

Baby Steps – Baby Breaths

Loud music. Traffic. Something overheard and taken the wrong way. A *look*. These are some of the things that can set a person off into a fit of anger, leaving those around them wondering what just happened.

What has just happened, in most cases, has nothing to do with **what has just happened**. The 'incident' that resulted in the angry outburst is often due to events that have gone on before. The recipient generally isn't aware of the genesis of the anger – they just know that they're getting an earful, or more.

Think about one of your worst days. You sleep in and in your rush to get ready, you slip and hurt your back. Then, you spill your coffee over yourself, while listening to your kids arguing, once again, over who gets to sit in the front seat. The car doesn't start so you rush back into the house to arrange alternate transport for the kids and yourself. And, on it goes...

By the time you arrive at work, late for an important meeting, your Sympathetic Nervous System is revving, unbeknownst to you. (Our Autonomic Nervous System has 2 branches – **The Sympathetic Nervous System** which accelerates the heart rate, constricts blood vessels, and raises blood pressure. Think “gas” for your “car”. **The Parasympathetic Nervous System** slows the heart rate, increases intestinal and gland activity, and relaxes sphincter muscles. Think “brake” of your “car”.)

The physiological changes that result can be explosive – literally! You still have to do the photocopying for your meeting, but someone is taking their sweet time copying, what seems to you, to be unimportant work. That's when you've had it and tear into them for taking their time. Given a more peaceful start to the day, the 'explosion' may not have taken place.

One of the biggest factors in the escalation of anger is stress. People who are under chronic stress are worn out – they have nothing left to give and may have a great deal of difficulty just getting through their day. The never-ending repetition of a cycle such as the one described earlier can cause people to feel overwhelmed and unable to cope.

The person who is quick to anger often wonders what is wrong with them and can't understand why things that aren't really a big deal can set them off. Their friends, family and colleagues may wonder the same thing.

Knowledge is power. Understanding the role that stress plays in the cycle of anger and learning techniques that help balance the two branches of the nervous system will help increase one's resilience so that they can approach situations from a place of heart and higher cognitive reasoning. Research is showing that by balancing the two branches of the nervous system, the signal from the heart to the brain becomes synchronized resulting in better emotional, mental and physical health. It's like getting a tune-up for your car – (and you) run a lot smoother and become more energy efficient.

What this means is that instead of saying the first thing that comes to your mind, you stop and think things through. It is **action** instead of **reaction**. It may mean asking for clarification, letting things go or expressing their anger, upset or hurt in a responsible way that moves the conversation forward.

Rather than managing your anger, why not transform it? Like any new skill, this is a process that needs to be practised and you can start right now by becoming aware of how you are breathing. Learn to use your diaphragm – watch how a baby breathes and copy it. Next time you get a hint of anger, stop and

start doing 'baby breathing'. You may be surprised at what happens next, or more to the point, at what doesn't happen next!

Marianna Paulson

“Auntie-Stress”

Change of Heart Stress Solutions