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Anxiety ruining family and intimate relationships ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have a major problem! You see, for the last year now I've suffered with anxiety and it's ruining my relationships with my mom, stepdad, and boyfriend!! I get mad over little things and sometimes, okay most of the time, I take it out on them! Is there any way to deal with this situation? If so, please help.

K

Answer

Dear K,

Kudos to you for being self-aware; taking a hard look at how your anxiety influences the ways you handle relationships isn't always easy. While some degree of anxiety and stress can serve as a useful part of life — sparking motivation and focus — anxiety disorders can be overwhelming, unpleasant, and detrimental to well-being. That being said, there are a number of ways to address your anxiety, whether it be due to day-to-day stress or indicative of a disorder. Some strategies are DIY (do-it-yourself) and you can start on them now. However, if the anxiety you've been experiencing for the past year is interfering with your close relationships (as you've described), ability to do well at work or in school, and/or complete daily tasks, it might be helpful to talk with a mental health professional for a proper diagnosis and to discuss additional treatment options.

There are a number of strategies you can adopt right now to cope with your anxiety. Everyday stress can often be managed with [exercise](#) ^[2], healthy eating, [meditation](#) ^[3], sleep, social time, and [time management](#) ^[4] (for more information on coping, read [Stress, anxiety, and learning to cope](#) ^[5]). These healthy and stress-reducing strategies are also helpful for individuals suffering from clinical anxiety, but may not be enough to fully cope with it.

Symptoms of anxiety disorders can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from reactions to everyday stress. You mention that you tend to have outbursts over little issues and take it out on your loved ones. Irritability, anger, and/or angry outbursts are among the emotional and behavioral symptoms of anxiety-related disorders, which can also include:

- Restlessness
- Sadness or depression
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Drug or alcohol use
- Over or under-eating
- Social withdrawal

Since you didn't mention the reasons or cause for your anxiety, it might be worth doing a little detective work. Think back to a year ago when your anxiety first became a problem: What, if anything, has changed? How persistent have your feelings of anxiety been since they started? Are there certain triggers that make you feel mad? Or does it seem to come out of nowhere? If you're unsure about the answers (or even if you are), it might be time to bring in a professional. Whether what you're dealing with is a true disorder or specific day-to-day stressors, talking to a mental health professional can help get at the root causes of anxiety. S/he will also be able to recommend additional coping strategies for you and any other treatment that could be helpful (one such possibility is prescription medication as a complement to the therapy process). For more on what happens physiologically in the case of anxiety disorders and how different types of treatment can help, check out the [National Institute of Mental Health's Anxiety Disorders](#) [6] page.

In the meantime, it might be worth it to have an open discussion about what you are feeling with your mom, stepdad, and boyfriend. In turn, this might enable them to provide more helpful support for you. Talking with them about your anxiety will give them the opportunity to better understand why you react strongly or "take it out on them" and hopefully refrain from accidentally making you feel worse. Honest conversations with those close to you can pave the way for more positive interactions as you work on managing your anxiety.

Alice!

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