

Graham



“My wife and I divorced three years ago, and I share a house with my eldest son Peter. I’ve been really busy trying to keep up with maintenance around the house, but it’s hard when I’m working as well, and Peter’s not much help.”

As a result, the upkeep of my house has suffered and a little while ago, my daughter decided to organise a Sunday family working-bee to paint the house. She invited all the family, including Peter. My ex-wife also agreed to come and assist, with our youngest son Scott.

Peter, who has been counselled for anger problems, had been particularly difficult to live with for a while and was undergoing medical treatment for a depression-related illness. He has been a heavy marijuana smoker for about ten years.

He’s really very self-absorbed to the point where every action in his life revolves around his own desires and there is little or no consideration for others. He is also extremely sensitive. You could even describe him as paranoid.

When he is in the company of others there is always tension. It is like waiting for a “time bomb” to explode. Friends and family are walking on eggshells around him. Sadly, it means that some people don’t encourage his company.

The family all arrived at about 9am on the day of the working-bee, but Peter was not at home because he had been called out during the night to help a friend who was involved in an accident. Shortly after work commenced Peter arrived home very tired. He immediately complained about the cars in the drive blocking his access and insisted on them all being rearranged. He yelled at his sister because he believed all the activity and noise around the house would keep him awake.

Other family members offered a bed at their house where it would be quiet and he wouldn’t be disturbed. He was very angry and rude, saying that this was his house and he should be able to sleep in his own bed.

He then got into his car and did a ‘wheelie’ down the driveway and drove off. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief, but he returned about half an hour later, still agitated and unreasonable.

All morning he either stomped around the house refusing to be pleasant to anyone or he would go into his bedroom and complain loudly to himself and rant about the situation. A number of times he got into his car and drove off, but always came back a few minutes later. Occasionally he picked up some tools and did a bit of work, but he really didn’t do anything much and just ended up being a hindrance.

The atmosphere was very tense and totally unpleasant. I tried to lighten things up by getting everybody some take-away food for lunch, but Peter refused to join in.

Early in the afternoon, my daughter and her husband decided that they couldn’t take it any longer and left to go home. Scott, who has always been closest to Peter, took him outside and tried to calm him down, but this did not improve his attitude.

It was all getting too much. Scott complained to me about Peter’s behaviour, and how it had wrecked the day. I’d been trying to ignore Peter as much as possible, hoping he’d just disappear for the day.

You see I’ve had some violent clashes with Peter before. I was really close to all the kids, especially Peter, and I reckon I’m really patient up to a point. Sometimes, though, I just reach the stage where I snap, and I can’t control it anymore. I guess I haven’t been the best example over the years.

I lost it and rushed at Peter, and we started wrestling and yelling at each other. Furniture and tools were being knocked over, and everybody else was too scared to intervene. We were swearing and yelling loudly at each other. It must have been a really ugly and frightening scene.

People were screaming at us to stop, but I kept yelling back for them to keep out of it. I just wanted to knock some sense into him; it seemed the only way to solve the problem. I was so furious with him and his attitude, I couldn't stop myself. I was screaming at him about how he had disgraced the family, how hopeless he was. I couldn't believe some of the things I was saying.

Eventually, we both ran out of steam, and I started to feel exhausted and upset. I had to walk away and go to a quiet part of the house.

Of course the painting project ceased and everybody went home except Scott. My ex-wife wouldn't talk to me.

Scott then spoke to Peter at length. This time he listened closely and poured out his troubles and they had a very emotional but constructive discussion.

The talk was beneficial, however, there was still no commitment from Peter to resolve his heavy substance use. Peter insisted that cannabis does not make his mental problems worse and stated that he smokes it because "...it makes me peaceful." The upshot of the event was that Peter became more approachable and co-operative for a couple of weeks, then his behaviour relapsed and nothing really changed for a long time.

I am happy to add, though, that nearly a year after the event, Peter went to a different doctor and quit smoking cannabis. His whole demeanour changed and he is on different medication and his attitude towards others has improved immensely. It's amazing how you think nothing will ever change, and then something just clicks.

I'd never wanted to talk to anyone about my feelings about Peter. I felt I had to just deal with it all. But I realise now that I really needed to find some way of stopping myself snapping. I could have really done some damage. I've got a mate who I talk to now, he's going through his own troubles and I think we're a really good help to each other. Feels a bit strange sometimes, but you've really got to let it out in a good way.



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