

Preventing family violence: rules for moments of incompatibility and improved self-control

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Introduction

As a retired private solo family psychiatrist treating all ages for over 40 years, I attended a Case Western Reserve Department of Psychiatry Grand Rounds on "Couple Therapy For Treating Intimate Partner Violence" (1). While many studies on incidence, sequelae, cost and treatment are available, the lack of family and couple oriented preventive information seemed evident. I thought of the many handouts I had used in my office over the decades, especially those designed to offer mental health promoting peaceful problem solving, training and interactions. Believing these efforts were effective, I summarize them for all interested in preventing "family violence" as currently understood. Three "handouts" were offered (updated and "cleaned up" for publication) containing the following themes:

1. "Seven Bad Days, Boredom, Stand By",
2. "Moments of Incompatibility", and
3. "Best Breathing by the SAM (Shut mouth; Air in thru nose; and Mouth exhale or cough)".

A brief scan of "violence prevention" literature did not reveal anything comparable.

Seven bad days, boredom, stand by

With rare exceptions, everyone has seven bad days a month: women for 7 days in a row; men for 7 days on weekends; and children for 1 hour doses two to three times daily. All are encouraged not to have more. All are to practice staying calm ("There he/she goes again!") by pretending "boredom" (I learned in the Navy Submarine Service that "Boredom is GOOD!"). Also, the Navy "Stand by" is a good phrase to help all (although I hated it in the Navy because usually all hell broke loose after most "Stand by"--Boredom was better). Finally, all should try to keep (or feign) monthly count so no one can "go off" more than their "7 days" (The firm reminder, "You have already had your 7 days this month" can help in time, with maybe even a chuckle). "Don't go off--use words and let's problem solve..." "ONLY 7 BAD DAYS A MONTH" on a small card on the refrigerator should help.

Moments of incompatibility (mois)

The "bad days" (and other times too) are characterized by MOIs which can occur between any individuals living together. It helps to be able to label "This is an MOI", and then call for the "RULES of Fight Fair, Forget Fast, Forgive, and Ask Forgiveness" ("FF, FF, F, AF"). These rules should be printed on small cards placed on the refrigerator and bathroom mirrors under the title of "Rules for MOIs." If not thought of daily, these rules will not be readily available when the MOI occurs.

Best breath by the SAM

There is a "best way to breath"²⁻⁵ for better oxygen and self control. This is helped by saying, "Let us SAM" which all should have

practiced. Each should be able to help anyone do it. Thus, to learn and help remembering, it should be printed on another small card placed on the refrigerator and bathroom mirrors: "The SAM: Shut your mouth. (No doubt, a great first step in family problem solving and a necessary step to breath well thru one's nose). Air in thru nose. (Nasal inhaling gives more oxygen because fewer muscle are used). Mouth exhale or cough if really choked up." Keep repeating as all moves to FF, FF, F, and AF. The SAM gives more oxygen (another helpful distracting thought), and it directly distracts focus from whatever tension is affecting all. In such regards, the SAM can be a universal remedy for rages, panics, obsessions, and impulses, whatever. BUT IF NOT PRACTICED to the degree of personal way to nasal breath, it will not be available when really needed. (Another benefit is that if learned to sleep by nasal breathing, snoring will stop.) While no definitive data is available, feedback was universally positive when these counsels were followed. If these three ways of interacting are promoted, family violence should be reduced and improved by incompatibility understanding and improved self control. Couples will be helped to process tensions without violence by having prepared an alternative to emotional acting out.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

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