

# 7 ways to keep your COOL

(when everyone around you is losing theirs)

Although anger is a perfectly natural emotion, it can sometimes get the better of us. Here's how to take the heat out of any situation

Ever found yourself losing your rag at your bickering children? Ready to scream when stuck in a traffic jam? If your blood boils after minor irritations or you're constantly seething, it's time to take control. "Losing your temper raises blood pressure, can weaken the immune system, cause digestive disorders and headaches – and it's bad for your relationships," says Gael Lindenfield, author of *Managing Anger* (Thorsons, £8.99). "People can find it hard to forgive and forget the things we said and did that we later regret. But anger is essentially a useful emotion. It gives us the motivation and extra energy to tackle injustice and frustration, and we need it to protect ourselves and vulnerable others. The key, though, is to express your anger in an assertive, controlled way." So try some of our suggestions to ensure you stay cool, calm and collected.

## 1 Dictate the pace

★ If you've got a demanding family who expect you to do everything, you need to take control. "Just as a group attitude can influence the individual, a determined individual can influence the group," explains Paul Wilson, founder of The Calm Centre ([www.calmcentre.com](http://www.calmcentre.com)). "Stop reacting to their demands and take control by moving slowly and speaking calmly. You can spread calm within any group, especially a family who will follow your lead."

## 2 Bicker on schedule

★ While it's impossible to avoid all conflict and arguments, it's possible not to feel too bad when they happen. If a row is about to flare because you're trying to do too many things, simply postpone it. "Use a phrase like, 'We can talk about this later when we have time,'" suggests relationship conflict resolution specialist Ursula James. "Lower your eyes, as engaging in eye contact can be aggressive, and speak quietly; doing this will show you're not prepared to escalate the argument. Discuss the problem when you both have time to put your attention to it." You'll be surprised at how peacefully that can happen.

## 3 Make your point constructively

★ Whether you've got to stick up for yourself at work or in a shop, make a conscious effort to think about everything you're going to say before you say it. Be certain of the facts and approach the conversation with a problem-solving attitude rather than aggression. Bear in mind that even if you focus on remaining calm and reasonable, the other person may not reciprocate; don't give in to the urge to match their hostility. Remaining calm, clear and anti-accusatory will allow you to keep control of the conversation, and, if necessary, end it on your terms if it's not going anywhere.

## 4 Take time out

★ When you feel your patience fraying, take a break. Go somewhere quiet if you can – even the bathroom will do – and take 30 seconds to gather your thoughts. Do something productive to take your mind off your anger or think about what you'll do or say next so you have more control over your response. Don't dwell on negative thoughts and feelings; instead find something positive you can do to restore your emotional balance. Ruminating isn't helpful and will only keep you stuck in your negative patterns.



## Gauge your rage

★ The next time you are about to blow up, think about why you are so angry. Are those dirty dishes really upsetting you? Will what that person said or did matter in three weeks? What's the worst that will happen if you're late? If you find that you're experiencing an undue amount of anger for a small problem, then try to discover what exactly about it bothers you so much. Either you'll calm down instantly or else may find the reason for your flared temper was something else entirely.

# 5

## Just say no

★ **No one wants to be labelled a pushover, nor do they want to be confrontational. You can avoid anger-inducing circumstances by asserting yourself and your needs in situations that don't suit you. The quickest and best way to do this is to keep it simple with a firm 'no'. If you learn to assert yourself and let other people know your expectations, boundaries and reasons in a clear, non-confrontational way, you'll soon find you have far less need to get angry in the first place!**

# 6

## Use laughter

★ After all, it's the best medicine. Humour can defuse a situation like nothing else. So if you are fuming, think of something amusing. It could be your favourite line from a funny film, something silly your child did – anything. Laughter helps put things into perspective and can turn around your mood. The act itself causes a reduction in stress-related hormones like epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine and adrenaline and also provides an emotional release. Even a forced laugh can help change your mood, allowing you to see things from a different perspective.

# 7

