

## ANGRY ALL THE TIME (2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION)

*An Emergency Guide to Anger Control*

By **Ronald Potter-Efron, S\MSW, Ph.D.**

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### SECOND EDITION OF ANGER MANAGEMENT CLASSIC

*Author uses a mixture of brutal honesty and understanding to help readers get control over their rage*

Everyone has a bad day. Everyone loses his or her temper once in a while. This book is not for them. This book is for those who stay angry. All the time.

These people live in a trap—they say things they do not mean, hurt people that they love, and even begin to turn their anger on themselves.

Using an 8-step anger management program the author, anger expert Ron Potter-Efron, teaches readers how to:

- identify the causes of their anger
- stop making excuses for their behavior
- avoid violence, blaming, and threats
- change anger provoking thoughts
- deal with old resentments
- follow the 8 steps of anger management

"You are habitually angry. You get mad so often you've forgotten what it's like not to be angry. Anger is your best friend; maybe your only friend. It's become just about the only feeling you have. Good-bye, happiness. So long, joy. Forget sadness and fear. What's love got to do with it, anyhow? Anger, anger, and more anger, that's what life is all about nowadays. You're angry all the time."

— From the book

Potter-Efron uses a tough, no-nonsense communication style to guide readers towards an immediate change in their behavior. *Angry All the Time* is divided into two parts: understanding the problem, and taking action. This revised second edition includes two new chapters, as well as updated material throughout. An important section provides advice and survival tips for those living with someone with an anger problem.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ron Potter-Efron, Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychotherapist in private practice with a special focus on anger management. In addition to his practice Dr. Potter-Efron gives numerous workshops and lectures. In addition to *Angry All The Time* he is the author of *Working Anger* and *Stop the Anger Now*; he is co-author with Pat Potter-Efron, Ph.D., of *Letting Go of Anger* and *The Secret Message of Shame*.

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## EXCERPT FROM *ANGRY ALL THE TIME*

### MY LIFE IS A MESS BECAUSE OF MY ANGER

Anger is a strong feeling. It can get you into a lot of trouble. Want to find out how much trouble you have with anger? Of course not! It's easier to *deny* the problem. "Who, me angry? They must be thinking of somebody else. I never get mad." Or to *minimize*: "Well, maybe I have a little anger problem, but it really isn't that bad." Or to *justify*: "You'd be angry too, if you grew up like me." Or to *blame* others: "Well, sure I get steamed a lot, but it's all his (her) fault."

Let's cut through the crap right now. You're no innocent victim. You're not the nicest person walking around. Be honest. No more bullshit. Quit lying to yourself. You are an angry person. A very angry person. A rageaholic.

Need proof? Read on. You're going to provide it, if you're honest.

### WHAT A MESS — THE RESULTS OF LONG-TERM ANGER

Turn the page to see a large circle cut into eight pieces. That circle is like a pie, and each piece is a slice of your life. It's your own personal *anger pie*. Each slice is one major area of your life that you have damaged because of your anger. Take a look at the names of the slices:

- Health
- Family
- Work and school
- Money
- Friends
- The law
- Mood and personality
- Values and spirit

I'm going to tell you about some of the most common problems angry people run into in each of these areas. At the end of each section, you'll write down the ones that you've encountered. There may be others that aren't on my list. You'll write those down too.

#### Why Can't I Stop?

##### THE SIX MAIN REASONS PEOPLE STAY ANGRY

*Why am I still so angry? What keeps me raging?*

History is history. It's over. Whatever got you this angry won't change. Better accept that about your life. True acceptance means giving up any last hopes that you can change your past.

The key question is, what keeps you going? Why do you continue to get so angry?

It's back to honesty time. Your anger is doing something for you. It has some uses. If not, you'd let go of it fast. So what keeps you so angry? One or more of these six things:

- Power and control
- Giving away responsibility
- Avoiding other feelings or people
- Habit
- The anger rush

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## **EXCERPT FROM *ANGRY ALL THE TIME***

### **I Need Help, Too — A Chapter for Partners Of Angry People**

Living with an angry person is hard work. It may be dangerous. It can even be fatal. You won't get much praise or appreciation from the angry person. Instead, you get big complaints about little problems, endless criticism, and a lot of ridiculous tantrums. But here you are, for better or worse. Somehow your spouse, partner, or friend is angry all the time. Maybe you didn't realize that at first. Perhaps you just figured it out.

You're in trouble. This isn't going to be easy. Living with a habitually angry person is like chewing on a lemon, hoping it will taste sweet. Chewing harder doesn't help. Adding sugar only covers up the sour taste for a while. And pretending a lemon is an orange won't do any good either.

You may have to spit that lemon out. But before you do, let's take a look at what you can do to make your life better. Here are my suggestions:

- Protect yourself. Physical safety comes first.
- Realize that you have the right to be treated with respect.
- Don't accept responsibility for your partner's anger.
- Watch your own anger. Don't become too angry yourself. But also don't become an anger avoider.
- Don't isolate yourself. Get support from others.
- Think about what the angry person gains from his or her anger.
- Learn how you've been affected by your partner's anger.
- Think seriously about leaving if your partner won't or can't change.

#### **PROTECT YOURSELF**

Some angry people are violent. They hit, slap, bite, shove, and hold. They threaten. They are bullies who beat up anyone smaller or weaker. They're scary and dangerous. You (and your children) have the right to be safe.

*Nobody deserves to be hurt, no matter how angry the other person gets.* I suppose you know that already. But do you believe it? For you? The angry person is responsible for his or her actions. But if your partner is a batterer or child beater, you need a survival plan. You need to know what to do to protect yourself and your family.

I'm not saying you can make anybody else less mean or nasty. You can't. That's their job. And I'm not saying you can keep them from hitting or hurting you. You can't. What you can do is protect yourself. You can draw up a plan of action that will help keep you a little safer some of the time. You might save your life by thinking ahead. You may feel depressed and hopeless. That's normal if you're living with someone who gets violent.

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## EXCERPT FROM *ANGRY ALL THE TIME*

### “I NEED HELP, TOO — A CHAPTER FOR PARTNERS OF ANGRY PEOPLE”

He or she is trying to control you, to destroy your belief in yourself. Don't give in. You'll be stuck forever if you do, and you'll be miserable.

Sit down and make a plan. How can I stay safe? Where can I go? What can I do? Is there a shelter you can go to in your community? A safe house? Do you know their phone numbers? Look them up. Memorize them!

Are there friends or family or neighbors you can go to? Think of the people close by you can count on. Keep a few dollars on hand in case you have to get out fast. Leave at the first signs of trouble, before you are trapped. For instance, if your partner is out drinking, and you know he'll come home violent, don't wait around. Get out and get safe *now*.

What if flight is impossible? Maybe the rager is right in front of you, ready to strike. Try to stay calm. Use a steady voice. Walk and move slowly. Keep your distance if you can. Don't argue. Don't try to explain or justify your actions if that only gives the rageaholic more excuses to complain. Use quiet, unemotional language. Think of it as living through a bad storm by letting the wind pass right by. Your job is survival. Keep your mind on that task. Calling the police may help. So can temporary restraining orders, but not always, and never if you break them yourself out of guilt or loneliness. Nothing you say or do guarantees your safety. You're living with a violent person. But do what you can. Don't give up hope. And keep reading.

#### REALIZE THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT

I once saw a cartoon with two giraffes. The first looked normal. The second's back looked like a staircase. The second one asked the other: "I wonder why people keep stepping on me?" I remember another cartoon. There's a man lying on the street. Cars are coming. The caption says something like this: "Having low self-esteem, George takes a job as a speed bump." You've got to believe in yourself. That you are a good person. That you are worthwhile. Above all, that you deserve respect\*. (\* See *I Deserve Respect*, by Ron and Pat Potter-Efron, published in 1989 by Hazelden Press, Center City, MN.) ...

#### DON'T ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR PARTNER'S ANGER

*You aren't the cause of your partner's anger. You aren't the solution.*

**You aren't the cause.** Some people are severely angry. They've been that way for a long time. Probably from long before you even met. If they weren't angry at you, they would

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be angry at somebody else. The anger problem belongs to the angry person. He or she is the only one who can do anything about it.

Of course angry people blame others. They always say, “You make me mad.” But that isn’t the truth. They make themselves mad. They’re just trying to give away responsibility for their own behavior. That’s one of the main ways angry people stay angry (see chapter 3 for the other ways). If they blame others for making them mad, then they can be an innocent victim. That’s bull. We each must take responsibility for our own actions. Me for mine. You for yours. Your partner for his or hers. The same is true for anger. Mine is mine. Yours is yours. I’m not the cause of yours. You’re not the cause of mine.

You aren’t the solution. That means you can’t fix your angry partner. Not by being sweet. Not by being mean. Not even by being assertive. Have you noticed there is a serious shortage of magic wands in this universe? Maybe you should give up looking for one that would turn your frog into a prince or princess. You need to focus your energy on yourself, not your partner. Figure out who you are. Take time with yourself instead of always thinking about him or her. Detach.

Maybe you’ve been trying for years to fix your partner. So he or she will be nicer to you. Or calm down. Or quit harping about little things. You’ve thought and thought. You’ve argued, maneuvered, pleaded, and reasoned. How well has it worked? Probably not very well, because your partner has to see the problem and want to change. Until then, all your effort is wasted.

I’m not saying you should stop fighting for what you want. Just don’t kid yourself. You have very limited power here. You can make suggestions, but you can’t cure your partner. To repeat:

You aren’t the cause of your partner’s anger.

You aren’t the solution.

#### **ELEVEN RULES TO HELP YOU CLIMB DOWN THE LADDER OF ANGER AND VIOLENCE**

Eleven rules will help you climb down the ladder. I’ll list them here. Then we’ll look at them more carefully in these next two chapters.

1. Take time-outs to stop your violence.
2. Wipe that frown off your face and relax.
3. Quit trying to control others.
4. Accept difference.
5. Ask, don’t demand.
6. Reward, don’t punish or threaten.
7. Speak quietly and don’t swear.
8. Be responsible for everything you say and do.
9. Treat others with respect.
10. Tell others what bothers you. Be direct, specific, and polite.
11. Use “I” statements.

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