

## FOR YOUR PRACTICE LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS

# Lawyer seeks help for anger management

**Q.** *Ever since I was a kid, I've been known to lose my temper, and I'm still prone to losing my composure when irritated. It's been happening for years with some of my uncooperative criminal clients, but frankly, what really got my attention was when I recently found myself behaving that way with my young child (not to mention my wife, who has learned to wait for it to blow over). I should clarify that it never gets physical, but my volume goes up, and some of my words can be quite hurtful. I have no interest in the kind of anger management program that is mandated for guys who have been assaultive; is there another way to deal with this?*

**A.** It's true that anger management problems occur on a continuum, and that while some individuals become physically aggressive, may harm others and may not even be bothered by having done so, many more are subject to reacting to frustration with a milder degree of losing control, raising their voices, adversely affecting relationships (professional, personal or both), and feeling guilty or ashamed when all is said and done.

The roots of these patterns may lie in our personal histories, our neurobiology or both. As a general rule, when our own self-esteem is solid, we are much less likely to regress into an uncontrolled, infuriated state.

Anger, of course, is a natural human feeling state, built into us to help us survive, and we all have it. We are at our healthiest when we are *aware* of our emotions, allowing us to *respond* to a frustration, insult, etc., rather than *reacting* in a reflexive manner. Quite often, but not always, it is appropriate to *express* anger — but this is best done *assertively* (forthrightly expressed in a way that does not harm or threaten anyone) rather than *aggressively*.

Much like relapses of addictive behaviors, anger tends to follow repetitive patterns. Many people can readily identify those events, interactions, etc., that trigger angry reactions, and may also be able to learn to notice early signs of building up toward an outburst.

Working with a therapist (in a dedicated way, over time), it is possible to become very conscious of these patterns, insert more time for *thought* before automatically reacting, and develop strategies for responding in better ways that may leave you and others feeling fine (or at least okay) afterward.

Reviewing the patterns as a sort of “slow-motion replay” can also allow you to notice, examine and challenge some of the fleeting thoughts and beliefs that elicit angry reactions.

If you come into LCL for a full assessment with one of our clinicians, we should be able to help you zero in on key aspects of your own pattern, and can refer you to an appropriate therapist for the longer-term work that will probably be involved. (In some cases, anger may also reflect a mood disorder or addictive component, in which case those conditions would also warrant treatment.)

Changing these behavior patterns will be well worth the effort, allowing you to interact in more rewarding ways both at home and with your clients, and to greatly reduce those painful moments of shame and regret. ■

*Questions quoted are either actual letters/e-mails or paraphrased and disguised concerns expressed by individuals seeking assistance from Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers.*

*Questions for LCL may be mailed to LCL, 31 Milk St., Suite 810, Boston, MA 02109; e-mailed to [email@lclma.org](mailto:email@lclma.org) or called in to (617) 482-9600. LCL's licensed clinicians will respond in confidence. Visit LCL online at [www.lclma.org](http://www.lclma.org).*