



Identify Your Role as a Victim

One of the most challenging aspects of processing anger is to acknowledge your own victim role. It doesn't feel like a complimentary term and we don't like it – or we simply may not recognize it as it applies to us. But being a victim is part of the human experience and is universal. The real question, are you or can you connect to it as part of who you are. Or are you spending a lot of energy keeping it under wraps.

I went through a phase in my journey where I knew a lot about being a victim and I thought, “That’s not me. My anger is legitimate and my pain is real.” In retrospect, I was detached from my deeper feelings. After a series of hardships, I committed (had no choice) to acknowledging my victim role and deepening my awareness of how many different ways the victim role would show up and play out. It continues to be a humbling, but freeing process.

Practice the following exercise on a regular basis in order to promote your own healing.

IDENTIFY YOUR OWN VICTIM ROLE

- What **person** or **circumstance** is **upsetting** you? Be specific.
- Acknowledge that you are **blaming** that person or situation for making you angry.
- Write or speak out loud to yourself, “I blame _____ for making me upset.”
- Understand that you are now in the role of a **victim**.
- Write or speak, “I am allowing myself to be a victim of _____.”
- Differentiate clearly in your own mind:
 - 1) Am I truly being victimized?
 - 2) Is it based on a **perception**, a “story,” or imagery in my mind?
- Note how much **more difficult** it will be to process the anger if you have been truly victimized.
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If you were raised in a chaotic or abusive family, you are a victim. You may not feel like one, as it is your baseline and it seems normal. But your brain is programmed to filter ongoing data based on those early experiences. More things seem threatening in the present because they were truly dangerous in the past. That is how all living creatures survive. A major study was performed quantitating this effect.

ACE

ACE stands for “Adverse Childhood Experiences”. Drs. Andra, Felitti and others published a landmark study in 1998 (1) looking at the long-term effect of these experiences in over 17,000 people. There were 10 ACE’s defined in three categories.

Household Dysfunction

- Substance abuse
- Parental separation/ divorce
- Mental illness
- Battered mother
- Criminal behavior

Abuse

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual

Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

They clearly demonstrated a link between the ACE score and difficulties functioning later in life – the higher the score, the worse the adult physical, social and behavioral problems. There is an endless amount of data that can be discussed but the most disturbing aspect of the study for me was that only about a third of people have an ACE score of zero. 26% had three or more. Our country overall isn’t doing a competent job of parenting and all of us are paying the price.

What is your children’s ACE score?

I would also dare say that the incidence of ACE events is higher in a family where at least one of the members is suffering from chronic pain. If you have to ask why I would think that, then please read or re-read my book. Being trapped by pain is frustrating and often results in what Dr. Sarno called “rage.” It is completely understandable but the family is frequently a target. They don’t deserve it.



You also have another legitimate gripe in that the medical profession isn't meeting your need to become free of pain. We have no comprehensive training addressing it. We're focused on "disease" and methods to "fix" you. We aren't taught the concept that the mind and body are simply a unit. There is no separation.

Dr. Luskin's perspective

Whether you like it or not, you are a victim. We all are. But I am not writing this piece to let you off of the hook. The past is done and there is nothing you can do about it. Dr. Luskin, a friend of mine and author of *Forgive for Good* summed it up nicely at a workshop my wife and I held with him. Here is a rough version of his thoughts.

It is a tragedy to have your life ruined by your parents. However, to hold on to it 50 years later does not make any sense. It is fine to be upset that they harmed you until you were 18 years old. Then you must acknowledge that you took over and continued to ruin your own life.

The bigger tragedy

Take responsibility for every aspect of your own life. Write down a list of everyone and everything you can blame for screwing up your life. It will become ridiculous quickly. What is a bigger tragedy is that you are continuing to blame the past and now adding to the world's misery instead of being a source of joy.

You can make a make a difference by identifying your victim role, taking full responsibility for your own life and breaking up the cycle of anger within your sphere of influence. An excellent resource on awareness is Anthony Demello's book, *The Way to Love*. Maybe you were ACE'd out but don't ACE out your family.

1. Felitti VJ, Anda Rf, Nordenberg D, et al. The relationship of adult health status to childhood abuse and household dysfunction. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (1998); 14:245-258.