



REED

Feeling ANGRY Playing Fair

Ken McMaster

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ABUSE

Foreword

Feeling Angry, Playing Fair is an excellent resource for any man who really wants:

- his partner to feel genuine respect for him and want to be with him, rather than a relationship based on fear or duty,
- a family relationship which is fair and based on trust and caring,
- his children's admiration and respect rather than their fear or resentment,
- to set an example his children would want to follow,
- to stop hurting the ones he loves,
- to be true to himself,
- to find genuine self-respect.

If you are reading this book you are probably one of a growing number of men who are dissatisfied with aspects of their lives and are not prepared to stick their heads in the sand and pretend that all is well, whilst their relationships and families disintegrate around them. You may already be realising that words and attitudes can hurt as much as fists and how violence and abuse destroys families and causes damage that is difficult to heal. You have probably begun to take a close look at your attitudes and your actions because you realise that you are losing the respect, trust and love of those who are most important to you.

Most men don't want to hurt the people they love. They don't feel proud of their violence and controlling behaviour which is killing off respect in their relationships. They see their children becoming frightened of them or beginning to practise their worst habits. Perhaps you are already realising that you stand to gain far more than you might lose by ending violence and abuse.

Many men are now making a stand. We are no longer prepared to sacrifice our relationships and happiness by blindly accepting the traditional ideas which have been passed down over generations and through societies, ideas which support violence and abuse. These ideas include the following behaviours:

- you should be in control of everything all of the time;
- you have to win at all costs;
- you have to be right all the time;
- you have to make sure you even the score.

When we do get sucked in by these ideas, we try desperately to control our lives and others around us, only to find our lives feeling more and more out of control. We don't feel powerful at all. We take it out on others, especially our loved ones who are least able to stand up to us. This is a book for men who are finding the courage to stand apart from traditional ideas and who are no longer prepared to make the same old excuses for themselves:

- she drove me to it;
- I lost it;
- I was drunk.

Feeling Angry, Playing Fair is for men who are ready to stop blaming others and to avoid wallowing in self-pity. It is for men with the courage to take responsibility for themselves and show their true colours. In *Feeling Angry, Playing Fair*, Ken McMaster outlines 'building blocks of change', a seven-step road map which can challenge, guide and support any man who has the determination to step out on a journey towards respect. The seven steps bring together current knowledge about effective ways to stop violence and build respect. However, *Feeling Angry, Playing Fair* does not preach or impose. It invites us to consider and discover what we really want in our relationships. The seven steps highlight effective ways to challenge habits and ideas which we can let prevent us from achieving fairness, respect and trust and which support violence and abuse.

Feeling Angry Playing Fair does not put men down. Ken's approach is extremely respectful to men, whilst at the same time holding each of us accountable for our own actions and challenging use to take responsibility for them. We are invited to examine and understand the 'stories' which lie behind violence and abusive behaviour and which can blind us to the fact that we can choose to take respectful paths or we can choose to continue disrespectful and abusive paths. These 'stories' blind us to the ways we justify our actions and excuse ourselves from responsibility.

The seven steps in this book invite all men to:

- make a commitment to stop violence and abuse;
- name violence and abuse for what it really is;
- stop making excuses for our actions;
- stand apart from unhelpful ideas and habits which support violence and abuse;
- take responsibility for our actions;
- help heal the damage we have caused;
- build respectful relationships.

This book offers an invitation to stand together with other men, both informally and in men's groups, to stop violence and build respect.

Ken McMaster is highly respected by colleagues and friends both in New Zealand and Australia. I commend his book to all men.

Alan Jenkins

Psychologist, Adelaide, 1998

Author of *Invitations to Responsibility*

Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of many years of grappling with the problem of finding effective ways to work with men and women whose behaviour is hurting others. Over those years a group of men throughout the country has formed under the umbrella of the National Network of Stopping Violence Services (New Zealand) Inc./Te Kupenga Whakoati Mahi Patunga, offering programmes for men who know that there must be a better way. I would like to acknowledge some of the women and men who have been a part of that journey and who have indirectly contributed to this book Graham Barnes, Stuart Curry, Les Gray, Shona Hawkins, John Hitchcock, Stephen Jacobs, Mike Jones, Peter Swain, Warwick Pudney, Mark Vivian and Anita West.

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Alan Jenkins, therapist from Adelaide and author of *Invitations to Responsibility*, needs a very special mention. Alan is one of the most outstanding theorists and practitioners working with men who are abusive. His ideas and practice have inspired a radical look at our programme content and approach. I am indebted to Alan for his permission to use his ideas throughout this book and for writing the foreword.

The pioneering work of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project has also taken our journey further ahead.

There are many women who have supported the establishment and continuation of programmes for men. They have grasped the vision of what is possible and understand that it is often women and children on the receiving end of men's violence and abuse. Brenda Pilott, past manager of the Family Violence Unit, Social Welfare, has been a supporter at a very personal level.

I thank Fraser Burrige for his useful and perceptive comments on the original draft, which has helped to make this edition much clearer, and Carolyn Lagahetau and the team from Reed Publishing for their enthusiasm and encouragement for this project.

This book contains many stories from men and women that clearly illustrate the difficulties of pioneering a non-abusive lifestyle. I feel honoured to have heard these stories of struggle, pain and hope. All the names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals involved. My thanks to all of them for allowing their stories to be heard.

And lastly a very special thanks to my wife and friend Suzanne Hall, who has allowed me the time and space to write this book, a greatly appreciated gift.

Preface

Dear Reader, I have spent the last sixteen years of my life directly working with men who have been abusive towards their partners, children and wider family. This work has been both painful and exciting. Painful in being with men who recount stories of horrific backgrounds filled with physical abuse, verbal assaults, intimidation and threats. Many men have told me of the pain of witnessing a parent they cared about being treated unjustly through violence. At a young age they felt unable to stop the abuse but tried anyway, only to be thrashed, hurt and injured. These men were trained into the ways of the Old Rule Book — a way of relating based on the need to control and be powerful at the expense of others.

This work has also been incredibly exciting as I see men take on the challenge against injustice — the injustice of growing up in violent and abusive families, and the injustice of continuing the family legacy of abuse in their own adult lives. These men have made the decision to break the cycle of violence and abuse and create a different history for their own children based on a New Rule Book. This New Rule Book is based on respect and empathy, that is, knowing how their behaviour impacts on others in both the short and long terms.

Taking on the challenge to turn one's back on a tradition of violence and abuse is by no means easy. As argued in this book it may appear the harder of the two choices — the other choice is not to change. In the long term the choice to change will bring much greater rewards and the internal satisfaction of knowing your children's lives will be different from your own. In all the years of working with men who have been violent and abusive, I have not found one who has wanted his children to go through the pain that he has, pain caused by a lifestyle of abuse.

I am as passionate today as I was sixteen years ago about inviting men to do the 'manly thing' and take on the task of dealing with their violent and abusive behaviour. Breaking the cycle of violence may be one of the greatest challenges a man who is abusive and violent will face. Violence towards our families is a dead-end street. It is nothing to be proud of. Men who share their stories with me are often very ashamed at what they have done to those they love. To regain their self-esteem and pride they know what they have to do.

I am convinced that violence and abuse has no place in family life — the costs are just too high. To not break with past traditions and patterns of behaviour that hurt others is to continue to perpetrate a legacy where no one wins. I have written this book for men who want to be winners in and with their families. I certainly do. I invite you to join the many thousands of men worldwide who have said no to violence in their lives and yes to relationships based upon respect.

Sincerely,

Ken McMaster

Introduction

Imagine a bully in a sandpit. Whenever other children come to play in the sandpit the bully throws sand in their faces and tells them in no uncertain terms to go away. Imagine also that the bully has been doing this for some time. Some grown-ups comment about how the bully can look after himself and how he doesn't take rubbish from anyone. They blame the other children if there is any conflict. They say 'he's only being a boy'. Now imagine that another child comes along and explains to the bully the benefits that he will receive in sharing the sandpit. These benefits could include having more friends, being able to play with other children, being able to share toys, and so on. Will the bully change his ways and invite other children to join him in the sandpit? My feeling is that the bully will not give up his control of the sandpit because his whole sense of who he is is based on being a bully. Also, as he has the benefits of power, prestige and status, it will be doubly hard to relinquish his control.

To ask the bully to change is to ask him to look at many fundamental assumptions that he holds about the world. It is frightening to consider that there might be a different way.

(Based on a story by A. Kahn)

This book explores the often confusing story that lies behind men's anger. Anger is the label we often attach to abusive patterns of behaviour as a way of making sense of it. I often hear men state that they 'lost their cool', 'blew their stack' and 'got angry'. Those on the receiving end of such behaviour sometimes support this perception and will describe the man as having a 'short fuse', as being bad tempered, or being 'just like his dad'.

'Being angry' is the expression we often use to make sense of men's behaviour. It is one of the dominant stories used to explain what happens when men relate abusively or violently to others. This dominant story, as I will argue throughout this book, does not adequately explain the issue of what happens when men are angry. It avoids the complexity of the issue, robbing men of new and creative solutions to patterns of behaviour that are destructive to themselves and others. This explanation also acts to censor out the impact of such behaviour on others.

I use the concept of 'dominant story' deliberately. In all cultures there are dominant stories that attempt to make sense of reality. These dominant stories tend to overshadow and obscure other stories that may be as valid and at times more appropriate. I will be arguing strongly that, although being angry is the dominant story for men, the pain for men, women and children, and the impact on our communities, are stories that also need to be heard.

I also use the term 'self-righteous anger' to describe men's anger. Men tell me all their good reasons for being angry. They will start by justifying, explaining and blaming others for how they act. There is something dangerous in this very process which is central to this book. When we take a self-righteous position on any issue we can easily become stuck with the behaviour we are carrying out and resist being challenged. It implies a rightness that cannot be challenged. Being angry is important, just as being sad, hurt or happy is. The phrase 'self-righteous anger' censors out the stories of those on the receiving end of it and in so doing helps men avoid facing the truth behind their violence and abuse.

The turning point for many men is when they begin to hear for the first time what it is like for others to be on the receiving end of abuse and violence. When men give space to hearing these alternative stories (the impact and effect of their violence and abuse on others) they can begin to turn around what have often been lifetime patterns of behaviour. This book is for men who are caught up in patterns of behaviour that they and others see as angry and abusive. Men who want to free themselves from abusive and violent behaviours that leave others feeling frightened, intimidated, and fed up with carrying the responsibility for such destructive behaviour, will find this book useful. Women, men and children on the receiving end of abusive behaviour will find answers to many questions. In the following pages we will explore together the complex relationships of anger and abuse and what it ultimately means to be a man.

Setting the Scene

Since 1982 I have worked with hundreds of men who have been dissatisfied with their relationships with partners, children, friends and acquaintances. The common story that these men told was of the cost to themselves and others of their abusive and violent behaviour.

Men often speak of the confusion they feel when they act towards others in angry and abusive ways when that is exactly what they don't want to happen. This dominant story of how men perceive anger as getting in the way of relating to others, of developing and maintaining relationships, and of acting out beliefs and behaviours, comes from what I call the 'Old Rule Book'. This Old Rule Book contains traditions, beliefs and habits that encourage unhealthy ways of dealing with men's emotional lives and it gets in the way of men accepting responsibility for their behaviour. Where a man's sense of what he feels entitled to exceeds his sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, abuse is a natural outcome. We will explore the teachings of this rule book, and how this dominant story is used as a tool to maintain a sense of power.

Let me state from the outset that focusing on anger and how it can be managed is not enough. I am more interested in exploring the questions surrounding the story that lies behind the anger. The Old Rule Book ultimately leads men to become trapped into patterns of behaviour that they often feel they have little control over. These patterns of disrespectful behaviour take on a naturalness, becoming familiar and being supported with beliefs and ideas which indicate that this is the normal way to respond. Pioneering a new rule book which is more appropriate to developing respectful and caring relationships, leads us on a journey that is more than just stopping a particular behaviour. In looking at the story behind the dominant story of anger we can learn to live non-abusive relationships.

In addition to exploring the story behind men's anger, this book will give you the opportunity to create your own new story about how you want to be with others. Changing old patterns of behaviour and thoughts is not easy, but it is possible. Sometimes it feels easier to stay with

how things are. I imagine that if you are reading this book then you or others have begun to question the old ways and are searching for new solutions. Perhaps you have already tried many things to overcome these patterns of behaviour, only to find that the old ways re-emerge and destroy any progress you may have made. In this book we will work together to explore what stops you doing things differently, and how you can unchain yourself from redundant and destructive patterns of behaviour that are abusive to others.

I can hear some of you saying ‘I am not abusive; I only get angry?’ Read on. What you will discover is that even though you may feel you are justified in your anger (and you may well be), how you express it may create difficulties for yourself and others. The way you respond may have little to do with the issue involved. What has therefore developed is the issue of what is an okay way to respond to a particular situation. This book is not about not getting angry. It deals with being clear about expressing our anger and other strong emotions in ways that are safe and respectful to those around us. You have the benefit of following on in the tradition created by many thousands of men who have attended programmes and groups that look directly at these issues. These men have made the decision to pioneer a new order, an order where men can be respectful of difference and equal in relationships with others.

The Mad/Bad Debate

Are men the bullies they are made out to be or are they trapped into certain roles that they are expected to play out? Newspapers are full of reports of male behaviour that hurts others — violence against women and children, sexual abuse and violence towards other men. Abuse in its many forms has become associated with men as a group. I am not just talking about the more overt and physical behaviours but also about the subtle behaviours that affect others in detrimental ways subtle behaviours such as emotional put-downs, threats, intimidation and the undermining of others’ confidence. Many men find owning up to such behaviour too difficult to face; it is much easier to remain blinded to how things really are.

I regularly hear that men are either seen as mad or bad. If they are ‘mad’ then it somehow makes what they are doing seem okay. If they are ‘bad’ then they are judged as having acted maliciously and in ways that lack concern for others. The trouble with the mad/bad argument is that we are invited to search for solutions elsewhere. Let me explain. If you are deemed to be mad, others may look for factors such as mental illness, addictions, family dynamics, unemployment, and so on. If you are bad, upbringing, character traits and motivation will be focused on. Either way I would suggest that we are not looking in the right place.

Men and others want an answer to what I call the ‘why’ question: ‘Why do men act the way they do?’ This invites a search for the ‘causes’ of such behaviour, which I believe is unhelpful and disempowering for men. This unrealistic pursuit for truth delivers explanations which ‘pacify the wonderer’ Explanations for behaviour that are seen to be outside of the person are unhelpful for men wanting to understand, change and face up to patterns of abusive behaviour I have met a lot of men who have become disheartened in their search for the reasons which explain why they have been abusive to others. What these men have come to realise is that, while they are searching in every nook and cranny of their minds and the world around them, their patterns of abusive behaviour continue.

This book is about looking for solutions, not from outside nor from the past, but from within a different setting. Having the context on the outside does little or nothing to invite a man to claim responsibility for how his individual actions affect others. While we are all products of our upbringing, it is unhelpful to hide behind this as a reason for acting in abusive ways.

Currently men are being cajoled, coerced and invited to look closely at what it means to be a man; to take a closer look at what goes on in their private world, how they act in their personal relationships and the impact that these sometimes everyday behaviours have on others. I meet many men who find themselves floundering between how they think they should be and how others think they should be. Many of the models of a 'man's man' no longer seem appropriate. The steadily increasing rate of women initiating separation and divorce tells us something about that.

The relationship landscape is littered with scared, scarred and hurt people believing that next time it will be different, only to find next time is much the same. Second-time-round relationships have an even greater rate of dissolution than first-time relationships. What we see reflected at this time in our history is a deepening sense of a lack of fulfilment in our relationships. 'Relationships', as used throughout this book, are defined in the broadest way to include any contact we have with another person.

Men find themselves moving from intimate relationship to intimate relationship in the hope that they will discover the missing bit. Partners of men I meet are clearly saying 'I don't like being treated this way.' And sad to say, those men often don't have much idea or find it hard to hear what their partners mean. Many men now find themselves alone, trying to understand what went wrong, decide whose fault it was, and endeavouring to make sense of their situation.

New challenges emerge — such as having the responsibility of caring for children, a role that many men are ill-trained for and which doesn't often fit comfortably. Other hurdles may include running a home, balancing full-time work with child-care responsibilities, and coming to terms with what it means to live alone.

Men tell themselves that escaping to their mates will help; at least their mates understand. Often dissatisfaction arises here as well. Mates can be more interested in telling you what to do, ignoring your pain and hurt or not wanting to be involved. There are gaps everywhere in the lives of men who often feel alone. But there is a different way.

Pioneering a New Way

The word 'crisis' has a double meaning. It denotes danger on the one hand and opportunity on the other. The crisis men face today has a positive side as well as a negative side. I'm sure that this time in our history will be remembered as the age when men took on the challenge to work through the crisis of masculinity, again embracing the pioneering spirit to create a better society for others, as they have done in the past. I'm also sure that if we journeyed back in time we would find that men have always had problems with their anger. Abuse of women, children and other men is not new. But the question you may well ask is: 'Why is this such an issue now?'

It is no coincidence that men are now being invited to explore and face up to behaviour that is seen as abusive. Over the past 25 years society has seen significant changes which have made certain behaviours no longer acceptable. These changes include major shifts in family life (more women are now employed outside of the home), an increase in the divorce rate to around 35 percent of all marriages, and an increasingly urban society with all its associated pressures and hassles.

In addition, parenting traditions have been under scrutiny with questions asked about the effectiveness of corporal punishment. Most studies show that ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ thinking ultimately teaches children to be more abusive and violent.

In the 1960s issues that were previously hidden became much more open to the public gaze. The women’s movement has over time continued to translate concerns about what happens in the private realm of the household into public issues. One of the key issues that has been identified is men’s violence and frightening behaviour and attitudes towards women and children. While some men find this difficult to accept, it has been valuable in assisting men to face up to their responsibility for inappropriate behaviour.

Other factors that have made a difference include the influence of television, films and other media which explore these issues through drama, news reports and articles. At no other time in our history have these issues been given such mass coverage. We can all agree that the crisis is upon us. The challenge for men is to take seriously what is being said, tune up our belief and thinking systems, and implement new behaviours that leave us and others feeling safe and secure.

Many men are trailblazing a different lifestyle — a lifestyle free of abusiveness and based on respect, trust and equality. They have embarked on developing a lifestyle of responsibility that helps them deal with the confusion of today’s world. They are learning and understanding the impact of the old rules about how men are supposed to be. They are checking to see these rules are helpful in developing caring and respectful relationships with others, or whether they get in the way. Many men are ready to break with the traditions of the past and shake off the legacies that view men as bullies.

These men have worked by themselves; they have come together in groups in their workplaces, clubs or sports teams; or they have moved outside of their traditional networks to explore what it means to be different in a world that expects men to operate from a position of having the dominant power and control in nearly all situations. For men the process of sharing personal stories is only just beginning.

Most men have grown up with the message that men keep personal troubles to themselves. ‘Real men’, in the traditional sense, are meant to be able to work things out for themselves. It is only as men begin to share their personal stories with other men that they begin to see patterns emerging that are wider than themselves. This helps to make sense of the experience of growing up male. It then becomes possible to appreciate the influences that reinforce and perpetuate certain beliefs, behaviours and values.

This book is about being different as a man, and will act as an aid in the process of pioneering a new and exciting lifestyle, free from abuse and harm to others. Over the years I have been emotionally moved by the incredible strength and determination that men have to unchain themselves from the painful and unhealthy lifestyles picked up from the past. This book recounts the journeys of some of these men as a way of giving each of us hope that we can reclaim and pioneer a very genuine and liberated form of masculinity.

I commend you on your decision to look at these issues seriously. That in itself is a significant first step. I wish you well in your journey towards pioneering a non-abusive lifestyle.

Let’s begin.

A Self-Assessment

Place a tick in the box next to behaviours you have carried out during the past six months. Place a cross next to thoughts and behaviours that you may have carried out previously. Try to answer as honestly as you can.

- I have concerns about what I do when I become angry.
- People say they are afraid of me at times.
- I am afraid of what I might do to those around me.
- Others tell me I am an angry person.
- I call people names and criticise when people don't agree with me or don't do things my way.
- I criticise how others look.
- I insist on having the last word.
- I force my decisions onto others.
- I keep important information secret.
- I ignore, sulk, walk out, storm out without discussing things.
- At home I make big decisions without talking to others.
- When I am angry I keep it inside and smoulder
- I come from a family where I saw violence between my parents.
- I was physically punished as a child.
- I have been rude to my partner's friends.
- I have hit out in moments of rage.
- I have threatened others.
- I have threatened to harm myself.
- I feel threatened and become abusive when others disagree with me.
- Others have had to receive medical attention as a result of my anger
- I have forced others to do things they did not want to do.

You are not alone if you answered yes to any of these statements. Hundreds of men in groups I have worked with have made the decision to be honest and face the truth in these statements. It is not easy to admit behaving in ways that hurt others. It takes a lot of courage and strength.

When we as men begin to share our stories with each other we often find that we have shared experiences. We have been hoodwinked by our upbringing into believing that men should be strong, silent and resilient. 'We have not been encouraged to tell our stories and reach out for the kind of help and support we need. Times are changing, and daily I come across men who are prepared to stand up against the dominant story of silence and speak about themselves.

This book will be one useful tool for you when you begin to explore your story. Working in isolation is not always the best way. Some men find it useful to have the support of other men

who are also working through these issues. Phone your local health centre or Citizens Advice Bureau for information on local stopping violence or anger management programmes.

Whether you are beginning or already well on the way, this book will give meaning to your experiences and help to affirm the changes that you have already made. I find it useful to re-examine aspects of my own behaviour from time to time, as this sustains me in resisting the invitations to relapse into old ways of behaving.

About this Book

First a warning: this will not be an easy book to read and work through. It will raise many questions that at times will be painful and difficult. If you want to talk with others who have been affected by abuse, I urge you to be cautious and take the lead from them as to their readiness to talk. Abuse destroys trust and breeds fear in relationships. Others may be too frightened to be honest about their issues for fear of you reacting in abusive ways.

You may be tempted to give up part-way through or dismiss this book as not applying to you. I urge you to resist doing this. I know what has happened to men who have put on hold looking at these very issues. Abusive behaviour hurts others and ourselves in a variety of ways, and the long-term costs are high. Relationships don't die; they get killed off.

Where there is abuse there also exists risk of injury. How will you ensure that others are safe as you work through this process? Some men make a very clear contract to leave situations where there is risk of harming others — either by living somewhere else for a time or by negotiating time out.

The chapters of this book follow a step-by-step process of change that I have found useful in my work with groups over the years. There are exercises to do along the way which will make this book more relevant to your own situation. Just reading about an issue isn't enough. There is an old Chinese proverb that says 'What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I know'. In this book you will hear the stories of others, men and women, and you will have the opportunity to explore for yourself what you do in your own life, and to put new ideas into action. In doing this you will integrate your changes in a very real way. By the time you reach the end of this book, having worked through the exercises, you will be well on your journey. You will notice that your beliefs, behaviours and thoughts are different, and that you can truly claim the label of being a responsible man.