

ANGER & CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Pocketbook



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Cartoons:
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Rage and tantrum



A protracted burst of anger is best described as rage. Being in a rage tends to give the protagonist a feeling of power. The person at the receiving end is often frightened and browbeaten into giving in.

But getting what you want through an angry tantrum undermines your relationships in the longer term. Such bullying anger destroys trust and makes any future resolution to a problem very difficult.

If you are a teacher who has experienced this kind of rage from a pupil, you become tense and fearful about it happening again in your lesson. It becomes harder for you to resume a trusting and positive relationship after each outburst.

Rage and tantrum

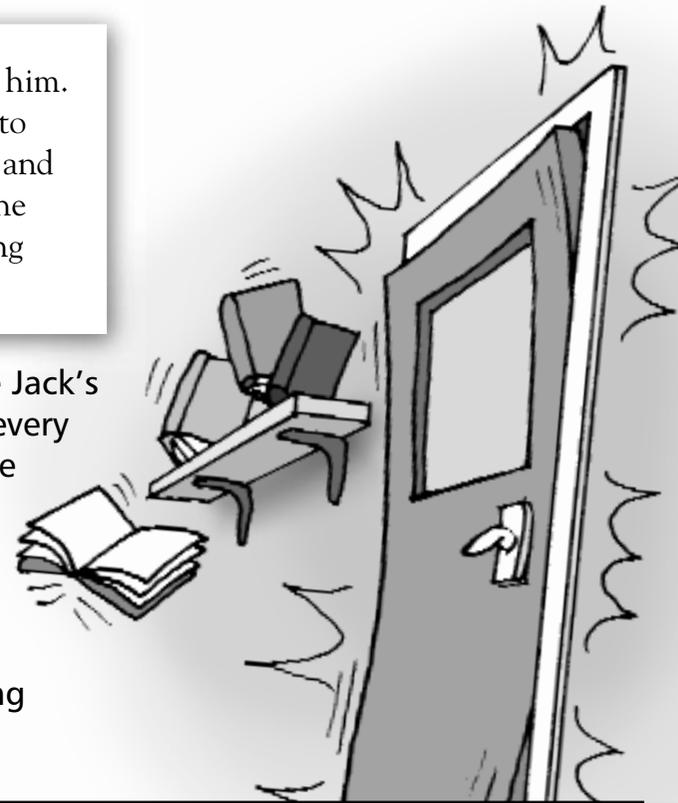


Case study

Jack just can't get on with the other pupils around him. Every few lessons he has a 'funny turn' and begins to verbally abuse his neighbours. He flings their pens and books on the floor. When the teacher intervenes, he verbally abuses her too. Jack always ends up running out of the classroom and slamming the door.

- How many times does this happen before Jack's teacher becomes tense and frustrated in every lesson, finding it hard to relax because she is continually anticipating an outburst?
- How do Jack's classmates feel about his volatility and ability to turn on them?

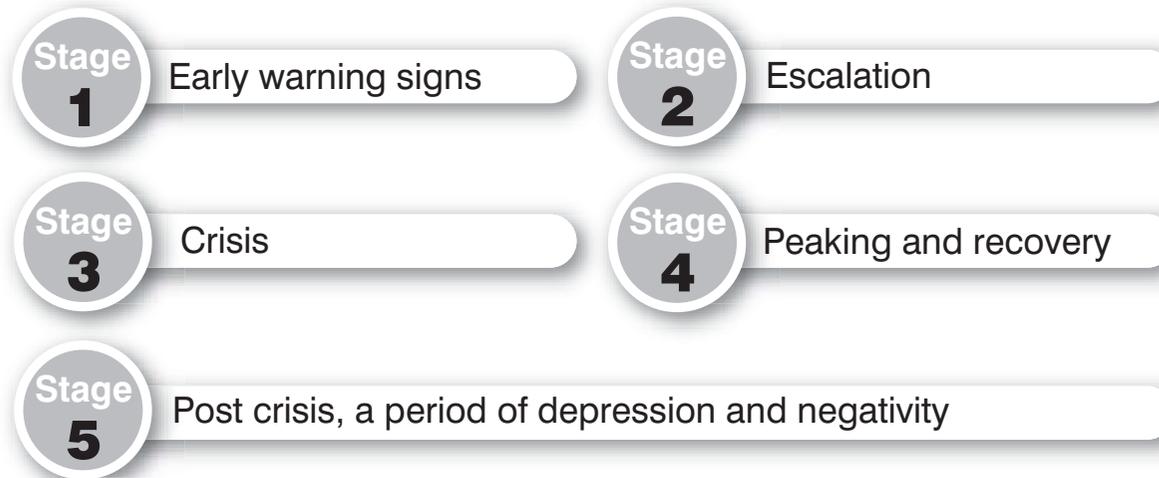
Let's look more closely at what Jack is inflicting on himself and the people around him.



The anger cycle



As Jack gets angrier, he is travelling through the stages of a typical anger cycle.



By the time Jack is verbally abusing his classmates and flinging their personal possessions off their desks, the cycle is too far advanced for recovery. However, if the teacher had spotted the cycle and been able to intervene earlier, she might have been able to keep a lid on Jack's temper and stop him spoiling everybody's lesson.

Early warning



Stage 1. Early warning signals

Something has happened which is seen as a major threat to a pupil like Jack. He gives away early warning signs of his distress. These alert you to the fact that you must intervene. If you can intervene successfully at this stage, (see pages 18-30), you have a good chance of stopping his anger from exploding. Look out for:

- Voices getting louder
- Muttering under the breath
- Repetitive body movement, eg tapping a ruler on the desk or rocking a chair
- Screwing up paper or scribbling on a page
- Changes in eye contact, eg staring at somebody, or making no eye contact at all

The earlier you recognise the problem, the better your chances of getting a full recovery. And it's not just the pupil you should monitor. If *you* are starting to get angry at the situation, you are likely to be exhibiting some or all of these traits yourself. If *both of you* are showing early warning signs, you may need to control your own mounting anger as well as that of the pupil.

Escalation, crisis, peak and recovery



Stage 2. Escalation

The growing anger of your pupil will be becoming more obvious: his body is tensing, his breathing becoming shallower; he may well be muttering or talking to himself. The longer this is left, the more danger of an explosion into rage.

Stage 3. Crisis

The analogy of fire is only too accurate. There comes a point where a spark becomes a flame. Pupils often describe this point as '**switching**' or '**popping**'. As explosive rage detonates, the angry person is no longer capable of listening to instructions from the outside. The rage must burn itself out. Teacher options for successful intervention are non-existent. You must wait.

Stage 4. Peaking and recovery

The energy involved in the crisis anger begins to die down. But the flame can be easily rekindled, if you handle the situation badly. The angry pupil's body is still tense and ready for action. The feelings are still raw and vulnerable. The last thing needed now is rigid enforcement of a clumsy school sanction. Flexibility is key at this stage.

After the storm



Stage 5. Post crisis, depression and negativity

Rage exhausts its victim. As your pupil calms down, he is able to listen to others and think clearly again. Often remorse and guilt accompany the fatigue. The pupil feels depressed and disgusted with his recent behaviour, *'I've let myself down again'*; *'I'm just useless'* are the negative thoughts that pass through his mind. Fear tends to kick in as the young person begins to appreciate that there might be serious consequences to his actions.

But even at this late stage, the anger can be re-ignited. It is dangerous, for example, to leave two fighters in close proximity. They could flare up again, even two or three hours after the original outburst.

So, if this is the likely progression of the anger cycle, what can you, the teacher, do to stop anger escalating to crisis point?

About the author

Paul Blum



Paul Blum is currently a member of the leadership team at Central Foundation Girls' School in Tower Hamlets. He has substantial experience as a senior manager in London Inner City Schools, including six years as deputy headteacher at Islington Green School. His work with pupils with significant anger management problems began in the late 1990's in the London borough of Tower Hamlets where he ran small anger management groups and devised whole-school training for teachers. Since then, he has written and trained extensively on the subject. A key influence has been the pioneering Everyman organisation that counsels adult males who have been involved in domestic violence.

Much of Paul's work has centred on how teachers can survive in very difficult classrooms where behaviour is very challenging and where pupils routinely exhibit high levels of anger and aggression. As a regular trainer for NASEN, Paul has taught teachers and teaching assistants up and down the country how to work effectively with reluctant teenage readers, including how to deal with their anger and frustration.