The Five-Step Approach to Managing Anger

If something happens that makes you feel angry, this approach can help you manage your reaction. It's called a problem-solving approach because you start with the problem you're mad about. Then you weigh your choices and decide what you'll do.

Each step involves asking yourself a couple of questions, then answering them based on your particular situation.

Let's take this example: There's a party you're planning to go to, but your mom just told you to clean your room or stay home. The red-hot anger starts building.

Here's what to do:

1) Identify the problem (self-awareness). Start by noticing what you're angry about and why. Put into words what's making you upset so you can act rather than react.

Ask yourself: What's got me angry? What am I feeling and why? You can do this either in your mind or out loud, but it needs to be clear and specific. For example: "I'm really angry at Mom because she won't let me go to the party until I clean my room. It's not fair!" Your feeling is anger, and you're feeling angry because you might not get to go to the party.

Notice that this is not the same as saying, "Mom's so unfair to me." That statement doesn't identify the specific problem (that you can't go to the party until you clean your room) and it doesn't say how you're feeling (angry).

2) Think of potential solutions before responding (self-control). This is where you stop for a minute to give yourself time to manage your anger. It's also where you start thinking of how you might react — but without reacting yet.

Ask yourself: What can I do? Think of at least three things. For example, in this situation you might think:

(a) I could yell at Mom and throw a fit.
(b) I could clean my room and then ask if I could go to the party.
(c) I could sneak out to the party anyway.

3) Consider the consequences of each solution (think it through). This is where you think about what is likely to result from each of the different reactions you came up with.

Ask yourself: What will happen for each one of these options? For example:

(a) Yelling at your mom may get you in worse trouble or even grounded.
(b) Cleaning your room takes work and you may get to the party late (but maybe that adds to your mystique). With this option, you get to go to the party *and* your room's clean so you don't have to worry about it for a while.
(c) Sneaking out may seem like a real option in the heat of anger. But when you really think

it through, it's pretty unlikely you'd get away with being gone for hours with no one noticing. And when you do get caught — look out!

4) Make a decision (pick one of your options). This is where you take action by choosing one of the three things you could do. Look at the list and pick the one that is likely to be most effective.

Ask yourself: What's my best choice? By the time you've thought it through, you're probably past yelling at your mom, which is a knee-jerk response. You may have also decided that sneaking out is too risky. Neither of these options is likely to get you to the party. So option (b) probably seems like the best choice.

Once you choose your solution, then it's time to act.

5) Check your progress. After you've acted and the situation is over, spend some time thinking about how it went.

Ask yourself: How did I do? Did things work out as I expected? If not, why not? Am I satisfied with the choice I made? Taking some time to reflect on how things worked out after it's all over is a very important step. It helps you learn about yourself and it allows you to test which problem-solving approaches work best in different situations.

Give yourself a pat on the back if the solution you chose worked out well. If it didn't, go back through the five steps and see if you can figure out why.

These five steps are pretty simple when you're calm, but are much tougher to work through when you're angry or sad **(kind of like in basketball practice when making baskets is much easier than in a real game when the pressure is on!). So it helps to practice over and over again.**