



TAMING ANGER

**A GUIDE FOR MOMS
WHO ARE TIRED
OF FEELING ANGRY**

SHANNON P. WARDEN, PhD

**“YOU WANT EVERYTHING
YOUR WAY...
WE OUGHT TO CALL YOU
‘BURGER KING!’”**

OUR TEN-YEAR-OLD SON, Avery, angrily said these words to our three-year-old son when Carson would not play the way Avery wanted him to play. Carson, not really knowing about the fast food restaurant or its marketing slogan, simply responded, “I like Burger King.”

So often we get angry because we want or need something (or someone) to go a certain way. It doesn't go that way. We're then disappointed or dissatisfied. Sometimes we lash out. But is all anger bad? Of course not! It can be a very healthy and productive emotion—but it can also be a destructive force that hurts others and hurts us.

MOTHERS CERTAINLY HAVE PLENTY OF REASONS TO BE ANGRY AT TIMES. CAN YOU RELATE TO ANY OF THESE THINGS THAT MAKE US ANGRY?

Unmet personal goals (health, time-management, home-improvement, social)

Unfulfilled dreams (marital, parenting, educational, career)

Inability to please everyone at home, work, etc.

Disobedience by children

Children tearing up stuff (over and over again)

Sibling arguments

Managing children's hectic schedules

Unwise decisions or irresponsibility by older children

Husband's unrealistic expectations

Insensitivity by husband (doesn't do his share of household chores, forgets anniversaries, doesn't understand wife's emotions)

Financial burdens

Disagreements with extended family members

Conflict at work

Fatigue

IN MORE EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES,

some moms may experience anger due to the death of a child, the death of a husband, chronic illness, extramarital affairs, divorce, or abuse. Still in other cases, some moms might say, "I don't know why I'm angry. I just am." Such a response suggests in part that a mom has allowed anger to build for so long that she feels defeated and may have even normalized anger as something that is simply part of her life.

Just as a number of things can trigger a mom's anger, she might express anger in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes our anger is quiet; sometimes it is loud. Sometimes our anger is short-lived; sometimes it lasts awhile. Sometimes we know when we're angry—and why, and everyone else knows it too. Other times, anger is quietly brewing in our hearts and minds, perhaps outside of our conscious awareness.



I remember having just moved back to our hometown, settling into a new home, starting a new job, and adjusting to having a third baby. For people at work or church, I probably appeared to be my typically reserved self. I think,

WE MOMS CAN GET MAD AT OURSELVES FOR FAILING TO MEET OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS.

too, that my husband and children did not necessarily fully know the amount of stress I was internalizing. I think I was even trying to carry on as if I could handle my stress just fine. What opened my eyes more fully to my stress were my increasingly angry reactions to our dog, Buster. He was only doing the same dog things he had ever done, which

are sometimes aggravating for sure, but I was snapping at him more harshly and in such a way that I remember thinking, “Shannon, you are taking it too far. Calm down.”

Moms often take out their anger on people (or pets) that they love and, perhaps even love “unconditionally.” This can create a good bit of frustration and guilt for a mom. On one hand, she loves and needs her children, husband, extended family, friends, family pet, etc., and yet on the other hand, these loved ones do and say things that spark her anger! At the same time, we moms can get mad at ourselves for failing to meet our own expectations.

HERE ARE SOME FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OUR ANGER AS MOMS—AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER MANAGING THAT ANGER.

PERSONALITY

The same things that made you mad before likely still make you mad after getting married and having children. Let’s take chaos and clutter, for example. A main difference now is that you cannot simply deal with chaos and clutter on your own terms; you now have to navigate the realities of living with other people who, at least in the case of the children, are naturally prone to mess-making.

Similarly, for personality types who prefer consistency,

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you still have some control over your own choices, but you now must flex with the sometimes unpredictable needs and wants of your loved ones.

You simply cannot control their emotions and schedules in the same way

RECOGNIZING THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF OUR PERSONALITY STYLES IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN MANAGING OUR RESPONSES TO ANGER.

that you may be able to control your own. All this can make us angry.

managing our responses to anger. Through that recognition and insight, we are better equipped to catch ourselves too quickly reacting in anger—overreacting with words or actions that we may regret later, or underreacting and allowing anger to unproductively build over time, or acting in passive-aggressive ways.

Recognizing the strengths and limitations of our personality styles is an important step in

Of course, self-awareness alone is not enough. We can and should learn and practice more positive ways of reacting and can do so by studying resources about anger, reaching out to trusted loved ones for guidance and support, and working with a counselor.

FATIGUE

To say that moms are busy is an understatement. Yet moms sometimes become so accustomed to being tired that they are oblivious to the physical and emotional effects of disturbed sleep or sleep deprivation. You might have to experiment to know if this is true for you, but a well-rested mom is one who may be slower to anger than a mom who is not getting enough good sleep. People who suffer with chronic or medically diagnosable sleep disorders should consult with a physician. Moms whose poor sleep comes from busyness may need to evaluate their daily schedules to see what, if anything, might be adjusted so that they are able to get to bed earlier or sleep a little later.

Moms whose sleep is compromised because of small children's nighttime restlessness due to illness, cutting of teeth, bathroom needs, etc., may be helped to know these behaviors will not last and that your service to these children bond you to them in important ways. But you may need to look for opportunities to grab even a fifteen-minute daytime nap to help with your fatigue. More rest may lead to less anger.

STRESS

Stress is an inevitable part of life and certainly of motherhood. Wearing multiple hats can surely wear down even the most durable mom. We may desire to tend to our stress but simply don't have the energy, time, or money to do so. Of course, just as we have to put gas in our car's gas tank, we also must make time to refuel ourselves. This takes intentionality and commitment on our parts to refuel in even the smallest ways that we can afford. Less time- and money-consuming stress-reducing activities include taking walks, reading, journaling, taking a bubble bath, or watching a favorite television show. More costly but equally valuable activities include getting a mani-pedi or an evening out with friends or your husband.

But it is important to remember that stress-management is as much or more mental than physical. That is, sometimes, we must consciously decide that "I am going to give myself fully to playing with these sweet children. They won't want me to play with them one day." Or, "I am going to sit with my precious husband, talk with him, and not worry about what's on my to-do list." When tending our stress levels, even if circumstances still warrant an angry response, less stressed moms may respond in a healthy way.

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ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Anxiety and depression are not uncommon and affect millions of people annually. They are distinct diagnoses but have a similar debilitating feature in that they can both make people feel hopeless and helpless. Hopelessness and helplessness can escalate and exacerbate angry feelings. Moms who battle diagnosable anxiety or depression should see a physician, as these conditions can warrant medical evaluation. Counseling is also an important resource for folks who deal with chronic and aggravating symptoms of anxiety and depression.

All people may experience situational anxiety and depression, and so all moms are encouraged to be aware of their current circumstances and how those may be generating anxious or depressed thoughts and feelings. Reaching out to close family members, friends, ministers, or counselors can be helpful. Self-care and stress-management are also helpful measures to counter the negative effects of anxiety and depression. By being aware and taking action against anxiety and depression, moms can potentially free up emotional, mental, and physical energy so that they can respond to disappointing circumstances in more healthy ways.

INSECURITY OR LOW SELF-ESTEEM

If a mom feels negatively about herself, she may look at her circumstances in less positive ways—and get angry. She may allow bothersome behaviors to go on because she doesn't feel she is worthy of better outcomes. She may struggle with perfectionism setting herself up for unhealthy, unachievable expectations. Insecurity and low self-esteem are often quiet and permanent residents in the life of so many moms. Here again though, self-awareness and counseling may help to counter the effects

of a mom's insecurity or low self-esteem. With an improved self-concept and inner strength, a mom can face aggravating personal and professional circumstances with increased hope and empowerment.

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POOR CHILDHOOD MODELS

Not everyone is blessed with parents or guardians who model healthy anger management. Not having that childhood model may leave some moms both feeling angry and uncertain how to express anger in healthy ways. Some moms may have been taught that anger is bad and to never express anger. Conversely, other moms may have been taught that anger is the only way to get what you want in life. These are just some of the messages children can receive in childhood. As adults, we are more capable of deciding for ourselves

how to best handle emotion, yet perhaps out of habit, we continue imitating the behaviors we saw as children.

Whether a mom had the greatest or poorest role models, honest self-evaluation may reveal to her how she is doing in terms of handling emotion,

especially anger. Such evaluation can involve observing her loved ones' reactions to her anger, asking those loved ones or other trusted sources

how they perceive her handling of anger, and gauging how she feels after she has experienced or expressed anger. It may be that through such honest self-evaluation, a mom decides she is handling anger just fine—she and her loved ones are not angry or bitter and are able to move on in their relationship without negative thoughts and feelings. However, if a mom realizes that she is, in fact, doing damage to herself and to relationships because of her anger, she may want to begin taking steps toward changing her thoughts and behaviors. Little by little, as moms learn more about ourselves and begin making positive changes, we can become the role models that our own children need.

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PAST TRAUMA

Some moms are hindered by not having positive role models. Yet, handling anger or other negative emotion can be even more challenging for moms who were traumatized in some way as children or as younger adults. Many types of trauma exist, but here I am speaking more about moms who have been traumatized through sexual, physical, or verbal abuse or through other physical violence. The effects of trauma can heavily influence every aspect of a woman, including how she handles anger. Perhaps through her trauma, she gained an increased sense of danger or inability to protect herself. That mom may be afraid of intense anger—her own or someone else's. Or, perhaps as a defense mechanism of sorts, she tends to stay angry—almost as a way of anticipating danger and shielding herself from it. This mom may need ongoing counseling or intermittent seasons of counseling to help recover and restore the inner peace she lost due to her trauma. And, while she works on personal restoration, she can evaluate her handling of anger and how and if she wants to make changes in that area of her life. This mom, and all moms, are wise to be kind to themselves while they make changes, as change is hard and takes time.

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ANGER IN ITSELF IS NOT A BAD THING.

Yet I have never known a mom who enjoys being angry or who wants to stay angry. Most moms want to resolve their anger and return to inner peace and interpersonal peace as quickly as possible. By exploring your angry feelings and angry reactions, and by considering healthier ways in which you might resolve your anger, you may gain some valuable life strategies that not only improve your relationships but empower you to control your anger rather than allowing it to control you.

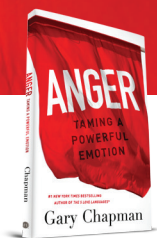


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HOW ARE YOU MANAGING YOUR ANGER? TAKE THE PERSONAL ANGER ASSESSMENT

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FOR MORE INSIGHT and suggestions related to handling your anger in positive and productive ways, read *Anger: Taming a Powerful Emotion* by Dr. Gary Chapman. Visit 5lovelanguages.com/anger.



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