

Response to Spouses

by Diane Hawkins

Thanks for caring enough about your marriage to try to understand and learn how to manage a very challenging situation. Let me assure you right off the bat:

- You are not to blame for his/her switches. They are caused by his/her history.

Every marriage has bumps and every person makes mistakes or poor choices or slips into the flesh. He/she should be able to handle these as an ordinary offense—UNLESS it reminds him/her of a past trauma. Then his/her system reacts as if he/she is in the same danger as he/she was back then.

- Once the past traumas can be identified and healed, this will no longer happen—So there is hope for change ahead.
- See below for how to handle when a switch occurs.
- You will never be able to do it “all” right. Your aim has to be to handle some of the situations better.
 - Ultimately, it is most important for you to assure him/her that you have not turned against him/her—that you are still there and still care for him/her. (This will probably be best received between blow-ups.)
 - Secondly, it will help immensely if you learn to understand how DID operates. *Multiple Identities* is a great starting place.
 - Third most important will be learning the skills of validation and synchronization for handling his/her emotional states and switches. I will explain that below.

Here are some starting tips:

- Alters emerge because:
 - Something reminds them of a past trauma
 - It could be the victim alter, like a Little one—in which case he/she needs to be assured that he/she is safe. This can just be your reassuring voice. Holding if tolerated. Pointing out what about the current situation makes it safe—if the part is older than an infant state. (This takes them out of the context of the trauma into the present.)
 - It could be a protector. Generally, they only know full-out protection mode—which is anger and force to stop what is threatening.
 - Try not to argue with a Protector or to enflame the situation further.
 - Try to validate the Protector by saying something like, “I know you are here to protect him/her and I honor and respect your right to do that. I want him/her to be safe and protected too. Can you help me understand what I did that made him/her/you feel threatened?”
 - Giving them respect and honor greatly defuses them. They are coming against you as if you are a threatening perpetrator. So you want to treat them the opposite of a perpetrator. Showing concern for their welfare and giving them respect is TREMENDOUSLY different. Being open to see what you did that made the protector so angry is also very different than a perpetrator and will help move you out of perpetrator status towards friend status.
 - They have a need.
 - Sometimes a part will come out because they have a need to make something known—perhaps about what is going on inside—Or they may be unsure about what something means that they have just seen or experienced
 - So if a part comes out who doesn’t seem to be a victim or a protector, try to find out what they need.
 - The main person can’t handle something.
 - He/she will generally handle life unless:
 - He/She encounters something that reminds parts of trauma
 - He/She encounters a situation that stirs an intolerable conflict in her. In order to escape that, another part will come out and take her place.
 - This is the hardest situation for you to respond to—as it will be difficult for you to figure out what he/she couldn’t handle. You might be able to help him/her figure that out once she comes back—if she is open to that.

- Alters usually go back inside once the reason that they emerged is addressed.
- Learning to validate and synchronize will be your most effective steps forward for now.
 - Validating the part out will be huge in helping to defuse the situation. Find something to affirm them about—even it is just calmly saying, “I know you are out for a reason and I would like to understand.”
 - If they are feeling any kind of emotion, it will help immensely to say, “I can understand that what happened would make you very scared, angry, wanting to be in control, etc.”
 - You can never bring change to someone who is feeling a strong emotion without first validating that emotion and trying to really understand why they are feeling it and agreeing with it whenever you can. Only when the person feels that you understand them will they be open for you to make any kind of constructive suggestion.
 - In the Preventing Shattered Marriages CD set (<https://www.rcm-usa.org/CD-Sets.html>) that I strongly recommend to all married couples, there is a CD called “Emotional Synchronization in Communication.” This may be the most valuable CD in the whole set as it teaches you the skill of synchronizing, with Tom and me doing role plays of the wrong and right ways to handle various situations.
- Dealing with infants

Another thing that is going to be important for you to understand in dealing with him/her is that a lot of his/her trauma/abandonment occurred as an infant. Therefore, he/she is often responding at an infant level of reaction. This means that trying to rationalize with him/her will rarely be helpful. You have to think about what would calm an infant. An infant can't understand words but will read your facial expression, body language, and especially the tone of your voice. These all need to reflect safety and confidence and impart a sense of security to him/her. If any of these is “off,” it will do the opposite. If he/she reacts to some of your attempts to help, it may be because your uncertainty or facial expression or body language is not communicating the security he/she needs at the moment.

I hope these tips will be helpful to you. I am sorry that he/she is so volatile and unpredictable at this time. Try hard to remember this is mainly due to his/her issues and try to remain calm and not react.