



## Reflex Emotions

**During childhood, our brain learns to react according to given situations with a mainly survival goal. This mechanism creates reflex emotions and behaviors that will be part of us during our whole lives if we don't change them.**

As children, when our parents scolded us for doing something stupid, the emotional responses were sadness or anger triggered by the frustration and fear of no longer being loved. Likewise, our brain, at the same period of time, also learns all its behaviours by imitating our parents' ones which become models to be reproduced in any given similar situations. Indeed, when we reach adulthood and we spend time with our parents, we often adopt with them again, without even realizing it, the attitude of the child or the adolescent that we were, still filled with frustration or anger, far from our normal adult ways of being.

This childhood learning mechanism creates reflex emotions and behaviors that will continue to be part of us as we grow up. Indeed, our brain being the interface computer between our body and inner self, once it has stored an emotional response, positive or negative, to a given situation, it becomes cast in stone: as soon as a similar situation arises in our life, our brain offers us the same initial emotion or reaction, often without us being aware of it, the original memory having long since been erased from our consciousness. Yet these emotions and knee-jerk reactions largely determine how we live our lives and how we view the world.

Fortunately for us, it is possible to reprogram our "brain-computer" to feed it with new positive emotional reflexes to any given situations and, consequently, any outcome we wish to change.



Indeed, it is not because we experienced a situation badly when we were children that we have to relive it in the same way again and again throughout our whole life.

An experience in my life has particularly marked me in this area. When I was a child and later a teenager, my mother had gigantic mood swings that took her from calm to anger in a split second. On the same issue, depending on her mood and degree of fatigue, she could have a calm and rational response or start screaming with anger, which, in the latter case, terrified me to the core and never allowed me to know how she was going to react in advance to any of my requests.

When my daughter was six years old, for some reason, I started to react to her requests exactly as my mother did with mine, depending on my current mood and how tired I was. Despite the fact that I knew I was repeating a pattern that had made me unhappy as a child and terrified my daughter in the same way, I could not stop the machine. Whenever my daughter didn't tidy up her room or was clumsy, I raised my voice very soundly. Little by little, I began to search for a solution to this reflex emotional anger which was inviting itself into my relationship with my beloved daughter. And it is the mirror-universe in which we live that brought me, in a very colorful way as is often the case, the answer. When my daughter was nine years old, I was verbally attacked in an extremely violent way by an infuriated person at my workplace. That day, the shock and fear that I felt led me to decide that I would never let anger burst inside me again so to never indulge it to someone else around me again. A few days after the incident, I went to see my daughter and made her a promise that I would never "yell" at her again if I was unhappy with her behavior, a promise I kept until now, as best I can, but with which I am still struggling with my erratic parents.

In addition, the fact that I calmly explain to my daughter what does not suit me in her behavior and that encourage her to change it rather than scolding her for it has allowed me to establish a real dialogue with her about the reasons for my dissatisfaction and the values that I am trying to teach her. It also led to a gradual change in her behavior, doing the things I ask when I ask her to, sometimes even spontaneously. It allowed me as well to show her that one could, if one wanted to and decided to, change his/her behavior when this behavior was harmful to others, even if this behavior had been going on for a long time. I also discovered how much my husband had suffered from my stormy behavior without telling me. Since then, we all laugh more often together and our home atmosphere has become much lighter.

I did not just apply this precept to my family, I try not to show anger to anyone again and have replaced it with [benevolence](#). First of all, because anger is not a pleasant feeling in my body, secondly because it is a very dark feeling that does nothing to alleviate the suffering that caused it.

When we get angry, it's usually because we've been hurt by someone else's attitude or a given situation. This reflex leads us to a defensive withdrawal within ourselves and does not allow us to look at the person or situation that has caused us harm with the appropriate perspective. This gut reaction intensifies the suffering that, on the contrary, we wish to diminish. Anger drives us to retaliate against the one who hurt us leading to an escalation of reciprocal suffering often forgetting the original incident in the process. This reaction leads to [a suffering spiral](#) instead of extinguishing



it.

The same is true when we get angry because we failed to do something or our ego is frustrated with not achieving to do or get something; our anger is then directed against ourselves and our imperfection that prevents us from being worthy of interest and, consequently, of love from our inner self and others. In this case, anger will push us to want to hurt back the one who hurt us, namely ourselves, thus placing us in a self-destructive spiral.

A few tips for when you feel anger rising within you:

- Breathe and start counting (this process activates another part of the brain and physically bypasses, for a time, the one that handles emotions),
- Never react in a hurry, sleep on it and ask yourself what really makes you angry, what initial wound this anger belongs to,
- Also ask yourself your share of responsibility in the situation and try to put yourself in the position of the person who triggered your anger,
- Finally, ask yourself what reaction on your part will make your suffering disappear more rapidly and what kind of human being you want to be in that situation – benevolent, magnanimous, vindictive... –, what kind of behavior would you admire in someone else reacting to the same situation, what kind of values you want to carry with your behavior...

Our negative emotions, such as anger or fear, prevent us from fully living the life we want. They are obstacles that maintain suffering within us and prevent us from being our true selves. If we wish to get rid of them, we must bring to consciousness each of our reactions that makes us suffer and transform it into a positive emotion through the mechanisms of self-love, benevolence and compassion towards ourselves and others. Tools such as [meditation](#) and NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) are at our disposal to help us do this. Be aware though that the process takes time and energy, like all learning in life, but is worth giving it a shot because, as taste and smell return very quickly after quitting smoking, calm and inner peace also arrive very quickly when we decide to stop negative emotions.

**We can change the emotional responses that do not suit us on a daily basis and it is quite wonderful to see the benefits that come with it in every aspects of our lives, with our beloved ones as well as in our professional environment. Getting rid of our toxic reactions is nothing more than getting rid of a bad habit: we identify the bad habit and stop reproducing it to build a new one instead that is more relevant and fulfilling for us.**