

Passive Aggression

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

There are times when we are not getting what we want and feel angry, upset, disappointed and so on. Yet for one reason or another we won't accept the situation and work towards getting it. Because we feel such negativity, we are not able to talk calmly about the problem. We don't want to be openly angry either for fear of the other's reaction and they may be more powerful, such as the boss at work, for instance. So we find ourselves in an unhappy situation and yet unable to 'do' anything about it. So we may choose to behave in a way to undermine the other, not realising that this is making things worse. Unfortunately, it may be an habitual way of reacting and we may not even be aware of our behaviour as an expression of anger, frustration and so on. We are bewildered as to why the other got so upset with us. We may not be aware that we are indulging in a form of bullying. A common strategy is to ignore the person you are angry with. You may be justifying it ('she's impossible!'), but you actually want to avoid conflict and punish them at the same time. Consider how you feel when you are ignored. Another is to be late. You may give yourself all sorts of excuses – had to this and that, the mobile rang, just missed the bus, the train and so on. How do you feel when someone is late a lot of the time? Here at Satipanya, how do you feel when the same person repeatedly comes in just a minute or two after time? Spiteful withdrawal of the usual things you would do – sex, cooking, gardening, taking on responsibility not strictly yours at work and then not doing it without telling anyone. How do you react when someone acts like this towards you? Doing something badly and then blaming anyone, everyone. But actually you couldn't be bothered. And anyway you didn't like the way you were asked or 'why was I asked to do this'. How do you feel when you've asked someone to do something for you and they have agreed, but obviously done it in a slapdash way and there is a feeling of irritation in the air. And all such strategies can be used at work to undermine the boss or the junior. If you know yourself to be a frequent user of passive aggressive strategies, it is good to ask yourself in what way does this help a situation? Surely it would be better to find an occasion – no matter how difficult it may be – to be honest with other. If the situation becomes intolerable, it may be worth losing a friendship or work rather than carry on feeling angry, frustrated and miserable all the time. If we are on the receiving end of passive aggression, what can we do? Often it is a case of the elephant in the room. We have to wait for a time and place to talk to the person, undermine any fear they have of us; let them be clear that we are willing to accept that we may have behaved wrongly; that we are prepared to come to an arrangement. The worst we can do is to react with anger. If they are unaware of their passive aggression, they will just deny it. Why are you sulking? : I'm not sulking. Is there something wrong? : No! : I feel you are angry with me. : Why would I be angry with you? You are late again. : Everyone is late once in a while. Why are you so angry about it? You've done the job so poorly. : Sorry! I know you would have done it better. As far as our practice is concerned, it is always better to keep close contact with our feelings. They

tell us how we are reacting. To be honest with ourselves. To make sure we don't act passive aggressively – especially against someone who is being passively aggressive! That will only make the situation worse and make us feel worse. A couple of months back, I am getting very strong passive aggressive signals from the neighbouring family. Even the boy gives me dirty looks. I finally got the opportunity to talk to the wife. I told her I am getting a lot of bad feelings from you. Can you tell me why? I'm sure there's been a misunderstanding. She denied the whole thing! My hope now is to catch the husband and try another tack. Then something strange happened. I went out to the post box and they were coming down the road. I greeted them. They were both very welcoming. Then they went to gate to see their two very beautiful, Shetland ponies and their foals. I joined them and he suddenly started a friendly conversation. I never did get to the bottom of it. If all this strikes a bell, there's lots on the websites. I found this informative: <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/passive-aggressive.html>

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