

Calming the Family **STORM**

Anger Management for
Moms, Dads, and All the Kids

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— Gary D. McKay

— Steven A. Maybell

I

One Big Happy Family . . . or Is It?

You've been on hold for a half hour, waiting to check on a delivery that was supposed to arrive two days ago. Your spouse promised to be home an hour ago. Janie is screaming, complaining that Johnny took her favorite coloring book. The door bell's ringing; you put your own phone on hold, rush to the door and find someone passing out leaflets for a tree-trimming service. You slam the door, yell at the kids, curse your spouse for being late, run back to the phone . . . and hear a dial tone.



Mary's son Tom — age ten — was a picky eater. He would whine at the dinner table, complaining about what was being served. Mary got angry and threatened to send him to bed without supper if he didn't stop whining and eat his dinner.



Henry and Sandra are the parents of two young children and have been married for seven years. Henry was raised in a "traditional" family: his father made the "important" decisions and his mother focused most of her energies on her husband and the kids. Henry was consequently "threatened" by Sandra's interests outside of the home. Whenever she wanted to socialize with friends or take a class, Henry

lectured her about the importance of caring for the children and would not cooperate by providing childcare or access to the family automobile. Sandra was obviously resentful of this controlling behavior and found herself seething with anger much of the time.



Carl had to win. He looked for opportunities to engage in arguments. His thirteen-year-old daughter Tammy was a good match for him: "Like father, like daughter." One evening dad and Tammy were in a good one — Tammy wanted to skip the two-week summer camp this year; she claimed it was for babies. Carl said that she needed the experience and logically began to present his reasons. Tammy retorted with logic of her own. The discussion became heated with dad finally saying he didn't care what Tammy thought, she was going to camp and that was it! Tammy stomped off to her bedroom.



Ben and Valerie were parents of a blended family, each with two children from previous marriages. Both parents cared deeply about their "own" children and felt bad about how their children had suffered as a result of the divorce. They both were competitive individuals. Their desire to win played out in many family scenarios. An issue of great intensity had recently developed in their new family. Ben's son and Val's daughter quarreled and fought frequently, each blaming the other for starting the conflict. Both Ben and Val would take their own child's side and argue bitterly with the other parent and child over who was to blame. This issue was contaminating the couple's entire relationship and poisoning the family atmosphere.



Sean was an active young teen who enjoyed sports and activities at church. Since his mom worked swing shifts, Dad

usually provided taxi service. Dad was glad that Sean was involved, but the constant running was taking its toll, so he told Sean that he needed his help around the house. Sean agreed to do the dishes after dinner on the days Dad took him to an activity.

The first time went well. Dad put Sean's baby sister Kara in the car seat and took Sean to soccer practice, and Sean cleaned up the dishes after dinner. The next time, however, Sean forgot. When Dad reminded him, Sean complained that he was tired. "You're tired!" Dad said, "What about me? I have to work all day, run you back and forth, fix dinner, and take care of Kara! Now you get in there and clean up those dishes right now!" Sean grumbled and did a sloppy job of doing the dishes. The evening ended with hurt feelings on both sides.



Nicole, a single parent of ten-year-old Corey, has become resentful over how irresponsible her ex-husband has been lately with respect to their visitation arrangement. Frank has been bringing Corey back from "his weekends" late and without making sure Corey had time to complete his homework and prepare for his upcoming week at school. Nicole was angry and resentful toward Frank, and she would "let him have it" whenever he returned late with Corey. This resulted in Frank also feeling mistreated and angry along with a determination to not make things easier for Nicole.



Of course, none of these situations would occur in your family, right? Right?

Well, we're all only human. The fact is, anger and confrontation are a part of our lives, like it or not. The key factor in happy families is how they *handle* anger. And that's what this book is all about. In the pages to come, we're going to get better acquainted with the angry folks you've just read about. And we're going to learn a lot about how to deal effectively with anger in families.

The methods for dealing with family anger that you will find in this book are based on principles of equality and mutual respect — respect for yourself, for your spouse, partner or ex-spouse, and for your children.

In chapter 2, "The Anatomy of Anger," we'll take a look at how anger develops, why we get angry, and the many purposes anger serves in our lives. Chapter 3, "Anger Management Strategies I — First Steps," begins our study of how to handle anger effectively, examining strategies to get anger under control quickly. Chapter 4, "Anger Management Strategies II — For the Long Term," offers you suggestions for longer-term changes, ways to change the "automatic" anger response, and how to change your life so you don't get angry so much. Chapter 5 is brief, bringing you "Five Steps to Less Anger in Your Life." Chapter 6 introduces a very special way to prevent and/or overcome problem anger: "Encouraging Relationships."

Anger can be appropriate at times, and in chapter 7 we'll show you how to communicate in more constructive ways, whether you're angry or not. Similarly, chapter 8, "Problem Solving & Conflict Resolution," and chapter 9, "Family and Couple Meetings," offer techniques that will improve your family relationships and help you to get along better even when you're angry.

Most parents were couples first, of course. Chapter 10, "All's Fair in Love . . ." offers couples a proven approach to dealing with their own intimate communication, including anger.

All parents find child behavior issues to be challenging at times, and chapter 11 will give you a tool kit for “Discipline Without Anger.”

The following three chapters — 12, 13, and 14 — continue to explore the problems of parenting and teaching children how to handle their anger with each other, and with adults. Special family circumstances — divorces, single parents, and stepfamilies — are the topic of chapter 15.

Finally, no book on anger in families can avoid the uncomfortable but all-too-common problems of domestic violence and child abuse. It’s important to acknowledge that anger can lead to psychological and/or physical abuse, and chapter 16, “When Anger Turns to Violence,” presents some helpful thoughts on that very difficult personal and societal issue.

Before we go on to all the important material in the chapters to come, however, let’s consider the question of why this book is needed.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH ANGER IN OUR FAMILIES?

Anger is a universal human emotion that impacts our lives in many ways. But shouldn’t the family be a place of comfort, of calm — a place where we can escape the stresses and strains that lead us to angry feelings in the “outside world”? Why do we get so angry with those to whom we’re closest?

There may have been a time in history when real families behaved like those on TV sitcoms of the 1950s; times when nobody got angry with anybody else in the family; times when the family was that all-nurturing place that got you ready for dealing with people at school, or the job, or in the neighborhood, or on the highway . . . And indeed, families still are our major sources of **nurturing and preparation**. But if those “TV show” times ever existed, they’re not easily found today. Families have changed as the environment around them has changed. The stresses of that world outside the door have leaked into the family room at home.