

**If you think the guy who just flipped you off on the highway is the only one with an anger problem, think again. It may be that the driver who continues calmly on after being cut off is the one who *really* has the problem.**

Joe cooks, cleans, and supervises bedtime routines. He isn't particularly interested in watching sports or hanging out with the guys. When his wife makes decisions about parenting or household matters that he doesn't agree with, he holds his tongue.

Kathy is chronically anxious. She calls her husband once or twice a day for reassurance and comfort, which disrupts his work. She spends her days taking care of everyone else's needs. Now that her father is elderly she drives him everywhere he needs to go and endures her sister's accusations of selfishness when she asks her to pitch in with the driving.

Most people would say that Jimmy is an easygoing guy who's quick to laugh or smile. Yet, there are times when he flies into rages. He slams doors, screams, threatens to leave, and cusses up a blue streak. Because of these tirades his wife recently insisted that they begin couples therapy.

What do these people have in common?

- a) They all have low self-esteem
- b) They all have an anger problem
- c) None of them knows how to say "no"

The answer is "b."

Yes, "b." Each of these people is what's known as an "anger avoider," a term coined by John Lynch, a psychologist and author of *When Anger Scares You* (May 04), to describe people who are afraid to express and feel anger. So, how is it that someone like Jimmy can be an anger avoider? Because he only knows one response to anger: explosion. As a result he avoids it and avoids it and avoids it—until he no longer can and then he blows sky-high. For him, anger is synonymous with rage and although he does his best to steer clear of it, inevitably it catches up to him.

Anger avoiders tend to be found on either end of the emotional continuum. They can be ragers like Jimmy or, like Nancy and Joe, they can be deferential and dutiful to a fault. If Jimmy's problem is an earthquake, Nancy and Joe's is a carbon-monoxide leak. Either way, the results can be devastating. That's because anger avoiders tend to suffer a host of psychological and physical problems. Depression and anxiety are common among them and many are plagued with unexplained physical ailments, like chronic pain that has no biological source. In *When Anger Scares You*, John Lynch uncovers this "other" anger problem and gives anger avoiders the skills they need to effectively express their anger without exploding into rage. Here's just some of what he has to say.

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**FOR AN INTERVIEW REQUEST OR MORE  
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**When Anger Scares You:**

**How to Overcome Your Fear of Conflict & Express Your Anger in Healthy Ways**

**by John R. Lynch, Ph.D.**

**ISBN: 1-57224-347-3, \$14.95, Published in May 2004 by New Harbinger Publications,**

**800-748-6273, [www.newharbinger.com](http://www.newharbinger.com)**

**Anger avoiders are made not born.** The origins of anger avoidance aren't a mystery. Most anger avoiders grew up in families who were ill-equipped to cope with anger in healthy ways. These families may have included members who were physically or emotionally explosive and who transmitted messages like "Anger is dangerous and violent;" "Anger cancels out love;" or "In all fights there's a winner and loser and the loser is shamed." Another family type that is likely to generate an anger avoider is the family who is overly polite and near-phobic when it comes to anger. Families like this impart messages like "Either you love someone or you are angry at them;" "If you care about someone you don't bring up your troubles;" or "Anger makes anything worse."

**Anger is a cultural dilemma.** We come of age in a culture in which anger is synonymous with violence. Assaultants are often referred to as "angry" in newspaper and television accounts of their crimes. No wonder many of us arrive at adulthood with the misconception that anger is inherently dangerous and avoiding it is wise.

**Many of us don't know the difference between anger and rage.** Many people confuse anger and rage and instead of differentiating between the two, simply label both as "anger." Since rage means that things get broken, relationships are damaged, and shame is sure to follow it's only reasonable that they avoid it.

**Anger is a constructive energy.** That's right. Where rage is destructive, anger—when it's expressed in healthy ways—is a springboard for growth and progress. It reinforces a relationship, communicates mutual respect, and is often the first step in solving a problem.

**There is a mind in the body.** Your body initiates the biochemical and physiological changes that translate into feelings and when it comes to anger these internal triggers can be powerfully. When you lack the coping skills needed to override them, the mind in your body can get so agitated and overwhelmed that you can act in destructive ways.

**Anger is not a "feminine" emotion.** From the cradle to the cubicle that's the message that women are likely to receive. That's because cultural attitudes die hard and even in these post-feminist days our culture tells us that to be feminine is to be a conciliator and to act feminine is to express only those emotions that maintain group cohesion. As a result women and girls are often encouraged to suppress anger for the sake of the group—whether it be the family or the workforce. Not surprising, then, that a woman's relationship to anger is complicated even in the best of circumstances.

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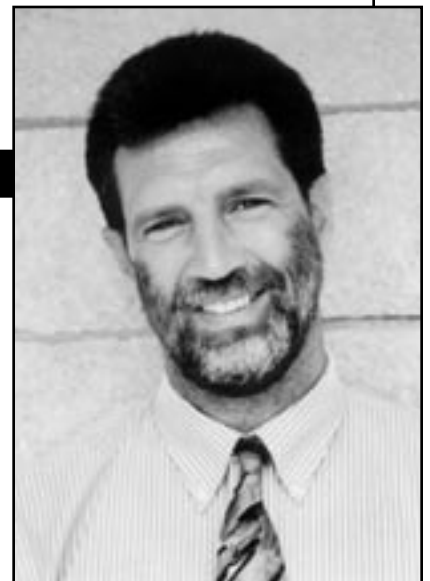
So just what does it mean to be someone who expresses anger in a healthy way, without exploding because of it or shrinking from it? In *When Anger Scares You* John Lynch offers a complete anger tool kit. He not only shares the beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions of healthy anger expressers, he provides step-by-step exercises for becoming one of them. With compassion and clarity, Lynch shows you how to:

- Change the unrealistic and downright untrue beliefs and assumptions about anger that cause you to avoid it;
- Examine the “psychological air” you breathed in as a child and understand how it defined your relationship to anger;
- Communicate about anger in a way that expresses the depth of your feeling without alienating others or damaging relationships;
- Recognize and defuse the physical triggers of anger before the “fight or flight” impulse kicks in;
- Identify the emotional threats that lead to anger and devise a plan for coping with them effectively;
- Adopt self-talk that can defuse anger before it overwhelms you; and
- Develop constructive anger responses that you can rely on when anger arises.

#### About John Lynch, Ph.D., author of *When Anger Scares You*

**John Lynch, Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist and former director of the Dissociative Disorders and Men’s Treatment Program at Charter Westbrook Hospital in Richmond, VA. He has served as associate professor of psychiatry at the Medical College of Virginia. He is a member of the APA and the Virginia Society for Clinical Hypnosis and coauthor of *The Pain Behind the Mask*.

“This is a good book on a neglected topic. Anger avoidance is quite common yet poorly understood. Reading this book will help people understand and change their excessive anger avoidance tendencies.”  
—**Ronald T. Potter-Efron, MSW, Ph.D.**, author, *Angry All the Time* and *Stop the Anger Now*



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## **Suggested Interview Questions for John Lynch, Ph.D., author of *When Anger Scares You***

1. Many people who hear the term “anger avoider” will probably think something like, “It makes sense to avoid anger. If only more people would we’d have a much safer and healthier society.” What would you say to them and why do you think anger avoidance is a problem?
2. Throughout your book you provide examples of anger avoiders, one of whom is of Jimmy, a guy who flies into rages when his anger takes hold. How can he possibly be an anger avoider?
3. What is “psychological air” and how can it shape someone’s relationship to anger?
4. What are some common behavioral patterns in people who avoid anger and what are some of the common emotional and physical difficulties that they face?
5. You talk about the need to separate rage from anger. Why do you think so many people confuse the two?
6. You say that “anger is a constructive energy.” Can you give us a few examples that support this?
7. What do you mean when you say that anger avoiders work double duty?
8. What kind of families are likely to produce an anger avoider?
9. Why is it important to keep a journal when trying to develop a healthier relationship to anger?
10. Why do women tend to have such a difficult relationship to anger?

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