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Family Focus

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live in another county, and I've changed their names so they won't be identifiable in this column. "Aaron" and "Leah" are a couple in their 50s. Leah had cancer and chemo three years ago and is in the high-risk group for the coronavirus. They have three children in their teens and early 20s.

One daughter, age 22, a recent college graduate, had to remain at home when she had been planning on finding a job and living with roommates. "Anna" became very willful about getting together with friends whether or not she was following safe protocol. Both parents pleaded with her to take more precautions and to think about protecting them, especially her mother. But things deteriorated as Anna continued to indulge in risky behavior by going to parties and group gatherings. Aaron was furious and the household was full of conflict and screaming for months. The final straw was when Aaron, who had never acted out in anger before, threw a vase at the family room wall. It shattered and so did this family's living arrangements.

Aaron and Leah decided that Anna could no longer live with them, and they rented a guest cottage for her from some neighbors. This was an expensive solution, but one that brought more comfort to Aaron and Leah. Anna has refused to see them at present, and they are hoping to repair the relationship soon. They are still giving Anna money to live on because they know she can't easily find work during this pandemic.

Aaron's loss of control was out of character for him, and he was very concerned. It is much easier to lose one's temper when there is underlying fear involved. When there is a threat to our safety (one of our most basic needs, according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs), we often have a fight or flight response.

If we understand how easily we can be provoked when we're more frustrated and fearful, maybe we can avoid controversy with others. I think just about all of us are feeling less in control (i.e., more helpless) and more anxious these days. Worry, stress and isolation can affect levels of brain serotonin and cortisol, which can then have a negative impact on our mood.

With so many challenges facing us, it is especially important to try to conduct ourselves reasonably, even if other people we may encounter occasionally are not. It is enervating to battle with others when we need to preserve our strength and determination to be safe from the virus, healthy in general and economically secure, to function at work and keep our jobs, and to help our children navigate their current school and social situations, and so much more.

How can we be good role models for our children and others and not allow ourselves to be negatively triggered? Some of the techniques for anger management can be quite useful in these times.

First, recognize that you have the right to think and feel any way you want; it's what you do with your thoughts and feelings that makes a difference. Then, take time and think before you speak or sound off in

We need Miss Manners more than ever now. All around us are more and more instances of people treating each other rudely, dismissively, or even hostilely. Some of our local Nextdoor postings got so nasty that the leader needed to remind participants of the rules of conduct for using the site.

Society had already slipped in decorum before COVID came along. The example from certain leaders of our government has been one of hurling insults and inflammatory remarks at people too many times to even count. I was already concerned about the message this crude conduct sent to our children, grandchildren, and impressionable youth in general. But now, frustration with so many parts of our society has seeped down to us average citizens and some people are not holding back.

Disagreeing respectfully seems to have lost its allure.

One controversial subject surrounding us at this time is how to keep safe during COVID or whether to even try very hard. Some are strictly observing recommendations for wearing masks and keeping distance, while others are not. Some in each contingent are denigrating those who are behaving differently.

One family I see on Zoom is so divided on this issue that they couldn't remain sheltered in place together. They

person or on social media, texts, or emails. It's helpful to first write down some iterations of what you want to say and then decide how you want to phrase your thoughts.

Once you're calm, if you want to express your anger use "I-statements." An I-statement starts with expressing a feeling, then what caused you to feel this way, then what you would like to see happen. An example could be, "I'm worried about getting takeout at this restaurant when I see you're not wearing a mask. Could you please put one on?" Or, "I'm upset that you called me _____ (insert derogatory name or curse word). I don't think I deserve to be treated this way and hope you won't do this again."

If you're highly upset, take a time out if you can. Find calming techniques for yourself, such as slow, deep breathing, yoga, music, writing in a journal, or talking things out with a trusted person. Identify possible solutions instead of focusing on what made you angry. These steps will help you feel more in control and less at the mercy of your emotions.

Some may feel better unleashing their anger, but that is usually only a short-term payoff. Long-term positive feelings about ourselves come from either exercising restraint in certain situations or speaking up without blame or judgment - in other words, with civility.

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