

Teenage Anger

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Cummings, E. E., (1971) Six
Nonlectures. Antheneum, New York

... remember one thing only: that it's you - nobody else - who determine your destiny and decide your fate. Nobody else can be alive for you nor can you be alive for anyone else.

The adolescent, we might say, struggles to escape from childhood*

In working with adolescents / teenagers I bring my experiences of working with 11 - 16 year old school students. As a teacher for 10 years I worked for much of this time with disaffected students; often relegated to the 'bottom sets' because of behavioural problems in the classroom. Thankfully since my teaching days, fifteen years ago, attitudes in school have moved on - generally for the better.

As a father, and divorcee, I have worked, and am still working, through with my own children the impact and effects of those difficult years that included teenage times.

Since 2002, and alongside qualifying as a Gestalt therapist I have looked to work with adolescents and from 2004 up to 2015 I worked as a therapist within the school environment and as part of an adolescent provision team with over 460 contact hours.

ANGER in Adolescents

An individual who is angry is generally more clearly and firmly bounded than when not bounded. *

In anger - not rage - the person is expressing more clearly what is happening; what is wanted; what is going wrong; what is not being done; and so on. This does not mean this expression is correct - for the situation - nor that the expression needs to be given in to. When not angry the person may not be saying something that inwardly is waiting to be said. Sometimes only in anger is it safe to say what's inside. Safety is ... emotional safety.

For an adolescent, anger is a temporary and extremely effective antidote to the experience of losing centre and risking disintegration. *

Adolescents are working through a period where 'who they are' is changing. This changing is risky, is scary. This change involves stepping out of the nest - will the person fall from the nest or fly?

Anger is often adopted as an antidote to the guilt and shame that might otherwise emerge at these moments ... threatening the self's precarious sense of integrity. *

Shame pervades all our lives, and is practiced without thought, without realisation by many individuals. We all guard against shame. Anger is one defense.

The moment of losing face, of being involuntarily reorganised - as a child, as incompetent, as uncool, as wrong, as at fault - is the moment of shame. Anger and

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projection forestall this possibility ... reasserting, perhaps desperately, the adolescent's own organisation of the field.

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The adolescent must work towards being individual, separate from his/her carers. Working towards this will involve getting it wrong; a necessary aspect of growth. The adult's desire to not let the adolescent make 'the same mistake' is not (always) productive, or necessarily correct. To avoid being 'too wrong' anger gets used to reject the shame attached to this.

*McConville, M., 1995 Adolescence: Psychotherapy and the Emergent Self. Jossey Bass, San Francisco