

# **DON'T GO MAD; MANAGE YOUR ANGER!**

**By Leonard Szymczak, MSW, LCSW**

Have you ever gone mad trying to manage your anger? You may feel overwhelmed if you're forever taking other people's fury or you may find yourself continually in trouble because you're the one lashing out. Whichever the case, you may feel helpless or out of control when dealing with conflict.

When threatened, your body naturally mobilizes energy for either a fight or flight response. It makes sense that if you're provoked, you'll want to fight back or flee. You may have a short fuse and explode rather easily or you may do a slow burn and implode within if you withdraw and suppress anger. Men traditionally have felt more comfortable expressing anger whereas women often have been taught that aggression is not considered feminine.

While anger is often viewed as unhealthy, it is a normal human emotion. In fact, many a noble cause has been fueled by the anger of injustice. Nature, herself, uses conflict as a motivator for change. Beautiful canyons, beaches, and mountains have been created by the interaction of conflicting forces. An irritating grain of sand imbedded in an oyster forms a magnificent pearl over time.

Conflict can offer opportunities for positive growth and change. The difficulty with conflict arises if anger, when fueled, becomes uncontrollable. The ongoing battle in the Middle East is a prime example. Anger, not handled appropriately, will disrupt our thoughts and inner harmony. It can either get internalized into self-blame or self-criticism which can lead to depression or escalate into outward attacks such as threats or physical violence.

Therefore, it is crucial to learn the important lessons about conflict lest it dominate your life. Irritation unexpressed leads to anger. Anger unchecked leads to rage, and rage uncontrolled leads to prison. By consciously taking charge of your anger, you can prevent it from controlling your life or from damaging those whom you love. The following steps will keep you from exploding or imploding.

1. **MONITOR YOUR ANGER.** Imagine an angerometer with a fuse burning from 1 to 10 with 1 as neutral and 10 as explosive. Just as a thermometer gives feedback about your body temperature so will your angerometer inform you to stop the wick from burning further. Self-monitoring will help you take action to prevent the fuse from detonating an explosion. Listen to your body for clues. A raised voice, tense muscles, rapid breathing, and a racing pulse are physical signs that your anger level is rising and your body is preparing for a fight.
2. **IDENTIFY TRIGGERS.** External events can trigger angry thoughts and feelings that lead to a retaliatory outburst. Clarifying the triggers that annoy and irritate such as being controlled, insulted, criticized, abused, etc will alert you to potential trouble

spots that ignite your angerometer. As you become more conscious of these triggers, and learn to identify them earlier, you will increase your ability to handle conflict.

3. **TAKE TIME-OUTS.** Sports teams use time-outs to collect themselves, interrupt the flow of the other team, and devise strategies. Time-outs are not meant to avoid problems. They are meant to provide a cooling down period so you can resolve an angry situation more effectively. If your angerometer is burning at a 9 or 10, you will be more interested in a counter-attack. Staying there won't resolve anything other than an escalation of conflict. When you're hot, you need to cool down. Time-outs stop the wick from burning further and allow you to be more open to solutions.
4. **DISCHARGE YOUR ANGER CONSTRUCTIVELY.** This doesn't mean punching someone in the mouth, though you may want to. If your body has moved to a fight/flight response with an increase of adrenaline, you may need to physically release the tension. If you continually store anger in your body, you may eventually implode with migraines, tense muscles or other somatic complaints. Taking a walk, cleaning the house, or exercising are constructive ways to dispel the anger. Relaxation techniques, which include tensing and relaxing muscles, are also beneficial as well as consciously taking slow, deep diaphragmatic breaths. Some feel relief by expressing their anger through drawings or by writing in a journal.
5. **USE PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES.** More often than not, your initial attempt to solve problems is to change others. To err is human, to blame others, more human. However, your opportunities at reducing conflict improve when YOU learn how to communicate and respond differently. A constructive way of resolving conflict is to review the problem and understand who was involved, what happened, when, and why. As you examine how you felt and responded, you can then consider what you wanted to achieve. Then you can imagine yourself successfully resolving the conflict and incorporate some of the ideas into a concrete action plan. If you need to speak with someone who upset you, dialogue with that person, using "I" statements such as "When you did W, in situation X, I felt Y and would want Z. Often, an open discussion will lead to a new understanding and successful resolution.
6. **DEVELOP A SUPPORT TEAM.** It's far better to seek advice when the fuse is burning than to deal with the aftermath of an explosion. Talking about conflict with an objective party in a safe environment can offer a fresh perspective and creative suggestions. A support team of friends and family, or even an anger management group, can provide important feedback and objectivity so you don't go mad while you manage your anger.

**Leonard Szymczak, MSW, LCSW**  
4010 Barranca Pkwy, Suite 252, Irvine CA 92604

**Phone: 949 443-4888**  
[leonard@leonardszymczak.com](mailto:leonard@leonardszymczak.com)

[www.leonardszymczak.com](http://www.leonardszymczak.com)