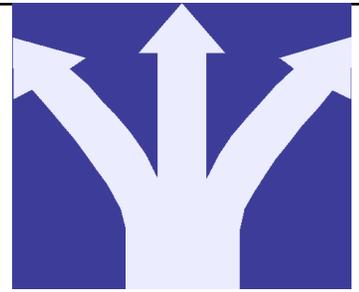


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Women and Anger: The Special Challenges of Single Parenting-Part 1

“If anger were mileage, I'd be a very frequent flyer,
right up there in First Class.”

-Gina Barreca , Academic and Humorist

In any given day, most of us encounter situations that make us angry. While commuting, working, caring for homes and families - just trying to stay afloat - we all face frustration. One would be hard pressed to find a person who is untouched by stress, irritability and the occasional angry outburst.

Daily life in the 21st century United States can be stressful enough, but add in the responsibilities of single parenting, and it can seem overwhelming. Whether dealing with an acrimonious divorce, and/or facing loss of income and help with the children, single parents must deal with their own difficult emotions – as well as their children's.

Economic stressors and concerns over meeting the basic needs of a family by oneself, add to the emotional burden of single parents and can lead to anxiety, depression and negative expressions of these emotions that have reverberating consequences.

Anyone can “lose it” at times, but when anger and patterns of acting out angrily cause us to feel often remorseful, or get us into trouble with others, it is time to take positive action. Not only is it healthier for a single parent if they learn to handle anger better, it is healthier for their children. Research shows that teaching children how to regulate their emotions is one of the best ways we can help them be resilient in handling life's challenges.

In writing about how “Some individuals, despite facing recurrent, severe adversities in life such as low socioeconomic status (SES) are nonetheless able to maintain good physical health...” researchers Edith

them to trust others, better regulate their emotions, and focus on their futures.”

So how can a parent – especially a busy and over-worked single parent - better handle anger? Let's look at some ways that have been suggested as useful by researchers and therapists, as well as other single parents:

1) Acknowledge the Problem – Don't Wait To Take Action

If your response to anger is becoming disruptive – acknowledge it. After all, the experience of anger is a natural, inevitable and even helpful occurrence. It lets us know that something is wrong in a given situation, and some action may be necessary. It is not the experience of anger itself that is the problem, but the negative and aggressive behaviors we might exhibit in response.

2) Assess the Basic Needs of Your Family and Find Help if You Need It

Does your family have adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical care? It can be difficult to focus on effective anger management if you are struggling in these areas. Particularly after a dramatic shift in family economic status due to divorce, job loss or homelessness, there might public or private assistance available to you. Seek out a social worker at your health clinic, or your city or town hall, and ask them for help in accessing benefits. [Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children \(TAFDC\)](#) may provide food and cash benefits to families that are income eligible. Other families may be eligible for food stamps even though their income is too high to receive cash benefits.

3) Don't Let Feelings Get Bottled Up

Talk about what is making you stressed and angry with other adults. If you don't have another caring and safe adult in your life to speak with, seek out a therapist who can provide a safe and confidential

(Continued)

4) Develop an “Anger Plan”

◆ **Learn What Are Your Anger triggers.**

What situations are most likely to develop into an angry conflict? “When he mouths off....” “When she refuses to do what I ask....” “When I come home from work and the house is a mess...” may be examples of triggers.

◆ **Note physiological responses – anger creates physical changes in your body.**

Notice what happens in your body when you get angry. Does your heart start to pound first, or do you get flushed? Take deep breaths and try to slow your heartbeat. BEFORE you respond to a trigger. Slowing down your reaction time, and allowing this pause between a trigger and your response, may take many practice attempts. Another way to slow your anger reactivity is to shift your brain’s focus from the trigger by stepping outside or focusing on your breath. Be patient with yourself, and acknowledge small, positive steps.

◆ **Develop strategies to handle “transition times” in the home.**

The period in which parents are getting ready for work and kids are going off to school; dinner and homework times can all be very stressful for the household. Try to simplify routines for these stressful times of day. Prepare as much as possible the night before, and encourage children to do the same.

◆ **Take a Break -**

If things are getting heated, and a situation is escalating, encourage the take a time out. Providing that the children are in a safe place, going into the kitchen for a cup of coffee, putting in the earbuds and listening to some music, calling a friend, or popping in an exercise DVD and exercising along (not just watching the instructor!) can help to cool down.

Reference:

Chen, E., Miller, G., (2012). “Shift and Persist” Strategies: Why Low Socioeconomic Status Isn’t Always Bad for Health.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Volume 7 (Number 2), pages 135-158.

Other strategies for single parents will be discussed in Part Two

FROM OUR FILES:

A Gene that May Cause Aggression and Anger?

A common gene mutation has been identified with compulsive and aggressive behavior. Individuals with the so-called “warrior gene” display higher levels of aggression in response to new research co-authored by Rose McDermott, professor of political science at Brown University.

In the experiment, which is the first to examine a behavioral measure of anger and aggression in response to provocation, subjects were asked to cause physical pain to an opponent they believed had taken money from them by administering varying amounts of hot sauce. The findings were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

Monoamine oxidase A is an enzyme that breaks down important neurotransmitters in the brain, including dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. The enzyme is regulated by monoamine oxidase A gene (MAOA). Humans have various forms of the gene, resulting in different levels of enzymatic activity. Several studies have found a correlation between the low-activity form of MAOA and anger/aggression in observational and survey-based studies.

The PNAS paper is the first experimental test of whether MAOA-L individuals display higher levels of actual behavioral anger/aggression in response to provocation. A total of 78 subjects took part in the experiment over networked computers (all were male students from the University of California-Santa Barbara). Each subject (A) first performed a vocabulary task in which they earned money. Then they were told that an anonymous partner (B), linked over the network could choose to take some of their earnings away from them. The original subject (A) could then choose to punish the taker (B) by forcing them to eat unpleasantly hot (spicy) sauce but they had to pay to do so, so administering punishment was costly.

In reality, the “partner” who took money away was a computer, which allowed researchers to control responses. No one actually ingested hot sauce. The results demonstrate that:

- Low-activity MAOA subjects displayed slightly higher levels of anger/aggression overall than high-activity MAOA subjects.
- There was strong evidence for a gene-by-environment interaction, such that MAOA is less associated with the occurrence of anger/aggression in the low-provocation condition (when the amount of money taken was low), but significantly predicted anger/