

# SHARON MONPLAISIR

Fencing, three-time Olympian,  
two-time gold medalist in the Pan American Games



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Losing made Sharon have terrible temper tantrums. How important is winning to you? Do you get angry when you lose?
2. Sharon got angry because she was afraid? What was Sharon afraid of losing?

## The Anger Inside

I grew up very, very poor. All around me was violence and danger. I felt like an outsider most of my childhood. I was also so very uncomfortable with my tall, skinny body. When I started fencing as a teenager, a whole new world opened up for me. I loved being an athlete. I met many wonderful and kind people. I became strong and graceful. I felt special. I found my talents. I learned to keep working toward my dreams.

But I began to fear losing it all. Sometimes, fear and rage would take over. I was afraid of losing the fencing competition and losing the respect I had earned. If I were losing I would have temper tantrums. I would throw off my fencing mask. I would scream. I would hurl my glove across the floor. I sometimes even cursed at the officials.

I received a scholarship to college. I got to travel around the world. I became a champion. My life improved a lot. I had earned respect. I was a celebrity. Now I had even more to lose. I was always afraid of ending up starving or homeless. In my mind, if I were not winning at fencing I would lose everything I had achieved.

Sometimes there was uncontrollable anger after losing a match. This behavior only occurred when I was competing. I had very little patience for making mistakes, and a fencer definitely needs patience. I didn't really like how the anger made me look and feel. It gave me a tight feeling in my throat. It made it hard for me to breathe. I was embarrassed about my anger, but I couldn't help it.

It took someone close to help me change. He told me that my behavior was childish and a total waste of energy. He said that my actions were giving people the wrong opinion of me. It was as if I woke up one day and realized how destructive my anger really was. I had to work on controlling my anger.

In order to change, I had to remind myself that winning and losing were not tied to my self-worth as a person. I had to learn to calm down and not let the anger build. I learned how to prevent the temper tantrums. I worked at it, and I finally believed that regardless of my fencing results, I would still be a wonderful, special, loved human being.

# EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- \* Figure out where the anger is coming from—what situations bring it out?
- \* Practice relaxing when you get mad—count to 10, think about your favorite place, chill out.
- \* If you can't seem to manage your anger on your own, get help from an adult (parent, counselor, teacher or doctor).
- \* Exercise! When you're feeling pent-up anger, sweat it out—run, do yoga, kick a soccer ball, swim.
- \* Avoid alcohol and drugs—they make emotions hard to control

## RESOURCES

WAVE (Working Against Violence Everywhere) 1-800-960-9600

[www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

Sometimes the world can make you wanna stomp your feet, clench your fists, throw your head back in the air and scream at the top of your lungs. You're furious because your so-called best friend has been spreading rumors about you. You're mad because no one on your team even cares about winning anymore. You're frustrated because your stepmom hogs all of your dad's attention. Anger can pop its ugly head up in a bunch of different situations, sometimes seeming like simple bitterness and other times seeming like fire in your gut.

Everyone has angry moments—it's part of being human. What's important is not whether or not you get mad, but how you deal with your boiling blood. Bottling up your anger or lashing out like a madwoman only causes more confusion and craziness. Some girls freak out when they get mad because they've never learned how to handle challenging stuff or maybe because that's how their parents deal with stress. Do you punch your little brother for spilling grape juice all over your favorite shorts, or do you walk away from the situation and give yourself a chance to chill out?

Anger can sometimes be a scary feeling. It can make you sick (headaches, stomachaches). It can ruin friendships. But it means that there is something wrong. It's a signal that there is a problem that needs attention. You might need to learn how to communicate better—to let others know what is bothering you before you get angry. It's a matter of getting others to listen and understand you before the feeling builds up.

Although movies and television might make you believe otherwise, violence and aggression is never the right answer. Guns kill 12 teenagers every day because kids don't know how to deal with their anger—and that's a fact. Lashing out when you get mad is, hands down, the most immature and counter-productive thing you can do. If you get angry, which you definitely will at times, find a way to manage your feelings. You can teach yourself to chill out and deal like an intelligent human being. Girl, if you want to be treated like a young adult, now is the time to start taking responsibility for your actions.