

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

DON'T LET HIS GOAT GET YOURS

Three easy steps to psyching out his anger

We all get angry once in a while, especially with the people who are closest to us—i.e., our partners. For this reason, it's important that you get to know your anger—in the same way it's important that you get to know your neighbor's pet Doberman—so that it is your friend, and *not* your undoing. The following guide should help.

1. Assess the causes of your anger.

Knowing what triggers your anger is of paramount importance if you hope to understand it and minimize its appearance in your home. Analyze the recent occasions on which you felt angry with your partner. When he came home from a business dinner at two in the morning walking like an unsteady toddler, did you tell him not to bother undressing and hand him the key to a room at the Y? Then be aware that uncertainty regarding his whereabouts is a trigger for you, and suggest that he have himself fitted for a tracing device. When he informed you that he thought your new haircut was too short and that it made your face look pudgy, did you try to stab him with the tweezers you happened to be using on your eyebrows? If so, be aware that accepting criticism is not your strong point, and suggest that your partner refrain from offering it if he wants to leave this world wearing the same

unscarred face with which he arrived. When he announced that the two of you would have to change your vacation plans because the day you were to leave for Italy was the opening day of baseball season, did you, for dinner, serve him ravioli stuffed with your airline tickets? Then understand that having to change your itinerary, especially for a moronic reason, is not something you accept with equanimity, and suggest that from now on your partner make his vacation plans with George Steinbrenner.

2. Gauge your anger's effectiveness.

When you can't avoid an anger-producing situation and must express your negative feelings, you can tell if you do so effectively by how you and your partner feel afterward. If you usually express your anger in stentorian soliloquies that leave you feeling exhausted and him feeling as if somebody blew a whistle in his ear, perhaps you should try a quieter approach. You could, for instance, make a one-minute home videotape of yourself screaming at him and then play it back to him with the volume turned down. If you usually express your anger by huddling in a corner and mumbling expletives, an activity that leaves you feeling unassuaged and your partner totally bewildered, perhaps you should find a more forthright way of getting out your feelings. You could try writing a statement detailing his crimes as you see them, then having it notarized and hand-delivered to him by a uniformed messenger. On the other hand, if you generally express your anger by stepping on his extra pair of contact lenses or performing other "accidental" acts of violence that leave *you* feeling guilty and your partner feeling homicidal—perhaps you should attempt a less vicious approach. You might try pretending he has a learning disability and, speaking with kindness and forbearance, spell out the

problem—why, for instance, it is impolite for a grown man to behave at a party as if you were deaf, dumb and invisible.

3. Know your opponent. Knowing how your partner deals with or tries to counteract your anger is essential to your control of an angry situation. What happens when you warn him, tight-lipped, that if he ever again enjoins one of your friends to "give your mouth a rest for once," you will tell *his* friends that the hole in your bedroom floor is not attributable to termites, as he's implied, but is actually the result of his failed attempt to lift a barbell? Does he answer with one of the three most typical male responses to female anger, accusing you of: (a) trying to provoke a fight; (b) being a victim of your hormones; or (c) getting "hysterical over nothing"? And does that response make *you* wish you could concoct a spell that would turn him into a toad? If so, get some perspective on the situation. Understand that your partner is probably unable to deal fairly with your angry emotions and is left with the pathetic option of relating them either to your personality or your gender, rather than to his own atrocious behavior. Don't take the bait by immediately becoming the irrational harpy he has just accused you of being. Save your hysteria for situations that actually call for it, as when your partner tells you that, sorry, he cannot take you on his business trip to Maui. (In that instance, exhibiting complete and utter derangement may be your only chance.)

Next month, get wise to *his* anger.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

Bette-Jane Raphael's book, Can This Be Love, was published by Arbor House in November.