

MEMBER RESOURCE

ANGER & IRRITABILITY

Understanding the short fuse and what's underneath it.

CODE ONE SUPPORT

ANGER & IRRITABILITY

You're snapping at things that never used to bother you. Traffic, a dish left in the sink, a kid asking one more question after a long day. None of it warrants the reaction it's getting – and you know that, which somehow makes it worse.

A short fuse isn't a character problem that showed up out of nowhere. Most of the time, it's a stress response with nowhere else to go, surfacing as irritability because that's easier for your system to express than whatever's actually underneath it.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS

Anger is very often a secondary emotion – the visible top layer over something else underneath, like fear, grief, helplessness, or unresolved stress from the job that hasn't had anywhere to go. Your nervous system, primed by repeated high-alert exposure, has a shorter distance to travel from calm to activated than it used to. Small triggers produce disproportionate reactions not because you've become an angrier person, but because your baseline arousal is already elevated before the trigger even shows up.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Something minor happens at home – an ordinary, forgettable irritation – and your reaction is out of proportion to it. You know it while it's happening, sometimes, and that doesn't stop it. Afterward there's often guilt, which adds its own layer of tension on top of whatever triggered the reaction in the first place. Over time, people around you start managing your mood rather than just being around you.

HOW IT SHOWS UP

- Snapping at family over things that wouldn't normally register
- A noticeably shorter fuse than your own baseline, that you can feel but not always stop
- Irritability that's more present at home than at work
- Guilt or shame after outbursts, which can itself add to the tension
- People around you visibly managing your mood or tiptoeing
- Anger at things – traffic, minor inconvenience – that's disproportionate to the actual event

Worth naming: irritability directed at your own family is very often not about your family at all. It's frequently the pressure valve for stress that has nowhere sanctioned to go – you can't snap

at a job, a system, or an outcome that upset you, so it surfaces somewhere safer, later, disconnected from its actual source.

WHY IT HITS THIS JOB HARDER

The job requires you to stay composed in situations that would justify real anger, fear, or grief in almost anyone — and to keep functioning professionally regardless. That composure is a genuine skill, but it isn't the same as the feeling not existing. It has to go somewhere, and home is often the first place it's actually safe enough to surface.

There's also a hypervigilance link: a nervous system that's been running in alert mode has a shorter fuse by default, because it's already primed for a fast reaction. Add cumulative fatigue and unresolved incidents, and ordinary household friction lands on a system with far less buffer than it used to have.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

Ask what's actually underneath it. Before reacting to the trigger in front of you, it's worth asking what you were carrying before that moment even happened. Often the real source is a job, a decision, or a feeling from hours or days earlier that never got expressed anywhere.

Build in a gap between shift and family time. A short, deliberate decompression period before you engage with people you love reduces the chance that leftover activation from the day gets discharged on the first person who says the wrong thing at the wrong moment.

Name the pattern to the people affected by it. "I've been shorter-tempered than usual, and it's not about you" is a small sentence that does real work — it tells the people around you the reaction isn't personal, without requiring you to explain everything underneath it.

Treat a persistently short fuse as a signal, not a personality trait. If irritability has become your default rather than an occasional bad day, that's information worth acting on — not something to just apologise for repeatedly and hope it settles on its own.

WORTH SITTING WITH

Think of the last time you overreacted at home. What were you actually carrying before that moment happened?

Has your fuse gotten shorter over months, or is this a new change worth paying attention to?

Who's been managing your mood lately, and have you actually acknowledged that to them?

IF THIS IS URGENT RIGHT NOW

This resource isn't a crisis tool. If you're having thoughts of suicide, of not wanting to be here, or of harming yourself – stop reading and reach out now:

AU: Lifeline 13 11 14 **US:** 988 **UK:** Samaritans 116 123 **CA:** 1-833-456-4566

This resource will still be here when you're ready.

Rick – Founder, Code One Support

Firefighter · Former Infantry · Trauma & Grief Peer Support

MORE FROM CODE ONE SUPPORT

If this helped, here's where to go next.

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CODE ONE PEER SUPPORT

Real conversations with a trained peer who's lived this job. Not a crisis line, not corporate wellness – ongoing support, on your terms. Plans from AU\$29/month.

SELF-GUIDED WORKBOOK – \$27

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One practical mental health tool every week, written for first responders and their families.

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Quick regulation tools, a guide for volunteers, and a guide for partners and families.

TikTok & Instagram: @codeonesupport · codeonesupport.com · info@codeonesupport.com

This resource is for informational and educational purposes only and does not replace professional mental health support. If you are in crisis, contact your local 24/7 crisis service.

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