

# ANGER

---

## TAMING THE BEAST

---

A Step-by-Step Program  
for People with Explosive Anger  
*and* Those Who Find It Difficult  
to Express Anger

RENEAU Z. PEURIFOY, M.A., M.F.T.



KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL  
New York • Tokyo • London

Kodansha America, Inc.  
575 Lexington Avenue, New York 10022, U.S.A.  
Kodansha International Ltd.  
17-14 Otowa 1-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112-8652, Japan

Published in hardcover in 1999 by Kodansha America, Inc.  
First paperback edition 2002  
Copyright © 1999 by Reneau Peurifoy  
All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Peurifoy, Reneau Z.

Anger : taming the beast / by Reneau Z. Peurifoy.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-56836-284-6

1-56836-321-4 (pbk.)

1. Anger—Problems, exercises, etc. 2. Anger—Case studies.

I. Title.

BF575.A5P44 1999

152.4'7-dc2199-12007

Book design by Pagesetters, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

02 03 04 05 06 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



---

# CONTENTS

---

Author's Note	ix
Preface	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
<b>1 Where Does the Beast Come From?</b>	
Is There a Positive Side to Anger?	2
What Is Anger?	3
How to Get the Most Out of This Book	4
Summary of Key Ideas	5
Recommended Activities	5
<b>2 Facing the Beast</b>	
Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Anger	11
Two Roadblocks to Change	12
Abusive Behavior	13
Time-Out	15
Summary of Key Ideas	18
Recommended Activities	19
<b>3 The Nature of the Beast</b>	
What Are Emotions?	26
Three Common Myths about Anger	29
How Anger Is Expressed	31
Learn to Recognize the Different Forms of Anger	32
Summary of Key Ideas	34
Recommended Activities	35

<b>4</b>	<b>Thoughts That Awaken the Beast</b>	
	Six Common Types of Distorted Thinking	39
	A Three-Step Approach to Reducing Distorted Thinking	46
	Summary of Key Ideas	49
	Recommended Activities	50
<b>5</b>	<b>Stress and the Beast</b>	
	What Is Stress?	57
	Your Body Is a Machine with a Limited Amount of Energy	58
	Decompression Routines	59
	Managing Times of Excessive Stress	60
	Summary of Key Ideas	65
	Recommended Activities	66
<b>6</b>	<b>Additional Thoughts That Awaken the Beast</b>	
	Who's to Blame?	68
	Four Common Erroneous Assumptions That Trigger Anger	71
	Mind Reading	74
	Summary of Key Ideas	75
	Recommended Activities	75
<b>7</b>	<b>How the Beast Is Shaped During Childhood</b>	
	Creating a Record of Your Childhood	85
	The Time Tunnel	93
	Core Beliefs	94
	Summary of Key Ideas	97
	Recommended Activities	97
<b>8</b>	<b>When the Beast Is a Ghost from the Past</b>	
	Cultural Stereotypes	103
	The Legacy of a Dysfunctional Family	105
	The "What's Happening? What's Real?" Technique	110
	Summary of Key Ideas	111
	Recommended Activities	112
<b>9</b>	<b>The Beast as Defender</b>	
	The Motivational Side of Anger	121
	Anger as a Psychological Defense Mechanism	123

---

The Price of Using Anger as a Defense	126
Learning to Experience All Your Emotions	128
Behavior as Coded Messages	132
Summary of Key Ideas	135
Recommended Activities	136
<b>10 Learning New Ways to Resolve Conflicts</b>	
Three Styles of Conflict Management	147
Five General Approaches to Resolving Problems and Conflicts	149
Common Erroneous Beliefs about Assertiveness	151
Rights and Responsibilities	153
Hit-and-Run Situations	154
D.E.R. Scripts	156
Summary of Key Ideas	160
Recommended Activities	161
<b>11 More on Conflict Resolution</b>	
Five Common Forms of Resistance	164
The Nonnegotiator	173
Becoming an Effective Negotiator	175
A Five-Step Approach for Resolving Conflict	178
Summary of Key Ideas	182
Recommended Activities	183
<b>12 Embarrassment and Shame</b>	
Embarrassment	185
Summary Sheets	188
Shame	192
Adding a Spiritual/Existential Dimension to Your Work	195
Summary of Key Ideas	199
Recommended Activities	200
<b>13 Resentment, Envy, and Jealousy</b>	
Resentment	203
Envy	209

Jealousy	212
Summary of Key Ideas	215
Recommended Activities	216
<b>14 Managing the Frustrations of Parenting</b>	
Children Are Not Miniature Adults	218
Most Things Can Wait	220
Becoming a Source of Encouragement	220
Teachable and Unteachable Times	225
Lower Your Action Point	226
Natural and Logical Consequences	227
Get Out of the “Crime and Punishment” Cycle	229
Sidestepping Power Struggles	230
Suggestions for Very Young Children	233
Summary of Key Ideas	234
Recommended Activities	234
<b>15 Making Peace with Intimacy</b>	
Substitutes for Intimacy	237
What Is Intimacy Like?	239
Eight Qualities That Increase Intimacy	240
Four Common Areas of Conflict	250
Summary of Key Ideas	254
Recommended Activities	255
<b>16 On Your Own</b>	
Three Plans	262
A Final Word	265
Appendix 1: Guidelines for Selecting a Therapist	267
Appendix 2: Locating a Self-Help Group	271
Supplemental Material	275
Recommended Reading	277
<b>Index</b>	<b>283</b>

---

## PREFACE

---

During the many years that I've worked with people struggling to manage their anger, I've often been disappointed by the published material available to them. Most books on anger don't provide effective tools for managing it, or worse yet, they lag behind the current research on emotions. Those that do have substance are usually targeted at men who are abusing their wives and children or at women who are having difficulty expressing their anger. While this focus fits many people, other large groups "fall through the cracks." I could find nothing that dealt with the full range of the problems that both sexes face, such as men who have difficulty expressing anger and women whose tempers wreak havoc on their husbands and children. Many good books are available on assertiveness, but they address only a small aspect of the problem.

As a result of my frustration, this book brewed for many years in the back of my mind. I am pleased now to be able to offer it both to fellow therapists as a resource, and to those who are struggling with managing anger effectively. If you are among the latter, it is my hope that this book will help you with your struggles. I know from the many letters I've received that *it is possible* to follow a program laid out in a book successfully. I encourage you to use this book as it is intended—as a workbook. If you do, I sincerely believe that you will succeed in taming the beast of anger and transforming it into a positive force in your life.

# 1 WHERE DOES THE BEAST COME FROM?

---

The image of anger as a beast is a familiar one. We have all experienced the transformation that can occur when the beast awakens: the momentary sense of power, the confidence that what we are doing is correct, and the overwhelming drive to triumph over whoever or whatever is opposing us. But all too often we have also experienced the aftermath of the beast gone wild: words and choices that we regret, damaged relationships, and a desire to erase what we've done. Some people respond to this havoc by locking the beast deep within themselves, where it never again sees the light of day; unfortunately, the price of powerlessness they pay can be just as great as the damage done by their uncontrolled anger. Others go through a constant cycle of anger and regret.

This book is for everyone who is struggling with anger. By following the lives of four people, each of whom is struggling with the beast in different ways, it will show you how to tame anger and make it your ally instead of your enemy.

Sharon, a divorced mother of two, often finds herself exploding over trivial matters. At work she is overly aggressive and has a history of alienating her coworkers. Her trail of poor relationships often leaves her with feelings of deep regret.

David, a successful businessman and a good provider for his family, is often overly critical of his employees, even cruel. At home his criticism and quick temper are distancing him from his wife and children, despite his desire to be close to them.

Carmen, a shy married woman who works as a clerk, remains silent when conflict arises. Sometimes her silence dissolves into a flood of tears. Afterward she dwells on how badly she handled the situation. Sometimes

she becomes so depressed that she sits and stares into space for much of the evening, replaying the conflict over and over in her head.

Alex, an intelligent and articulate single man, has what most would consider an easygoing manner. But he often stewes over minor things for days. When he feels he has suffered wrongs, he often retaliates indirectly, making hurtful comments or “forgetting” things that he knows are important to others. Afterward he is often confused as to why he acted as he did.

As you follow each of these people on their journey to controlling anger, you’ll find many parallels in your own life. Along the way you’ll acquire new tools for taming your own beast.

## Is There a Positive Side to Anger?

What words come to mind when you think of anger? When I conduct workshops on anger, I often begin with this question. In response, workshop participants often list these words:

confusion	hate	pain	stress
destruction	helplessness	powerlessness	tears
disappoint- ment	hitting	pushing	trouble
disapproval	hurt	regret	weakness
fear	inadequacy	rejection	violence
frustration	loneliness	resentment	
guilt	loss	running away	
	out of control	sadness	

While we usually see anger in this negative way, it has another side as well. Sometimes anger is a positive force. When I ask the group to think of times when this has been true for them, they begin to see that anger enables them to set limits and say no to unreasonable demands. It can also help them take steps to meet important needs that they’ve been ignoring. As you work through the following chapters, you’ll learn how to transform destructive anger into a positive source of strength.

## What Is Anger?

Three words summarize the key aspects of anger:

- Threat
- Energy
- Motivation

Anger is an automatic emotional response to a real or perceived threat. It generates energy as well as motivation to eliminate that threat. The greater the threat, the higher the level of arousal and the greater the motivation to eliminate it.

In everyday speech, the word *anger* usually refers to a level of arousal somewhere between irritation and rage:

Irritation——Anger——Rage

When I refer to anger in this book, I'm referring to this entire range of emotions: from low-level irritation to out-of-control rage.

Once a perceived threat has triggered anger, the energy and motivation generated by the anger produce actions that can range from violence to positive problem-solving:

- Violent, destructive, and/or harmful actions
- Tantrums
- Hurtful or critical remarks (sarcasm/teasing)
- Sulking/pouting
- Passive-aggressive behavior (hurtful actions such as being late or cruel remarks that you "don't mean")
- Withdrawal (you retreat from situations that incite anger)
- Hurtful or destructive fantasies
- Suppression (you're angry but pretend that you aren't)
- Repression (you're so good at suppressing anger, you don't even realize when something has made you angry)
- Constructive action (usually assertive behavior or problem-solving)

As you read through this list, you may have noticed that nearly all the items are destructive and self-defeating responses. The goal of this book is to reduce such destructive expressions and channel the energy and motivation of anger positively.

Two things cause anger to be expressed in harmful ways. First, anger can be triggered by a *real* or a *perceived* threat. The first step, then, for transforming anger into a positive force is to learn to evaluate threats accurately. Because this is much more easily said than done, we'll spend a lot of time developing this ability.

The second cause for anger's destructive side is its automatic and unconscious nature. Like our actions generally, the actions we take when we are angry tend to be fairly automatic and unconscious. The good news is that these actions are *learned* responses. This means that you can learn new ways of responding that will eventually replace destructive and self-defeating expressions of anger. While this takes time and effort, you can succeed and learn to manage your anger in new and more effective ways.

## How to Get the Most Out of This Book

This book is designed to be used as a *workbook*. In order to get the most out of it, you need to read through it slowly. Beginning with Chapter 2, I suggest you spend at least one week on each chapter and do as many of the Recommended Activities as possible. While it's best to work through the book slowly, it's all right to first read through the entire book quickly to get a general idea of what it covers. But once you've done so, return to the beginning and work through the chapters slowly.

If your goal is to change the way you experience and express anger, you will need much more than just a general understanding of ideas. You will need to internalize the information and skills presented in each chapter, to make them a natural and automatic part of your behavior. The Recommended Activities play a key role in this process. The more time and energy you spend on them, the more successful you will be.

You may want to read each chapter several times. You may also wish to spend more than one week on a particular chapter. While it's important to be thorough, it's also important to maintain your momentum. So as you work through the book, try not to overdo it. Instead, spend at least one

week but no more than two weeks on each chapter, doing as many of the Recommended Activities as possible. You can spend additional time on those areas where you feel you need more work after you complete the program.

This probably sounds like a lot of work. It is. But it took all your life to develop your current thinking patterns and behaviors. Still, if you keep at it, you'll soon find yourself taming your beast—first in small ways, then ultimately mastering it as Sharon, David, Carmen, and Alex have.

## Summary of Key Ideas

1. Anger is an automatic, emotional response to a real or perceived threat. It generates energy as well as motivation to eliminate the threat. The greater the threat, the higher the level of arousal and the greater the motivation to eliminate the threat.
2. While anger is often a destructive force, it can also enable a person to set limits and say no to unreasonable demands and take steps to meet important needs that have been ignored.
3. A threat that triggers anger may be either real or perceived. Our responses to threats are learned. New responses can be learned to replace the old ones.
4. Use this book as a workbook. Read each chapter several times, and do as many of the Recommended Activities as you can before going on to the next chapter.

## Recommended Activities

### *Getting the Most out of the Recommended Activities*

At the end of each chapter, you will find a set of activities that will help you learn to manage anger in new and more positive ways. I have used them with clients in my psychotherapy practice for many years. Some will be easy, while others will be difficult and may make you uncomfortable. The easy activities probably involve skills that are already a

part of how you usually think and act. The difficult and uncomfortable activities probably involve skills and ideas new to you or that you've never really mastered.

You may be inclined to spend less time with activities you find easy and more time with those that seem difficult or uncomfortable. That's fine, but I encourage you to do *all* the exercises. Even though a particular exercise may not seem to apply to you at first, the results of doing it may still surprise you.

One other point I'd like to stress is that I've designed this book to produce permanent change rather than just a quick fix. This is a very difficult task, since you are trying to change deeply ingrained response patterns. It's very likely that you've already attended workshops or read books that taught you various assertive and communication skills that you've understood and have been able to use in limited ways. However, the old dysfunctional patterns continue to re-emerge. The problem is that irrational beliefs, distorted thinking, and reactions that were established during childhood are blocking your ability to use the various skills you've learned. Because of this, the early chapters of this book focus on removing the blocks that prevent you from using new skills. It is only then that you will begin practicing communication and assertiveness skills.

Another thing that I've done is to introduce the various skills needed to manage anger effectively in a systematic way, from those that are usually the easiest for a person to master to those that are most difficult and dependent on earlier abilities (such as challenging distorted thinking or changing basic beliefs). So, while the order of the material sometimes may not make sense to you, it is all done based on my experience with many different people and the goal of permanent change in mind.

Since you have spent your entire life developing your current thinking and behavior patterns, changing them will take some time. Be patient. When an important change occurs, you probably won't even notice it until later. This is how personal growth takes place. If you have a strong commitment to use the book as it is designed—to do the reading and apply as many of the suggestions as possible (even if they seem silly or pointless)—you will learn to respond and manage anger in new and more effective ways.

## *Keep an Anger Journal*

Because most of our behavior is fairly automatic and unconscious, the first step in changing behavior is to identify our current patterns clearly. The more precisely you identify your automatic responses to various situations, the better able you will be to identify the changes you need to make. The best way to identify your responses is to keep an anger journal.

Use your journal not only to record and analyze your behavior, but to complete the written Recommended Activities, list your problems and concerns, record your insights, and keep track of your progress. As you proceed through the chapters, you will find that your journal is an extremely effective tool for growth.

You don't need to use an expensive or fancy volume for your journal. A simple spiral-bound notebook is fine. Feel free to choose whatever is most comfortable for you. As you work with your journal, keep in mind that privacy is essential, in order to write honestly and openly. Do not write for an "unseen audience"; attempting to please invisible watchers can cause you to lose much of the benefit of keeping a journal.

The main value of a journal is not the permanent record it represents but the work put into creating it. The act of writing is a powerful way to learn because it involves different parts of the brain. This is why written homework is a fundamental part of formal education. Even after you complete this book, you may choose to keep your journal as a source of encouragement because of the progress it records.

As I mentioned, the first step in changing your anger patterns is to observe and identify your current patterns in detail. Each day this week, take ten to fifteen minutes to write down a brief description of when you became angry. For each incident rate your anger in terms of its level of intensity. Use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is minimal anger arousal and 10 is the most anger arousal you have ever felt. Also using a scale of 1 to 10, rate each incident in terms of how aggressively you acted, where 1 is minimal aggression and 10 is the most aggression you have ever displayed. Then record your thoughts when you were angry and a brief description of what you did. You'll use this information in the later chapters. Here are Sharon and Alex's first entries in their anger journals:

## SHARON

MONDAY, JUNE 2

*Incident:* I became angry with my son, who had not picked up his toys.

Arousal — 4, Aggression — 4

*Thoughts:* “Why can’t he learn to pick up his toys? Why do I always have to follow him around? I feel like a maid. He’s so irresponsible.”

*Actions:* I yelled at him and told him how irresponsible he was. Then I made him pick up the toys.

## ALEX

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7

*Incident:* My girlfriend went shopping with her friends instead of having dinner with me.

Arousal — 1, Aggression — 1

*Thoughts:* “How could she do this to me? I thought she cared, but I guess her friends are more important than our relationship.”

*Actions:* I went home, took the phone off the hook so she couldn’t reach me, and watched TV.

## *Clarify Your Goals*

If you are serious about change, you can greatly increase your chances of success by clarifying exactly what change you wish to achieve. Think about each of the following questions, and record your responses in your anger journal.

- Why am I reading this book?
- What do I hope to achieve as a result of working through this book?
- How might I sabotage or undermine my work as I go through this book?
- How can I prevent myself from sabotaging or undermining my work?
- How do I *feel* about reading this book?

---

# INDEX

---

- Abusive behavior, 13–15
- Action point, 226, 227
- Active listening
- feeling confirmation, 244–46, 258, 259
  - I messages, 157, 158, 162, 165, 168, 183, 219, 243
  - paraphrasing, 175–78
  - roadblocks, 244–46
- Aggression, *see* Assertiveness
- All-or-nothing thinking, *see* Distorted thinking
- Anger
- action taken in, 20–22
  - appropriate, 11
  - behavioral cues, 33, 34
  - definition, 3
  - displaced, 31
  - early signs of, 35–37
  - effects of, 22–25
  - energy and, 3
  - erroneous assumptions, 71
  - explosive, 1
  - expression of, 31, 32
  - feeling strong when angry, 123–25
  - forms of, 32
  - inappropriate, 11, 12
  - increased focus on needs, 121
  - instinct and, 29, 30
  - interferes with problem solving, 126
  - low-level, 32
  - motivation and, 3, 121, 122
  - myths about, 29
  - needs and, 2
  - positive role models, 115
  - positive side, 2
  - reduced awareness of other emotions, 22
  - responsibility and, 24, 25
  - roadblocks to change, 12
  - sense of righteousness, 121
  - suppression of, 1, 31
  - threat and, 3, 4, 11, 27
  - unconscious nature of, 4
  - venting, 29
  - words associated with, 2
  - words that describe, 34, 37
- see also* Abusive behavior; Fight-or-flight response; Defense mechanism
- Approval and performance, 187, 188
- Assertiveness, 147–84
- aggression defined, 148
  - conflict defined, 147
  - D.E.R. scripts, 156–60, 162, 179, 204, 228, 246, 248, 249
  - definition, 148
  - erroneous beliefs, 151–53, 161
  - five step approach, 178–81
  - five ways to resolve conflict, 149–51