

Counselor's Corner: *Bad Bad Mad Sad*

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Hate anger bad bad
No resolving no good
Hate anger bad bad
Won't let you do this and that
Hate anger bad bad
Can't we just talk this out
Hate anger bad bad
No way!
Hate anger bad bad
Let's calm down and talk this out
Hate anger bad bad
You still can't do this and that
Hate anger bad bad
Sad sad sad mad
Hate anger bad bad
Calm down, you two!
Bubbling madness slowly cools
Anger bad sad
Silence

Bad bad
Sad
Guilty feelings creeping in
Sad
Apologize
Hug
Pause

Peace

This poem is an eleven-year-old girl's expression of a fight with her mother. The stark eloquence of her

words makes it a universal expression of the drama of any conflict.

We do not live in a one-dimensional world, but a complex matrix of multiple meanings, differing perceptions, unique experiences and individual lives. We each perceive the world through our own eyes, bodies, memories, genes, culture, religion, values. Empirical studies show that 80 percent of our perception of an event or a person comes from our own store of past memories, experiences and assumptions. Only 20 percent of our perception is based on the real and unique realities present in the person or event we are experiencing in the moment. Difference and disagreement are inevitable.

In his recent speech about race, presidential candidate Barack Obama talked about the consequences of this inevitability: the African-American experience of racial inequality causes the anger of Obama's black pastor, and the white American experience of racial difference produces the fear and suspicion of his white grandmother.

Obama's response to this reality is to accept it—not to condone the anger, the fear and the suspicion—but to understand that it comes from real experience, real history, real

lives. The real violence that can result from our differences is what cannot be condoned or encouraged. Violence is the "bad bad" of being "sad mad." Emotions are not bad. What we do with them can be very bad.

Understanding that different life experiences will produce different perceptions and reactions can help us navigate the sometimes scary landscape of conflict. Whether with families or neighbors, politics, religion, or race, it is possible to understand, even validate and support another perspective, without agreeing with it or adopting it as our own.

Our eleven-year-old poet knows that a pause comes before peace. The sooner the pause happens, the shorter the "hate anger bad bad" part of the story. When we pause ("push the pause button") we give ourselves space to find the grace and clarity to see the other as a whole person, not as the enemy. Agreement and like-mindedness are not necessary for peace. Love and acceptance are.



Margaret McCray