

Carolyn Hax: Her heart isn't hurtful, but her voice can sound like it is

By **Carolyn Hax**



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Adapted from an online discussion.

Dear Carolyn: *I have a way, sometimes, of speaking too quickly or being impatient that can sound so rude. It just comes shooting out. I am afraid I will lose all my friends and I know it hurts my husband. I hate myself when it happens, and even though I vow, time and again, to be patient, to be kind — and I am a kind person, I do not at all have a hurtful heart — it happens again.*

It just happened last night when a friend was over. I am not personally insulting in these moments; it's just a tone that I hear and feel ashamed of.

I wonder if you've come across this and have any thoughts, or if I should just move to a monastery and be silent for the rest of my life.

— **Sharp Tongue**

Sharp Tongue: Do I have any thoughts.

Do I? Have any *thoughts*?

If you're reading this and you know me in real life, enjoy.

By way of explanation: An old friend of mine marvels at how fast I can get someone off the phone. Like, he feels the breeze from my hanging up on him (I did say old) the millisecond the necessary information has been exchanged.

It's up to your friends whether you lose all your friends, of course — but you have precious awareness of your tendency. Even better, you *hear the tone*, which means you're aware as it's happening, yes?

That means you can take a breath before you speak. Slow down.

And if it's too late and you already snapped, you can say you're really sorry your evil twin just took over. Even it dawns on you an hour later, you can still say, "I just realized I was an impatient jerk to you over the [whatever]. I'm sorry about that."

Your husband deserves the larger conversation — if you haven’t had it already — about your being aware of this terse persona, and you don’t mean it personally and don’t mean to hurt him. If he can help you figure out what precedes these episodes — fatigue? hunger? frustration? — then you can train yourself to catch them before they happen. You can also teach him how and when to speak up in the moment.

This isn’t to say you can’t talk to your friends about it generally, too — to say, “I know I can sound short and impatient sometimes, and I’m sorry about that — I know it’s not okay and I’m working on it.” It’s just that it’s required for your spouse, vs. merely thoughtful and recommended with others.

By the way, if you went into monastic silence, then you’d probably be the exact same way, just by glaring.

Dear Carolyn: *Thank you. The thought of figuring out what precedes it is extremely helpful — I think it is often when I am tired or frustrated. It doesn't happen at other times.*

I have thought of having the conversation, but I am afraid to. I am afraid if I point it out, then I will get pummeled and will lose everyone anyway. This makes me teary. But I know it's a good suggestion.

— **Sharp Tongue again**

Sharp Tongue again: Please don’t be afraid. Vulnerability is the most precious gift you can give the people who love you. And lovable ones won’t pummel you for it.

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