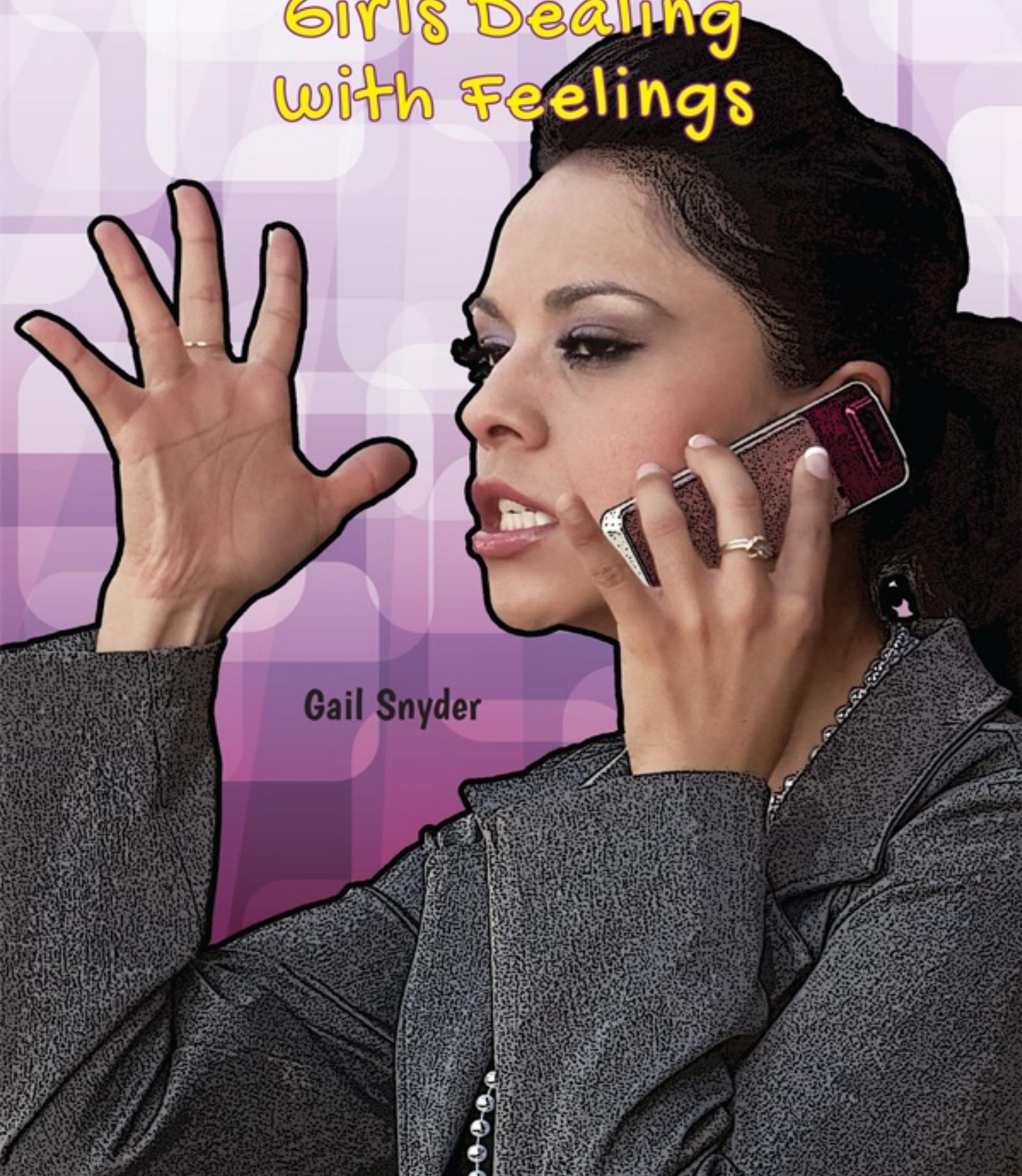


ANGRY GIRL?

Girls Dealing
with Feelings



Gail Snyder

About this Book

Are You Angry?

You are so mad you want to scream and throw something! How do you stop yourself from doing something you'll regret later? *Angry Girl? Girls Dealing With Feelings* discusses the causes of anger and its biological, emotional, and social effects. It also provides research-based information on how to handle it in a healthy way. Take a quiz to find out if you anger easily and learn how to improve the situation.

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 **JASMINE**
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CHAPTER ONE

I'm So Mad...

I couldn't believe it when my mother told me that I couldn't go to Kelsey's party. I had been looking forward to it for weeks. Mom told me I had stay home just because I had gotten another bad report card. I tried to tell her how unfair it was, but she wouldn't listen to me.

I ran upstairs to my room and slammed the door so hard it cracked. Then I scooped up a sculpture of a dog I made that my mother really liked and hurled it to the floor. It broke into a million satisfying pieces. I was standing in the middle of the room with my heart pounding and my hands curled into fists. All I could think was, what else could I throw?

—Jenna

Jenna was experiencing all of the physical symptoms of having kicked into anger mode. Her heart was racing, her body was stiff, and she couldn't think clearly.

Whenever you are angry, your body automatically reacts the same way, regardless of the situation. Your muscles get tense and your heart starts to beat faster. These changes in your body mean you are physically ready to respond to the threat before you.

This response is known as the “fight-or-flight” instinct. It has been part of being human since prehistoric times, when people needed to deal with wild animals and other dangers. The instinct allows the body to prepare to stand and confront a threat or to run away.

This fight-or-flight instinct is an automatic response that helps protect you from harm. But it also occurs when there isn't any actual physical danger—only the feeling of needing to protect yourself from some kind of threat or danger. The same response happens whether a speeding car is hurtling toward you, or you hear a particularly nasty insult from a boy you can't stand. This protective instinct causes your body to respond whenever you feel irritated, disrespected, shamed, or embarrassed by others.

Lots of things can make you angry. Sometimes the unfairness of events in your life may seem overwhelming. It may be that one of your friends kissed the boy you've had a crush on, or a girl is spreading rumors about you at school. Or perhaps you believe that your parents are being unfair because they give your brother more freedom than you have. In all of these cases, you can experience various emotions, along with anger.

You may be having a lot of trouble dealing with your emotions these days. This is especially true if you are going through the physical changes of puberty—the stage when your body is maturing into that of an adult. Controlling your emotions during puberty can be especially hard. That's because the emotional center of the brain—the amygdala—is in charge. As you grow older, the part of the brain that handles reasoning and judgment—the prefrontal cortex—will be in control. So while the amygdala is running the show, you can experience emotional highs and lows that make

you feel like you're out of control. During this time in your life, even little things may set you off and make you feel mad.

Your changing moods are also affected by special chemical substances in your body called hormones. During puberty, the levels of hormones in a girl's body, especially estrogen and progesterone, keep changing. These hormones affect behavior and mood. So when the levels of hormones in your body keep changing, your moods can change, too. You are also more likely to get angry because nobody seems to understand you.

Just feeling sad or stressed out can make you grouchy and angry over things that may not normally bother you at all. For example, if your life is going smoothly, a bad grade on your math test may upset you a little, but you'll just resolve to study harder next time. However, if that same test result happens after you've been grounded for staying out too late, you are likely to get angry and upset. If you are tired or not feeling well, you may also be more likely to take offense or get angry.

How you express your anger. How do you act when you're angry? Some people physically and verbally lash out. They yell at or hit others, break things, or act mean. They're expressing anger by being aggressive—that is, by acting in hostile or violent ways. Being aggressive with others seldom solves any issues. In fact, it often leads to more problems because it makes the person on the receiving end angry, too.

However, it is possible to express your anger in ways that don't harm others. You are taking charge of your anger when you communicate your feelings in healthy ways—that is, by being honest and up-front but not hurtful. This way of talking with friends, parents, teachers, and other people in your life can help you improve your relationships with them.

For example, Elise and Jamie have been friends for a long time. But Jamie has a habit that has been getting on Elise's nerves. Whenever Elise asks Jamie for her opinion, Jamie doesn't give one. She usually replies, "I don't care—whatever you want." Jamie's laid-back attitude had really been bothering Elise lately, and she finally decided to say something about it. Although she was feeling angry, she spoke calmly as she explained her frustration with Jamie. Although Jamie felt surprised at first, she appreciated her friend's honesty, and she promised to make some changes. Both girls felt better about their friendship.

Getting a grip on your anger is important. Are you quick to anger? Do you break things when you get mad? Have you ever hurt anyone when you were angry? Did you feel bad about it afterward? Do you believe you are having trouble dealing with people because you can't manage angry feelings? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you need some help dealing with your anger and learning better ways to express your feelings.

Just remember, feeling angry is normal. It is the actions you take as a result of your anger that can solve conflicts and problems, or make them worse. Anger can be a real problem in your life if you let it. But learning to manage your anger will not only

improve your relationships with others, but also help make you feel better about yourself. By practicing some of the ideas and tips in this book, you will understand this powerful emotion and have the tools to handle anger in yourself as well as in others.



Fight-or-Flight Emotions

The fight-or-flight instinct typically involves the basic emotions of both fear and anger. Anger (like any other emotion) rarely exists for very long before another emotion or two come into play. If you can identify the pattern of emotions you are feeling, you are on your way to being able to take charge of them.



You and Your Emotions

A part of everyone's personality, emotions are a powerful driving force in life. They are hard to define and understand. But what is known is that emotions—which include anger, fear, love, joy, jealousy, and hate—are a normal part of the human system. They are responses to situations and events that trigger bodily changes, motivating you to take some kind of action.

Some studies show that the brain relies more on emotions than on intellect in learning and in making decisions. Being able to identify and understand the emotions in yourself and in others can help you in your relationships with family, friends, and others throughout your life.



What Happens When You're Angry?

1. dilated pupils
2. tears
3. feeling flushed
4. dry mouth
5. a knot in the stomach
6. rapid breathing



The word anger describes emotions that cover a wide range. When you are angry, you may be mildly annoyed, somewhat irritated, rather mad, simply outraged, or incredibly furious.



The Survey Says...

In a national poll, Harvard University researchers surveyed more than 1,500 middle and high school students about their anger. One third admitted that they had trouble controlling their anger. Twenty-one percent of the girls said they had gotten into fights because they had been insulted, disrespected, or

involved in an ongoing disagreement. More than twice the number of boys made the same admission.



Science Says...

When you are angry, a hormone known as adrenaline is released into the bloodstream. The high amount of adrenaline energizes you and causes blood to rush through your body. That's why your face turns red and your heart beats faster when you have angry feelings. Adrenaline can fuel a rush that takes over, making you feel overwhelmed, powerless, and out of control.



Expressing Anger

There are big differences in the way girls and boys express anger, says author Rachel Simmons in *Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write About Bullies, Cliques, Popularity, and Jealousy* (2004). American society tends to expect boys to directly show anger—with words or physically, although only if they don't seriously hurt anyone. However, girls are often taught that expressing their anger this way is bad.

As a result, if a girlfriend is angry at you, it is likely that she won't come out and tell you so. You may have to figure it out by the clues she leaves. She may tease you about something she's never brought up before, stop talking to you, or tell stories about you that aren't true. But what she may not do is tell you what made her angry or give you a chance to make it up to her.



When you get angry, you have choices: you can choose to stay angry or you can calm down and think about how to resolve your issues.

CHAPTER TWO

How Do You Show Anger?

One day at school, Angela and Erica were talking between classes. Suddenly, Felice burst in on their conversation. Shoving Erica hard against the lockers, Felice angrily accused the younger girl of flirting with her boyfriend. Angela knew Felice was just being a bully and that the claim wasn't true. So she was shocked to hear Erica quickly apologize and say it wouldn't happen again. Angela was angry for her friend. She turned to Felice and in a cool, firm voice told her to leave Erica alone.

Different people will often react to the same incident in different ways. One person step backs and claims not to be bothered, another person is inspired to take some kind of action, and a third person becomes furious. Are you like that third person? Do you tend to get angry often? Take the quizzes [here](#) and [here](#) to find out.

Your answers to the quiz may depend on your personality. In general, if you have an aggressive personality, you tend to get angry easily—and show that anger—more often than people who are assertive or passive. So what exactly are these different kinds of personalities?

Aggressive. People who have aggressive personalities usually don't give much thought to other people's feelings because they typically put their needs ahead of anyone else's. They often seem to think they know best and are better than other people. When something goes wrong, they find someone else to blame rather than themselves. Quick to anger, aggressive personalities often number among the bullies at school. They're also the people most likely to get sent to the principal's office for talking back to teachers or getting into fights. Using threats to get what they want, aggressive people are often feared by their classmates but are typically not well liked or admired.

Passive. People with passive personalities tend to fear confrontations. When faced with a situation that would make most people mad, they often don't look angry. There is no red face, clenched fists, or heavy breathing. Because they simply want the uncomfortable situation to go away, they deal with it—and most confrontations—by giving in. They will assume blame for a problem, even when they are innocent, and often place other people's needs ahead of their own. They don't attempt to seek revenge, but they don't try to suggest a fair and proper solution to the problem either. Some passive people act that way because they don't value themselves—they suffer from low self-esteem.

Assertive. People with assertive personalities try to understand and support everyone's rights. Because they tend to have high self-esteem, they believe other people are not necessarily out to hurt or take advantage of them. Their high self-esteem means they can listen to criticism and consider its merits. They respond to disagreements without taking offense or thinking they are stupid or worthless. When an assertive person is

faced with a situation that could cause anger, he or she thinks about the best way to resolve the problem before acting.

A complex combination. Of course, it is possible that you can see yourself in some of the descriptions of each of these personality types. Most people don't fall neatly into a single category. Depending on the situation and the people involved, you may act in a different way. For instance, at home you might demonstrate passive behavior with your parents, while at school, you may be assertive with your classmates and friends.

However, you will find that in most cases, when you act assertive, you will have the best results in dealing with others. When you are assertive, you are able to honestly communicate your feelings. Although that doesn't guarantee you will always get what you want, you will feel better when you can honestly share things with friends, family members, and other important people in your life. And by talking about your emotions, you will prevent them from staying bottled up inside of you—which can cause even more problems. By being assertive, you will let others know how they can better consider your feelings in the future.

Learned behaviors. Your temperament and personality aren't the only influences on how you experience and express feelings of anger—and other emotions for that matter. Over the years, you may have learned certain ways of dealing with anger based on how your parents or friends behaved in stressful situations. If your parents yelled and hollered when they were angry, it's likely you do the same thing, too. Some scientists report that teens who respond with violence when they are angry do so because they were exposed to it while growing up—either by witnessing it or being the victims of it. Even if you've learned some unhealthy ways of expressing anger, you can unlearn those behaviors.



Science Says...

*James Averill, author of the book *Anger and Aggression* (1982), says most people experience anger several times a week. Some people become angry several times each day. Yet Averill's research shows that only 10 percent of the time does this anger result in someone physically hurting another person. In fact, he found that 19 percent of the time the angry persons funneled their emotions into being "extra nice." In other words, they behaved in a passive way, by not directly dealing with the situation by standing up for themselves.*



Anger as a Way of Life?

People who anger easily often have a set pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of themselves and of others. They often believe that their way is the only way to do things, and they feel threatened when others question their actions.



Rate Yourself: Do You Get Angry Easily?

Do you agree with the following statements? Give yourself three points if your answer is “often,” two points if it is “some of the time,” one point if “rarely,” and zero points for “never.”

1. If my friend cancels on me at the last minute, I get mad at her.
2. I hate waiting in line.
3. When someone disagrees with me, I make sure they know they are wrong.
4. When I get mad, I throw, hit, or break things.
5. I get angry at myself when I do something wrong or badly.
6. When someone treats me poorly, I think about ways that I can get back at them.
7. I’ve gotten in trouble at school because of my anger.
8. I have been so angry that I have pushed, kicked, or slapped another person.
9. Other people have told me that I get angry too much or that I am scary when I get mad.
10. I curse at people when I get mad and try to make them feel bad.
11. Sometimes I don’t feel like I’m in control of my anger.
12. I am easily offended by comments people make about me and can’t stop thinking about them.
13. I frequently feel bad about things I have said or done while I was mad.
14. When I dislike someone, I let them know.
15. When I don’t get my way, I get very upset.

Add up the numbers: 0–8 points means you’re pretty good at handling situations that make people angry. Anger sometimes causes problems in your life if your score is **9–20**. More than **20 points** indicates that you probably get angry easily—and that you need to find better ways to handle your anger.

Adapted from David J. Decker and Mike
Obsatz, “Your Anger Index: How Angry
and Hostile Are You?”
ANGEResources.com