

Cooling down before you respond

Easy · 10 min to read · Free

When you're angry, your heart rate and blood pressure rise and your thinking gets exaggerated. Pause before you speak or hit send, calm your body with slow belly breathing or a brisk walk, swap "always" and "never" for accurate words, and come back with an "I" statement about what you need. Venting at full blast makes anger worse, not better.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A way to step away for a few minutes

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Notice the signs.** When you get angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up, along with adrenaline. A pounding heart or hot face is your cue to stop.
- 2 **Say nothing yet.** In the heat of the moment it's easy to say something you'll regret. Take a few moments to collect your thoughts, and let the other person do the same. Try: "I want to answer this well. Give me ten minutes."
- 3 **Calm your body.** Breathe deeply from your belly, not your chest, and slowly repeat a calm word or phrase like "take it easy." Picturing a relaxing place or doing slow stretches also helps. If it's still building, go for a brisk walk.
- 4 **Check your words.** When you're angry, thinking gets dramatic. Replace "Everything's ruined" with "This is frustrating, and it's understandable I'm upset, but it's not the end of the world". Drop "always" and "never." They're rarely accurate, they make anger feel justified, and they push away people who might help.
- 5 **Turn demands into wants.** "I would like" is healthier than "I demand" or "I must have." If you don't get what you want, you'll feel disappointed instead of furious.
- 6 **Respond once you're calm.** Use an "I" statement that's respectful and specific: "I'm upset that you left without helping with the dishes," not "You never do any housework".
- 7 **Focus on the fix, not the fault.** Ask what would actually solve it, and accept that some things are out of your control.

Watch out "Letting it all out" is a myth. Research has found that letting anger rip escalates anger and aggression and doesn't help anyone resolve the problem. Holding it in isn't the answer either: anger turned inward can lead to high blood pressure or depression, or come out sideways as passive-aggressive behavior. The healthy middle is saying what you need clearly, without hurting anyone.

DAD NOTE Write the angry text. Then delete it and go for a walk.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/mind/emotional-regulation/cooling-down-before-you-respond/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: American Psychological Association; Mayo Clinic; National Institute of Mental Health.