

Enacted anger is self-indulgent



Jo Ann
Lederman

FAMILY MATTERS

Dear Jo Ann,

My wife tells me that my anger is out of control when we have a difference of opinion. We have been married 12 years and have 2 children. My father had the same problem and it frightened my mom. What can I do?

José

Dear José,

Enacted anger is self-indulgent. It lacks a thoughtful plan for expressing discontent, while intimidating and creating submission. It erupts and spews forth like a volcano, annihilating everything in its path. This kind of anger is out of control. How are your wife and children being affected? Are they afraid? Resentful? What was it like to watch your mother be afraid? You have recreated your family dynamics. You are modeling the role of victimizer and your wife, victim. Is that what you want?

Your dad did that for you. Do you remember how that felt? José, you can change all that. Feelings of anger are normal to every human being. When babies are born, they know how to get attention by crying and screaming. Soon, babies learn to use their words and hope to be heard. Has your wife been hearing you? Are you having temper tantrums because you feel she is not listening? Or is it because you do not know how to express negative feelings without being angry? Many people have that problem. I'm sure it is almost as uncomfortable inside your body when you are angry as it is for your family to experience its impact. All of you are suffering.

José, it's not too late to learn to express anger more effectively. Here are some helpful hints that I use in my office with my patients to harness unbridled feelings:

- Identify what your body is feeling

prior to the explosion. Some men feel tightness in their stomach, throats or chest. Others become aware of the inevitable rise in blood pressure. When you feel these feelings in your body, go on to the next step.

- Begin to deep breathe to a count of six and exhale to a count of six through your nose. You will begin the process learning to delay expressions of your anger. You will experience more self-control. You will give your self time to reflect.

- Identify what is bothering you.

- Write it down. Journaling will create organization so you can convert feelings to thoughts on paper.

- State your problem without blaming your wife.

- Ask for her help

- Request a specific change.

Create outlets for your angry energy as you learn to delay uncomfortable feelings. While some men journal their thoughts and feelings to organize them, others need more immediate and active relief and exercise until the anger depletes and clarity of thought can begin. Some men work on their hobbies. Angry energy, organized, can convert to constructive uses. One patient I counseled cleared and planted an English garden while learning to delay anger. He said that hauling rocks, digging and working in the soil was healing. I encouraged another man to start a foundation to honor the memory of his mother, who died post surgery, rather than pursue a frivolous lawsuit.

When couples with anger management problems come to me for help, I ask them to try this trick:

Imagine that you are in an angry conversation; someone knocks at your door. Do you answer the door angry or do you put on a happy face to greet your guest? One hundred percent of my patients imagine that they change their tone to answer the door. What does this mean? Simply, that when in an emotionally tense spot, they actually do have authority over their own powerful emotions. To many people, this is a revelation.