



# Cooling Hostility: Tools and Strategies

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**Notes, Suggestions and Strategies for Your Consideration. “One size does not fit all!”**

“**Hostility**” can relate to: anger, aggression, irritation, rudeness, unfriendliness, resentment, disrespect, etc.  
**Can result in:** Inappropriate arguments, irrational “attacking and defending” — verbal and otherwise. An assortment of counterproductive behaviors, such as insults, passive aggression, shouting, yelling, etc.

**What might trigger hostility?** Stress; frustration; disappointment; fears; perceived insults; lack of control.

**Why?** We never completely know someone’s back-story or history. Reasons could be obvious ... or hidden.

- **Stress** is the body’s immediate response to a survival threat (real or imagined). It is a biochemical reaction.
- Self-protection, defensiveness and survival is programmed into our genes. We want to be in control.
- **Stressors** are events, circumstances or associations that our nervous system **perceives or interprets** as threat.

**REACT** — Limbic System (flight, fight, freeze; unaware of behavior and impact; automatic; impulsive)

**RESPOND** — Prefrontal Cortex - (purposeful; conscious; present; aware of consequences; impulse control)

**Keep YOUR Cool:** Remain calm, mindful, make appropriate behavioral and communication decisions.

**STOP — PAUSE — BREATHE — EVALUATE** (Ask yourself some good questions).

***“Threat” may be overestimated, our ability to cope might be underestimated.***

***Before you take it personally, consider, “How much of this is about me ... and how much isn’t?”***

Identify potentially sensitive situations in advance, if possible. **Be prepared** with a plan and strategy!

**Think before you speak.** Count to 10 (or 20). “Just because you think it, doesn’t mean you have to say it.”

**Don’t say:** “You’re overreacting.” “Calm down!” “You’re wrong.” “Shut up!” **Instead:** “Let’s solve this.”

**Communicate with empathy and compassion.** Seek to understand where they’re coming from.

— Cognitive empathy: “I can certainly understand why you’re unhappy.”

— Emotional empathy: “I’ve been there, too.”

— Compassionate empathy: “How can I help? What can I do?” “How can I make this person feel safe?”

— Emotions are contagious — who will catch whose?

— Am I sounding calm, positive, clear and easy to understand? Am I non-threatening?

— “Reframing” could be helpful. “It gives me pleasure to be charitable.”

Research suggests: probably more than 80% of our impact is non-verbal — tone of voice and body language.

- To calm people down: speak slowly, softer, lower pitch. Use your “FM late night jazz DJ” voice.
- What are the messages my face is sending?
- Ask questions that demonstrate caring. Be a great listener! Observe nonverbal cues. Acknowledge feelings.
- Notice and evaluate feedback WITHOUT becoming defensive. Put yourself in **their** shoes.
- Sometimes, the best thing to do, is to avoid making it worse! “Letting it go” might be the right strategy.

When mistakes are made, own them. No blaming, no shaming, no maiming! Keep it positive.

**L. E. A. P.** (Listen. Empathize. Apologize. Problem-solve) **L. A. F. F.** (Listen. Apologize. Fix-it. Follow-up)

If/when you “lose YOUR cool,” recover with self-acceptance (self-compassion). Don’t “beat up on yourself!” Say you’re sorry! Your job is to cool down the emotional temperature ... not necessarily to be “right.” Calm yourself with a conscious breathing technique — there are many to choose from. For example: Inhale for 2 seconds, exhale for 4. Or, inhale count of 4, hold 4, exhale 6, hold 2.