

The Blame Game

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“It’s all your fault!” “You caused me to overeat and gain weight.” “You made me angry.” These blaming statements may sound all too familiar. Where did we learn how to blame? Why do we tend to blame so easily? Why is it so difficult to state: “I made a mistake, or it was my doing.” Why can’t we be honest about our own actions?

Blame is an emotional response which is triggered by one’s interpretation that there is a threat at hand. The body’s physical response is to activate the fight or flight mechanism to eliminate the source of that threat. The mental process of blame as well as other negative emotions is automatically generated. At that point in time, one is only focused on one’s own wants and needs and has no regard for the other person’s wants and needs. A person blames as a means of eliminating that perceived threat while believing that he is truly justified.

Our early experiences as children being raised by our parents/caretakers have a deep effect on shaping our beliefs about ourselves and others. These beliefs can be conscious and unconscious, rational or irrational. It is irrational thoughts that are maladaptive and unproductive which formulate the basis for negative reactions and responses. Children are instinctively innocent and vulnerable. They model their parent’s behavior and internalize whatever they observe and unconsciously identify with them. They believe that parents treat them as they deserve to be treated, resulting in under-valuing or over-valuing themselves. They frequently form faulty messages about how life should be for them and for other people. Parents often use blaming as a means of dealing with frustrations and feelings of helplessness by blaming their child and others and as a way to protect themselves and their loved ones. Blaming allows one to perceive himself as more effective and not being taken advantage of.

If a parent is physically, emotionally, or verbally aggressive toward the child, the child spends all his energy trying to shed his feelings of shame by adhering to irrational blaming of others as a defense mechanism for survival. He develops a negative set of habitual responses when confronted with stressful situations. If a child feels sad, angry, isolated, or insecure, he will automatically transfer awareness of the source of his depressing feelings to an external cause. That external cause could be anyone - a parent,

spouse, relative, or friend. However, the outcome he hopes to achieve is never achieved. All that is accomplished is a destructive never ending cycle. A person doesn't look at what is in his control. He looks to blame so that he won't have to take any responsibility for his failures, problems, and his negative emotions. It's always someone else's fault, never his. It is someone else's responsibility to "fix" the problem or the negative emotion generated. Therefore, he never has to do things differently or improve his own behavior. "When you blame others, you give up the power to change." He believes that others caused him to feel wounded and that he is entitled to retaliate by blaming others for causing his pain. In essence he is waiting for the other person to improve the situation to suit him. That is an irrational belief. That other person will never be able to live up to those unrealistic expectations. Both parties will be left empty, lost and confused, hardly a constructive outcome.

When a person blames someone for anything, he gets to feel a sense of superiority that is short lived. He creates a self satisfying script in order to defend a supposed morally superior self image. He projects the focus of his own failings on to the person who he feels threatened by, to rescue his actual poor self image. His failings are explained away by everyone else's actions, thereby absolving him from any blame. Einstein was quoted as saying: "You cannot solve a problem in the same state of consciousness or with the same type of thinking which created the problem." Blaming is a false sense of control that originates in the wounded core of oneself that hates to feel helpless. Instead of gaining control, one has clearly lost control; intensifying one's powerlessness and preventing him from dealing with the sources of the problem, which in reality are himself and his irrational beliefs. For example, Mr. Smith comes home from a long day at work and tries to talk to his spouse. When he realizes that she is not totally tuned in to him, he loses control. He lashes out, blaming her for never being there for him, and accuses her of not being a concerned and nurturing wife. In addition, he attributes his tense mood to her "lack of sensitivity." Mr. Smith felt vulnerable and worthless. Fears of abandonment and shame flooded his brain, thereby prompting his blame onslaught. His needs were not being met and he believes that since he works so hard to support his family he deserves unrequited attention. Mr. Smith internalized the irrational belief that his wife is responsible for his reaction. He blames her for his losing

control and rationalizes that he needs to demean her in order to feel better about himself. Mr. Smith had identified with his father who rarely took responsibility. He learned that taking responsibility is a sign of weakness. He also believed that he does not deserve to be listened to since he was always blamed for complaining. He was merely repeating the same behavior that his father had behaved toward him. This resulted in both husband and wife feeling hurt and dejected. If he could replay this scenario, he would substitute the irrational belief for a rational one. He would have to recognize his rousing emotions within him to prevent a barrage of negative statements. Mr. Smith could begin to think differently about his wife's disinterest in the conversation. It is possible that she had something pressing on her mind, or perhaps was ill or fatigued. It would be beneficial to ask her about it rather than fly off the handle. His goal would no longer focus solely on getting his own needs met as he sees fit but rather on working on a positive outcome in his relationship with his wife.

We are not necessarily distressed by events that take place but by our personal interpretation of them. We all learned how to use blame, some more and some less. When blame is used consistently and relentlessly and the parties involved are left with emotional pain, it needs to be addressed in a more effective manner. Feeling "good" doesn't have to be at the expense of anyone else.