



**No-nonsense  
training**

# **Fighter's Fact Book**

**Principles and drills  
to make you a better fighter**

**LOREN W. CHRISTENSEN**

# Fighter's Fact Book

## Principles and drills to make you a better fighter

With over 50 years of experience in the ring, on the mat, and in the street, Loren W. Christensen understands the daily challenges martial artists face. In this book he has put together a collection of over 400 tips, drills, principles, concepts, and exercises to give you the edge, no matter what style of martial art you practice.

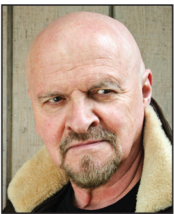
Discover quick and innovative ways to improve your punching, kicking, sparring, and self-defense skills—plus dozens of tips to develop speed, power, and flexibility. If you are feeling stuck or bored in your martial arts routine, Loren's no-nonsense style will get you up and training with a fire you have not felt in years.

Highlights include

- 10 ways to improve your speed
- 5 ways to increase your power
- 10 ways to train for self-defense
- 10 ways to improve health and fitness
- Dozens of tips for improving kicks, blocks, and hand strikes
- Guidance on psychological preparation



*Fighter's Fact Book* includes hundreds of training methods drawn from the author's vast experience, research, and interviews with top instructors from around the country. This is an essential reference for every martial arts student and instructor.



**Loren W. Christensen** is a retired cop and high-ranking martial artist who survived everything the mean streets threw at him, working patrol, gang enforcement, and dignitary protection. Loren Christensen resides in Portland, Oregon.

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# Contents

Introduction .....	9
<b>PART ONE: PHYSICAL TRAINING .....</b>	<b>15</b>
10 Ways to Train Alone .....	17
10 Ways to Improve Your Hand Techniques .....	31
10 Ways to Improve Your Kicks .....	55
10 Ways to Improve Your Speed .....	83
20 Ways to Improve Your Sparring .....	97
10 Ways to Score Almost Every Time .....	127
5 Ways to Improve Your Blocking .....	147
10 Ways to Improve Your Kata .....	157
5 Ways to Increase Your Power .....	169
10 Ways to Train for Self-defense .....	185
5 Ways to Prepare for a Belt Test .....	211
10 Ways to Improve Your Heath & Fitness .....	217
<b>PART TWO: MENTAL TRAINING .....</b>	<b>233</b>
5 Ways to Alleviate Stress .....	235
10 Ways to Use Mental Imagery .....	239
10 Ways to Eat Pain .....	253
10 Ways to Learn Quickly .....	261
5 Ways to Conquer Fear .....	273
10 Ways to Be Safe in Your Daily Life .....	279





# Introduction

In 1965, most of the people in my circle of acquaintances had not heard of karate. “Kar-a- what?” a couple of them asked when I told them I had started taking lessons. “Is that Chinese food or something?” And they weren’t trying to be funny. People were somewhat familiar with judo back then, since it had been portrayed in several old World War II movies. But except for a few cities around the country where returning servicemen from Okinawa and Korea had established schools, karate was mostly unheard of.

I remember my first day walking into the Oregon Karate Association and seeing those pajama-clad guys kicking and thrashing all over the training floor. Man, these guys could beat up anybody, I remember thinking in awe.

Although I was a pretty big 19-year-old as a result of lifting weights since I was 13, I had never been good at sports, probably because I wasn’t terribly interested in playing them. But something swept over me that first day as I sat along the wall with my mouth hanging open, watching those warriors moving about in their deadly dance. I knew, just as clearly as I knew my name, that karate would be my life. I joined on the spot (monthly dues were only \$7 then) and the fighting arts have been part of my life ever since.

That was 1965, and I’m still training in spite of the fact this part of my body really hurts and this other part here doesn’t even bend anymore. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that the martial arts can be a little taxing on the ol’ bod’, especially when you do it decade after decade as I have. But bad shoulder, trick knee, trashed elbow, busted fingers and all my other maladies aside, I wouldn’t change a thing that has happened to me during my long martial arts career. They have been wonderful years in which I have met some incredible people (and not just a few weird ones), traveled, taught, and enjoyed a way of life like no other. The fighting arts have kept me in good condition, physically

and mentally, and they saved my precious hide many times in the war-torn streets of Saigon during the Vietnam war and in the mean streets of Portland, Oregon where I served 25 years as city police officer.

It's a profound understatement to say that karate has changed since I began. What I teach today and how I teach it is so remote from how and what I learned many moons ago, that it's barely recognizable as being the same. Of course, there are martial arts schools stuck in the ancient past, but most have recognized the need to evolve with the times.

While change isn't always a good thing, there is much that has changed for the good from when I began, for that matter, even in the last five years. New techniques have come along as well as new and better ways to execute basic movements. There have also been new discoveries in ways to train, both physically and mentally. For example, as a white belt, I can remember many classes where we squatted in a deep horse stance and threw hundreds of punches. Did we get good at this? Sure, I developed a tremendous reverse punch. It would be hard not to get proficient at something you do over and over again. But considering the volume of hours that we spent on this ancient exercise, its value as a practical technique is virtually nil. I never once used the horse stance when I sparred in class or in competition, and I definitely never used it in the dozens of street battles I had as a cop. While I did get strong from the exercise, I know now that there are many other ways to develop punching power that are far more interesting, practical and result producing.

Some of the old ways of training were hazardous to one's health, joints, tendons, muscles and ligaments. Today, there are better and safer paths to proficiency, because modern sports medicine and nutrition have invaded the ancient fighting arts and brought sense and science to the way we develop the mind and body.

I'm a strong advocate of using the mind to push beyond what we think is our limit. There are lots of instructors who talk about incorporating the mind in training, competition and self-defense, but they speak of it in mystical terms that leave their students wondering what the heck they are talking about. Many times students don't understand because the instructor doesn't understand either. All too often, he is trying to sound like a white-bearded sage sitting in the lotus position on the peak of Japan's Mt. Fuji. This is unfortunate because there is no need for confusion and mysticism in this area of training. Learning to incorporate the mind in karate training should be no more complex than throwing a reverse punch.

It's good when students are loyal to an instructor and to a fighting style, but it's not good when they blindly follow whatever the instructor tells them. I

did that and wasted my first three years of training. But I didn't have much to compare it to then because information on the fighting arts was sparse. Today's students, however, live in the information age. There is no reason to lack knowledge of techniques and training ideas when there is such a plethora of educational material available everywhere you look. There are now thousands of schools in the United States, making this country a melting pot of martial arts instruction. Additionally, there are many excellent books (ahem . . . like this one), instructional videos, magazines, CD roms, and Jackie Chan movies (just kidding about Jackie Chan). Getting these instructional aids will educate you and open your eyes to the truth. The more enlightened you are, the more easily you will see what is valid and the more intelligent will be the questions you ask in your search for even more knowledge.

It's my hope that you find this book to be an encyclopedia of training and fighting ideas no matter what karate discipline you follow. The book is divided into two sections, "Physical Training" and "Mental Training" with a total of 18 chapters, each offering 5-20 major topics covering dozens of ways to help you be a better fighter.

I have had the pleasure of teaching the martial arts for many decades to students in my school, private students, police agencies, private security companies, mental health organizations, and various city bureaus. The slant in my personal training and teaching has always been toward surviving a real fight, therefore I can't help letting that prejudice slip through in this book. While I'm happy to report that the training tips I offer have worked for students in the harsh reality of violent encounters, I believe you will find that many of them will also help you in competition, or can be easily modified a little for the specific requirements of sport.

There is a method to my madness here, though it may appear at first glance to be a hodgepodge of concepts, principles and techniques for virtually all areas of the fighting arts. It would have been easy to write a book of 5000 ways to fight better, but it would have cost you as much as your car. So, because of space limitations, I have limited the ways to those that I have found especially valuable in my training, competing and my job as a police officer. I have also included a few that were given to me specifically for this book by instructors I hold in high regard because of their knowledge, ability and their track record of success in real-world confrontations. I have also tried to give credit here for information that I have gotten from martial artists I've talked with over the years, trained with or read about in books and magazines. I'm sorry if I've left anyone out, but having been punched and kicked in the head since 1965, my memory isn't what it use to be.

*A word on the writing*

While women make up a significant percentage of martial arts students, for ease of writing, I have used “he” instead of the awkward “he/she” and “him/her.” I have also used the word “karate” as a generic term and hope I’m not offending readers involved in the many other kick/punch fighting arts.



# 10 ways

## to Train Alone

I love to train by myself and have always encouraged my students to train alone at least once a week. Solo training is a time when you can do whatever *you* want to do. No one is telling you to work on a punching drill when you really want to polish your roundhouse kick, and no one is telling you to spar when you have yet to heal from your last session. Solo training is your time to train as hard or as easy as you like, for as long as you like. You can do it in your underwear while watching *The Brady Bunch* reruns on the tube, or do it in the basement to burn off frustration after a squabble with a family member. You get to choose the time, you get to choose the place and you get to work on anything you want.

One of the complaints I've often heard from students is that training alone is boring. How can that be? If you go into your solo training with the right mind set, that is, you picture before you an ugly, salivating beast of a human being who wants to rip your head off, how can your desperate fight for survival be boring?

Use your imagination when you train alone, just as you did when you played by yourself as a child. Make the imaginary attacker your boss, ex-spouse, the guy who cut you off on the freeway, the punks who threw trash in your yard, or that mean school teacher with the bony fingers. While this might seem a little sick, psychologists say it's actually a healthy (and legal) way to let off steam. It doesn't matter who you see in your mind's eye, as long as the image brings out your warrior spirit to enable you to train intensely and get a good workout.

Here are 10 ways to make your solo training interesting, challenging and make you a better fighter.

## 1. SHADOWBOXING

I have always felt that students who don't incorporate shadowboxing in their training are missing a valuable aid to their growth. As the name implies, shadowboxing involves your moving about the room punching, kicking and blocking an imaginary opponent who is throwing punches and kicks back at you. Here are just a few of the things you get from it.

### Cardiovascular Benefits

If you want to improve your wind for sparring, then spar. Don't jog, climb the stair master, or swim laps down at the creek. Instead, work to develop your cardiovascular system doing the very thing you want aerobic conditioning for - in this case, to be able to spar without getting weak in the legs and blue in the face.



To get in good cardio condition, you need to shadowbox for at least 20 minutes two or three times a week with your heart rate sustained at about 75 to 80 percent of your maximum. Here is how you determine your maximum heart rate and then your training heart rate.

Males, take the number 220 and females take the number 226 and subtract your age. The difference is your maximum heart rate. Multiply this by the percentage you want to train at and that will give you the heart rate you need to maintain throughout your shadowboxing session. Here is how it looks if you are a 20-year-old male.

$$220 - 20 = 200 \times .75 = 150 \text{ beats a minute}$$

If this male is out of shape, he should reduce his training percentage of his maximum heart rate to 60 percent and then progressively increase it as his aerobic condition improves. Even when you are in good shape, it's never a good idea to sustain a rate or 85 percent of higher.



Your pulse sites are at your wrist and the side of your neck. Stop sparring and check one of them for six seconds and then resume sparring. Multiply the number of beats you felt by 10. If you felt 15 beats, 15 multiplied by 10 is 150 beats per minute. If you are 20 years old, you are right on target. If you counted 10 beats, you need to pick up the pace, but if you counted 20, you need to slow down.

## **Improve your Timing with Music**

Select music that has a pronounced rhythm and then block, kick and punch to its beat. You will find yourself moving about rhythmically and launching your techniques reflexively to the beat as if responding to openings and attacks with a real opponent. A nice side benefit is that music has a way of camouflaging your fatigue, enabling you to train longer and harder. But watch out, when the sounds stop, fatigue will hit you like a truck.



To find your pulse, use your fingers to press at the hollow between your ear and jaw, or along your wrist

## **Coordinating Footwork with Combinations**

It's one thing standing before a mirror and throwing your combinations, and it's quite another shadowboxing combinations as you move about the room without entangling your feet. The latter provides you with the opportunity to launch your combinations from constant motion as you move forward, backward, sideways, bob and weave.

## **You Always get to Win**

You always come out on top when you shadowbox an invisible opponent (unless you are a masochist and deliberately lose). All your techniques get to the target without being blocked, you are always successful at blocking your opponent's kicks and punches, and your match always ends with you as the victor. Savor the moment as few wins in life are this easy.

## **2. ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING**

As a former police officer who has been in dozens of physical force situations, I can tell you that not one of them ever took place in a nice, wide-open space or on mats like those in your martial arts school. I've fought people on roof tops, on the edge of a dock over a river, in a slimy skid row bathroom, on stairways, inside of a car engulfed in flames, and many other places I had never thought of when I was learning my techniques.

Training in different environments is a fun and beneficial way to learn more about your favorite moves. Consider conducting your solo training in the following places around your house.

### **Stairs**

It's a whole different world trying to defend yourself on 12-inch wide steps as opposed to a wide-open floor. Do your rep practice and shadow boxing while moving up and down a set of stairs, while leaning against the wall with one foot on a high step and the other on a low one. Evaluate your favorite techniques as to what you can and can't do while trying to maintain your footing.

### **Cluttered Room**

Practice your techniques in your cluttered basement or in your crowded attic. Don't move anything out of the way. Move around those boxes, kick over that stack of tires, jump over that collection of newspapers and move around that pile of unwashed clothes. If barefoot, look out for mousetraps.

### **Small Room**

I've fought people in restroom stalls, clothes closets, and phone booths. Once I thrashed around with a man in that narrow space between a bedroom wall and the bed, on which his wife laid with a knife protruding from her throat. You

# 10 ways

## to Improve Your Speed

One time I had a guy attending one of my police reserve defensive tactics class who was blessed with incredible speed - and he had never had a martial arts lesson. I was able to talk him into joining my school, and I enjoyed training him for several months until his job forced him to move. During those few months, his speed never failed to impress me as well as his ability to learn quickly. I would show him a new technique and by the second class he was doing it perfectly and faster than any of my advanced students. On those occasions when he had trouble executing new techniques with good form, it was usually because his natural speed was far ahead of his ability to coordinate the movements, sort of like being too fast for his own good. I had to get him to slow down until he could perfect the overall technique.

Students with natural speed like him are few and far between. The rest of us have to work at it. Here are 10 ways to increase speed.

### **1. MAINTAIN RELAXED TENSION**

I use to believe that to move with great speed, it was necessary for one to maintain total relaxation in the muscles. My theory was based on the fact that when your muscles are tense, thousands of muscle fibers are in full contraction. For example, if you tighten your upper arm and forearm as hard as you can, then launch a backfist, your fist will move like it's pushing through cold molasses. This is because your muscle fibers are already contracted and have nowhere to go.

It seemed logical to me, therefore, that your backfist would snap out much faster if your muscles started out relaxed. Then I met a guy named Bob Munden, a guy with the title, "The Fastest Gun Who Has Ever Lived." Speed drawing/shooting is a modern day sport, in which Bob holds 18 world records. *The Guinness Book of World Records* has timed his draw at less than one-half of one-tenth of a second, less time than it takes you to blink. He draws his weapon completely out of the holster, shoots and re-holsters before your eyes can register his movement. In fact, your eyes see only the re-holster. Sometimes he will shoot the target with a semi-auto handgun, and then shoot the spent shells before they hit the ground. Without exception, he is the fastest human being I have ever seen.

I asked him about my theory of total relaxation. He didn't agree. "My arm and body are never completely relaxed," he said. "If I was relaxed, I would have to come up to the place of necessary tension that I need to be able move fast. When I am waiting for the signal to draw and shoot, my arm and body are slightly tense, in what I call 'relaxed ready.' When I explode, my muscles don't start moving from a place of total relaxation, but they are already primed to move."

Interesting, I thought, and it's hard to argue with a guy who can put a bullet in my forehead faster than I can blink. So, I gave his approach a try using my backfist, which I must say in all humility, is pretty quick. After 10 minutes of whacking the heavy bag and snapping backfists at the mirror, I had to admit that the ol' gunslinger was right. My backfist was quicker when I kept a mild level of tension in my muscles prior to snapping it out.

## 2. FASTER KICKS

When I see a student's kicks starts to slow, all I have to do is remind him of this simple principle, and he regains his speed almost immediately. Most karate students learn it when they first began studying karate but get lax with it after a few months. If you are one of these people, here is the good news: start applying the principle again and you will immediately increase the speed of your punches and kicks.

Mysterious, aren't I? Okay, here is what I'm talking about. Let's use kicking as an example.

### Bring it Back Fast

Simply telling students to kick faster usually doesn't improve their speed. In fact, most strain and tense their muscles in their effort, which slows their kicks even more. This is because the solution is not to kick *out* faster, but to snap the kick *back* faster.

For example, when throwing a roundhouse kick, don't think about how quickly you launch your foot toward the target, but rather think how quickly you snap it back and return it to the floor. To do this, the muscles on the back of your leg, the hamstring muscles, and the cords on the back of your knees, must be in a relaxed state of readiness. Here is a simple drill that will get you moving the right way.

### Hot Potato Drill

Face your partner and assume your fighting stance as you prepare to front kick. Your partner hold his palms 12 inches apart in front of his belt, ready to clap. Your task is to launch your front kick between his hands and touch his belt, and his job is to slap his hands against your foot before you retract it. Tell him to be honest and not to clap until your foot begins to retract.

To beat him, concentrate on snapping your foot back as fast as you can. The instant you launch your kick, don't tense your muscles in your effort to return your leg quickly, but rather, *think* about returning it quickly. It may take you a few reps to accomplish this, but once your mind and muscles are in sync, your effort to bring your foot back quickly will in turn make it go out faster. It's pretty darn mystical.

### 3. KISS

Later, in the section called *5 Ways to Block Faster*, I discuss how your defense against an attack is faster when you have fewer blocks to choose from. This is one of those times where more is not better. There are some mighty fast punchers and kickers out there, so when one of them launches an attack at you, don't stand there and deliberate about the best block for the job.

KISS stands for Keep It Simple, Stupid, with no offense meant. The idea of KISS, as it pertains to the martial arts, is to remind you to always look for the easiest and simplest solution to a fighting problem. Since we are talking about blocks here, I encourage you to throw out the garbage that passes for blocks, and keep the simple but effective ones. If you can block a punch with a simple palm sweep or slap with the back of the hand, why would you choose another way that is more complex? If you can block 10 different hand attacks with one or two blocks, why have 10 different blocks in your arsenal?

A desperate fight in the street can be frighteningly fast and furious. Those fancy smancy blocks won't serve you when you are in a desperate struggle, since your fine motor skills disappear in a quick hurry when fear and adrenaline wash over your body. Keep your defense and your offense simplistic, but strong and fast.

KISS.

#### Strategy Tip: Keep it Simple



*This simple sweep doesn't stop the incoming force but redirects it. From this point, it's a straight shot to his eyes. Keep your blocks and counters simple.*





# 10 ways

## to Eat Pain

“*Eat pain?*” you ask. “I don’t want to eat pain. I don’t want to feel pain at all.”

Well, then you are participating in the wrong activity; you might want to consider stamp collecting since there is no way you can avoid getting owies when you train in the martial arts.

When I began training in the mid 1960’s, we didn’t have any of the protective equipment we enjoy today. Those first three years of training were painful, as I always had a body part bandaged and at least two walnut-sized swellings on the back of my hands, shins and the tops of my feet. And we always had blood splatters on our uniforms. Red Badges of Courage we called the stains, and we took great pride in them. To get some relief from the slams and bams against already swollen parts, I would go to a mattress store to buy large squares of foam rubber, cut them into smaller pieces and tape them over my injured parts.

Happily, those times are gone because protective equipment is plentiful now. Nonetheless, pain is still part of karate training. Blows aren’t always pulled and accidents happen. Of course, there is full-contact fighting where pain is deliberate as well as street fights where pain is intentional. So how do you deal with it? How do you keep going when pain is ripping through your body? How do you face another match when you know there will be pain involved?

Here are five ways to eat the pain.

## **1. GET USED TO IT**

Can you really get used to pain? Well, sort of. You will never get to a point where pain doesn't hurt, but you can reach a stage where getting hit just isn't that big a deal.

Most beginners start out being afraid, so they flinch and overreact to even the slightest smack with a padded glove or shoe. But a month later, these same people are getting hit a little harder and reacting less. By the time they have earned a couple of belts, they have progressed to a point where they barely notice getting clobbered. They have arrived; they are on the road to getting conditioned to eat pain.

### **In the Street**

There are some styles that don't allow contact at all in their training. This is a serious mistake. Whenever I have seen students who have trained in such schools, they inevitably pull their kicks and punches far too short, sometimes as much as twelve inches from the target. Remember: *How you train is how you will fight for real*. Training this way will come back to haunt you in a real fight when you unhappily discover your blows falling short.

Secondly, training to miss doesn't help your training partner to get conditioned to take a hit, even a light one. When I have gotten these transfer students, some with as much as two years of training under their belts, I've seen them overreact to even a light tap. If they were in a real fight and reacted this way to a blow, their disrupted focus would make them vulnerable to getting hit even more.

### **In Competition**

I've also seen tournament fighters lose a match because they overreacted to an uncontrolled blow. While excessive contact usually gets a fighter disqualified or at least a warning, it's not going to get called as such when the judges don't see it. What often happens is that the unconditioned fighter reacts to getting hit, stops fighting and, to his chagrin, his opponent takes advantage of the moment and hits him again. The judges see the second blow and award it a point.

If you get hit hard in a tournament, keep fighting. If the judges saw it, they will stop the match. If they didn't see it, you want to maintain your focus and continue to be on guard against anything your opponent does.

Here is a favorite drill of mine that will quickly condition you to take a hit.

### Three-person Drill

I learned this many years ago from kenpo Professor Rick Alamy. It can be used for many purposes, such as a blocking drill, a reaction drill and a way to work combinations. But for our purposes here, let's use it as a way to get conditioned to getting hit.

Assume your fighting stance between two training partners and face one of them. He will throw a roundhouse kick at your front thigh and hit it with medium impact. The moment his kick lands, you respond with a backfist to his head. You then turn and face your other training partner and allow him to kick you in the front thigh with a medium-impact, roundhouse kick. Again you respond with a backfist.

That's the drill. You turn left and get hit, and you turn right and get hit. Fun, huh? Continue doing this for a set of 10-15 blows from each partner. This is good for you in two ways. First, you get conditioned to take a hit. You feel it, you hear it and you tolerate it. Secondly, you condition yourself to instantly hit back every time you get struck. Instead of reflexively saying "ouch," you reflexively return a blow of your own.

When you get used to this, and it may take anywhere from one workout session to 10, your training partners raise their kicks to your midsection. Respond to their solid hits to your belly with a backfist to their head. In the third stage, your partners hit you with medium impact to your forehead (make sure they are wearing their padded gloves), and you respond with a counter, say a reverse punch to their middle.

You should make only light contact against your outside partners. The drill is to teach you to react with a counterattack when you get hit. If you were to hit your outside partners as solidly as they hit you, they should technically respond with a counter of their own. That would complicate the drill too much, if it didn't turn into a brawl first. To prevent this, respond with a controlled tap.

As you can see, you can get quite creative with this using different offensive and countering techniques. The beauty of it is that you quickly condition yourself to getting hit. Before you know it, getting whacked extra hard in class will no longer be a big deal.

Let's look at pain from the standpoint of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

## Three-Person Drill



The outside training partner connects with a hard roundhouse kick to your thigh . . .



. . . to which you respond with a backfist.



The other outside person connects with a hard round-house kick . . .



. . . and again you respond immediately with a back-fist. When you get used to taking a hard kick to the legs, your training partners should raise their kicks to your abdomen.

## **2. PHYSICAL**

Besides being mentally conditioned to taking a hit, it's important that you are in good physical condition, too. The term "hardbody" was never more apropos than when referring to your physical ability to absorb a punch or kick. A strong body, one that is padded with muscle, will better absorb a blow than a frail one. By the way, I've struck some overly fat guys with my police baton only to have them look at me as if I were wasting my time and theirs, which in a way I was. Fat is padding, too, but I'm in no way advocating that you overdose on burgers and fries so you can take a punch.

It's also good to have a strong neck. The less your head moves when struck, the less your brain gets jarred and the more awake you stay so you can keep on slugging it out.

Adrenaline is probably nature's best buffer to pain. I once saw a guy get his ear cut completely off in a knife assault, and he was so busy fighting that he didn't notice it until my police partner and I pointed out that it was lying under a parked car. A flood of adrenaline blocks pain when you are high on rage and fear. Once the fight is over, however, the aches and pains begin.

## **3. EMOTIONAL**

Out-of-control rage is an emotion that can easily cause you to forget all of your training. When your friend tells you that he got so mad in a fight that he had to be pulled off the guy, he is also telling you that he was out of control. That is not a good thing. Fighting is about control of yourself, the other person and the situation. It's impossible to control anything if you are so out of it that you have to be physically restrained.

Anger is not necessarily a bad thing as long as it's directed and used to your advantage. If someone attacks you or a loved one, you should be outraged by that - but the rage should be controlled and channeled to facilitate your warrior spirit and buffer your pain.