

The Habit of Sulking – Ann Gadd

How often do you say, “I’m fine,” when you are not?

How often do you find yourself really angry and resentful? But you don’t seem to be able to confront the person involved, often because you see little point in doing so. So you sit with this fiery anger, smouldering inside you with nowhere to let it explode. Some of it may however, boil over into barbed comments, impatience with children or colleagues, general dissatisfaction and feeling alone with your pain.

The word “sullen” and “sulk,” originate from *sullein*, which means alone. When we are sullen, we show that we are not only passively resentful, but actually are feeling very alone. The world is a place where we perceive no one actually understands us.

Why we sulk

We all want and expect others to be appreciate, love and understand us. When they fail to, we get angry, which creates a feeling of being alone in a place where our pain is not comprehended or even acknowledged. Lacking the self-confidence/personal power to confront the person with whom we are angry, we emotionally withdraw ourselves becoming unresponsive thereby ensuring that others can’t relate to us. We feel helpless, abused, ineffectual and misunderstood. Their response or lack of it, only serves to push old childhood buttons and confirm past feelings of a lack of self-worth.

Rather than experience these painful feelings, we defend our vulnerability with anger and punish them, rather than explore why we are feel this way and work at rewriting this program. It is however, a highly effective response, which is why we use it often to gain control of a situation, reclaiming the power we felt we had lost through the actions of another. It also involves making the other person feel guilty. Guilt as we know cohabits in the second chakra, where finance, sex, boundaries, feelings, pleasure and fear of change lie. Usually our expectations of how another person *should* behave, centre around these issues.

When the expectation and reality differ then, it is cause for us to feel anger,(fire/male) which being unable to voice, we remain in the (water/passive female) state.

Even when eventually conversation is resumed, the actual incident that started the war is seldom discussed. Left to fester it moves our relationship from one of intimacy to co-dependency. Where there is no understanding (*into me see*) there can be no *intimacy*. Author of *Why Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus*, John Gray describes this deterioration in four stages: resisting, resenting, rejection and repression.

With **resisting**, we hold back from communicating openly for fear of being ridiculed or made to feel worthless. This leads to **resentment** in not being able to share ourselves completely. We then **reject** the other person, which we do through sulking, withholding sex and withdrawing emotionally. Finally, we appear to get over it and make-up, yet in not expressing the cause of our initial anger, we **repress** our true feelings. In time, the relationship deteriorates to the

point that we repress all feelings, positive and negative and we find ourselves cohabiting with someone we barely seem to know, let alone love.

How to identify it, how to stop it..., and why we don't want to.

Ask yourself how able you are to truthfully express your feelings, particularly anger to another person. Can you address them calmly and say, "what you are doing makes me feel hurt and angry, because it feels to me as if you are abusing me," or "by ignoring my needs, you make me feel unloved and worthless?"

Do you rather get in a huff and not say anything, yet get revenge by making them suffer? Why then would you not want to stop this and enter into a more honest relationship? The answer is simple: sulking gives you power when you feel disempowered and who would voluntarily want to give that up?

It allows you to control and manipulate situations. Whenever we have little self-worth we will always try to gain control of situations or people through manipulative means. Stopping sulking then, involves working with issues of self-worth and building the self so that we have inner or true power. Then we will not have to try to create external power by manipulating others through guilt.

Start working with communicating openly with others. The other person may not particularly enjoy what you have to say, but given the option of being made to feel guilty for days, speaking about the problem is infinitely preferable. Then you open the doors to connectedness as opposed to isolation.

