: He knows he can create frustration in the lives of those he harbors anger against by being too late or even too early. Remember, the goal is to inflict emotional pain out of desire for control or revenge.
- K. **Uncaring**: One of his hallmarks is an attitude of carelessness, either for things or relationships.
- L. **Non-Confrontational**: He may complain about something behind another's back but at all costs refuses to discuss problems openly because of a lack of trust in his own abilities to manage conflicts successfully (Let's, p. 67). He never learned to challenge the wrong done to him in the past or how to talk adult-to-adult and challenge those who were controllers, overbearing or who invalidated his opinions.
- M. **Irresponsible**: He resents any responsibilities imposed on him; therefore, he is very unreliable.
- N. **Unteachable**: He is unwilling to learn from others unless it benefits him.
- O. **Uncooperative**: He will do what he wants when he wants and no one (including God) is going to tell him how to run his life (Let's, p. 66). His anger drives him to be uncooperative. In fact, as the PAP senses that you need his cooperation, it only energizes his feelings of power. You may be surprised to learn he actually enjoys knowing that he can frustrate you (Let's, p. 75). His goal is to prove you can't impose your desires on him. Requests are not viewed as topics to discuss and to negotiate but the beginning of competition and prove that he, not you, is in the driver's seat relationally.
- P. **Pessimistic**: Due to his pessimism about life, he feels justified in keeping others (including family) at arm's distance.
- Q. **Defensive**: He is very defensive in personal exchanges. He may justify his own position and denounce others' thoughts and feelings or he may choose to defend himself by withdrawing (crawling into his own cave) to prevent expressing his real thoughts. He may adopt an adversarial (defensive) role to protect himself.

- R. **Unaccountable**: Out of fear of losing control, he has a high need to control which leads him to evade the normal obligations of his relationships. He will be angry, wily and slip out of any opportunity if someone is imposing their preferences on him. He can't believe others do not want to control him; therefore, he refuses any accountability. Being held accountable for a promise or obligation scares him because he may have to consider someone else's preferences or ideas and perhaps give preference over his own (Rom. 12:10).
- S. **Loners**: He is so consumed with maintaining power and control, he willingly forgoes any meaningful relationship or significant communication. He believes that the less people know about his personal life, the better off he is (Rom. 14:7).
- T. **Unpredictable**: Like walking through a minefield, you never know when he is going to suddenly disappoint you or create an unexpected conflict.
- U. **Inferior**: The PAP's behavior is an over-compensation for his feelings of inferiority in his core belief system which Scripture calls the heart (Prov. 23:7). To overcome his enormous self-doubt, he deems others' thoughts, feelings and values as worthless. Any negative reaction to him only proves to him how justified he is in his beliefs. Remember the PAP is not mature and doesn't respond with sound reason. Your task is to remain a mature adult in the face of child-like behavior coming from an adult body.

### III. How to Respond to a Passive Angry Person

#### A. Avoid the "Gotcha Trap"

1. A PAP can drive a normal, calm person to overreact in anger and frustration. He will ignore you, stonewall you or walk away as if he did not hear you and start doing something else as if you were not talking to him. Just as soon as you react in anger and frustration, he will turn on you and shame you for your angry response while selectively ignoring the fact that what he just did to you brought about your reaction. He will start to lecture you for your bad attitude, poor emotional control, unbridled anger that deserves to be ignored.
  - a. Avoid returning verbal insult with verbal insult (I Peter 3:9, 17).
2. He will bait you to respond in a negative way, then, point out to you what a poor Christian or example you are to the kids, friends or family. Once you lose it that will be all that matters to him. It will be thrown up to you in later exchanges. In his eyes, he is totally innocent. Your anger is viewed by the PAP as proof you are inferior to him.
  - a. Jesus was baited often by the Pharisees but remained in control of Himself (Matt. 22:15-22)

#### B. Remain under the control of the Holy Spirit and control or restrain all outward outbursts of anger (Gal. 5:22, 23; I Peter 2:23; 3:9). It would be totally

**appropriate to share your frustration with a trusted friend, spouse or pastor and allow them to affirm your emotions and help preserve a healthy perspective (Gal. 6:2).**

**C. Remain respectfully firm.**

1. Stand firm when it is appropriate and confidently go on about your business with an inner peace from the Holy Spirit (John 14:27).
2. You can only be controlled if you allow yourself to be controlled out of your own fears and guilt. You can respond in quiet firmness (in peace) and secure confidence (by faith) to his attempts of manipulation. He cannot manipulate you without a fear or guilt hook in you. Face your fears and challenge the false feelings of guilt with truth (I John 4:1).
3. Remain decisive when he appears to waffle in any direction. Do not speak so gently that you fail to speak directly to the point. Avoid the other extreme of being so blunt that you border on being rude. You can be both firm and respectful (Let's, p. 74).

**D. Decline his invitations to step into his circle and begin the dance of anger. The PAP is a loner who is uncooperative, controlling, selfish and revengeful.**

**E. Stop attempting to convince or persuade him (or her) about the error of his/her behavior or logic and confidently go on about fulfilling what is in your circle of responsibility (Rom. 12:18) for each day without his approval.**

1. Ask yourself what is the next right thing to do. Following through with it, you will discover you have lived pleasing to the Lord (Col. 3:23).
2. Determine what your rightful responsibilities are and fulfill them, instead of stewing over what the PAP is thinking. At all costs do not allow his or her negative attitudes or opinions to define you and control you. You can have inner peace in the eye the storm that the PAP has created. Entrust yourself and situation to God in prayer and He promises to guard your emotional door (heart and mind) with His peace (Phil. 4:6, 7). This will help keep you from constantly second guessing yourself and viewing yourself as a victim.

**F. Do not allow his irresponsibility to define you or be a commentary on who you are (Let's, p. 73). The PAP's goal is to get you to lose sight of who you are in Christ and to lose faith in yourself and your decisions. Why? Now he can do his own selfish thing.**

1. God alone defines you. God refers to Christians as saints 60 times (I Cor. 1:2).

**G. Avoid all coercive communication, desperate pleading and obsessively analyzing his/her behavior. His behavior is beyond logic.**

**H. Understand the selfish, passive, angry person's pattern of motivation will take a miracle from God to change because the anger and fear are deeply rooted in**

**the past and it has nothing to do with you. He or she would have done this to anyone. Your sincere efforts to persuade, plead or coax will only be viewed as an invitation to dig in their heels and stubbornly frustrate and upset you.**

#### **I. Reduce your expectations**

1. Unfortunately, the PAP is not likely to change. Could he? Yes. Will he? Probably not. Bitterness combined with selfishness is a deep dark prison. Couldn't God choose to heal him? Yes. Will He? Probably not. Can God cure every cancer patient? Yes. Will He? No. God does not interrupt the normal cause and effects of life and the consequences of sin in creation and life.
2. The roots of fear, bitterness and selfishness would take a miracle of God to penetrate. A person can be born again in his spirit at salvation and still be deeply damaged in his soul. You can observe many selfish patterns described in I Corinthians although they are called saints (I Cor. 1:2).
3. The PAP is firmly against others' feelings, requests, preferences or desires and he balances this in his mind with an extreme desire to protect his private, secret world. Why? Life is all about him.
4. Adjust your expectations of fairness. In many respects, life is not fair. With a self-centered, passive, angry person it only gets more unfair. Your task is to drop any requirements for fairness and make the best of a one way relationship. You would be making a mistake to think that you can reason with such an emotionally wounded person as a PAP. You are not enabling them but accepting that he or she is who they are.
5. It is hard to adjust one's thinking that someone you care about would be so calloused as to have no empathy or mutual consideration. But your attempts to change them is to impose your values on someone who has no concern for them. Rarely will the PAP even come close to matching your good will.
6. Your task is to release the expectation that you will be loved or accepted at least the way a normal person understands it.

#### **J. Switch your ultimate acceptance from the PAP in your life over to the Lord Jesus.**

1. Normal people base their human relationships on mutual give-and-take and validation. A PAP has a different goal, its power, not a relationship of giving and receiving mutual acceptance. Because he believes he is superior, he is unable to grant acceptance, worth or value to anyone. To do so in his thinking would reduce his power.
2. Make the switch to getting your inner peace and contentment through your deep relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He has laid down His life for you (II Cor. 5:21) and proved beyond any shadow of doubt His enduring love for you (Rom. 5:8).

- K. Realize the PAP will never love you in a healthy way until he or she has been broken and has laid down his arrogant opinion of himself. He is gifted in acting loving, giving and even selfless at times but his heart belief remains the same and he keeps reverting back to it. King David made it clear that in our relationship with God, He wants a broken and contrite heart, not just temporary behavioral changes to jump through hoops (Ps. 51:16, 17).**

### **Bibliography**

- Carter, Les. Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 2005