



# Surprises

	<b>Sometimes they are not the person I started with</b>	<b>When I am stressed, I cannot think fast - I get frustrated</b>		
<b>I like things to be predictable - surprises throw me off</b>		<b>I love surprises! Shouldn't everyone?</b>		<b>I am often surprised at their reactions – what can I do?</b>
<b>My partner says things they regret when startled, what can help?</b>			<b>We come to a stand still, &amp; might not talk for days</b>	
	<b>My partner goes off like a rocket if I interrupt their work</b>			<b>We argue when things don't go as planned</b>

## Surprises

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You have gotten up early, quietly slipped

into your work clothes, and gotten an early-bird start on the tasks you planned last night. The air is fresh and you just feel great and a bit giddy with the joy of advancing the list and getting ready for the day. As you begin, you notice that progress is quick and so many things just seem to come together. Hours pass and it is now the usual rising time, and you are well on your way. It occurs to you that your partner will be so happy to see what you have done. Maybe you can sit and enjoy some breakfast together as you review the preparations you've already made, and see what lies ahead for the day.

So, your partner gets up and moves about and wonders where you are. "Honey! Where are you?" You appear, covered in sawdust already, and have a grin on your face. So, what's next?

**Scenario A?:** Your partner nods in appreciation and continues to wake up. Slowly they realize how much you have been at it and what a jump you have gotten on the day. They wonder if they are in trouble for sleeping in. They may scurry about and try to catch up. You need to let them know that you just had a whim to get ahead, and that you are now ready to slow down and get in tune with their pace, and even spend a little of the advance time you earned – having a nice breakfast and reviewing the plans for the day. If you give them a chance to adapt to your mismatched energy, it will go fine.

**Scenario B?:** Your partner may just ignore you. This one is hard – you may be very excited, but are getting no response. You also know your partner pretty well by now and know if they are just being their usual morning bear. They may be secretly quite worried to imagine what you have done while their eyes were closed. They may even scowl and quiz you on what you did, and if you undid their special set-ups. It is important to indulge these inquiries and at the same time not let them burst your energetic bubble.

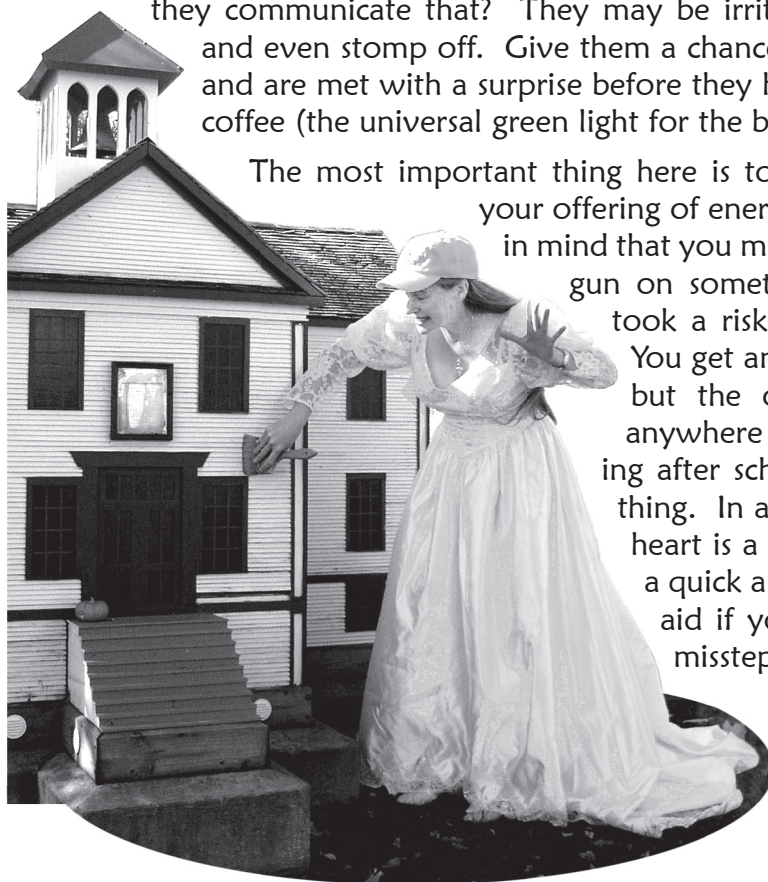
You have a little gift for the family today, and you need to keep it on a tether and not let it go if the winds blow a little bit. Let it bounce and dance in the wind, and let the sun shine again. You also really do need to let your partner have a chance to share in the dancing energy; it is an

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interplay and not just your show. Sharing the lead while pacing a dance is an intricate process. That is why it is so wonderful to watch a couple that has danced together for 30 years do the jitterbug. They have woven an intricate set of subtle signals to indicate their moves, their readiness, their pace and direction. It often brings tears to my eyes to see the love that is demonstrated in their split-second acceptance of each other's positions, pace, reach, and limits. The same thing will happen in your family, as you and your partner mature together and learn how to add zest to your pace and to weave your moves together. You will not be dancing solo, but will intertwine your emotions and visions of the moment, each one adding to the moves of the last. What moves will you continue to contribute?

**Scenario C?:** Your partner may be aghast that you did the work ahead. Yikes – they had second thoughts during the night, saw trouble with the plans made last evening, and are upset, bewildered, confused, and frustrated. How do they handle all that inside? Each person is different. How do they communicate that? They may be irritable, gasp, sputter, and even stomp off. Give them a chance. They just got up and are met with a surprise before they have even had their coffee (the universal green light for the brain).



The most important thing here is to be positive about your offering of energy, but also to keep in mind that you may have jumped the gun on something and that you took a risk, hoping for good. You get an 'A' for motivation, but the outcome might be anywhere from 'A+' to staying after school to redo something. In any case, a forgiving heart is a key ingredient, and a quick apology is great first-aid if you have innocently misstepped.

## **On the inside – dealing with an icky surprise**

Some surprises are not so much fun, like when you come upon your project again and see that half of it has caved in; or when the boards you took all day to cut to size are gone and you track them down to find them re-cut and used as scrap. Uggh. Your brain can actually shut down at this point as you feel the air pulled right out of your body. You might even be angry and want to storm around, muttering invectives about tool placement or other issues. Yes, but you only have so much steam and energy for the day and you really don't want to waste it on frustrations.

### ***When you are fed up***

If you truly can't shake it, it's a good idea here to just give yourself a venting session and get it over with. But do so privately so that you don't say things you'll later regret. You might even spew off some things about other frustrations while you are at it (we humans tend to use any open channel when we need to dump the week's worth). So, give yourself a safe outlet and then let your brain turn back on. Breathing helps.

### ***Getting your brain back on track - easy now***

By the time it gets smooth again, your whole brain may be ready with the lights on and you can re-sort your priorities for the day. But, be sure not to stick with a task that you know is a goner. If you need information from your partner, and if you can be civil, go ask. But if you can't and you spend 3 hours of a perfectly good day hunting for what you need rather than talking to them, just – don't. Give it up and do another task.

Get yourself simmered down and then bring it up during a review time. They will need to be accountable for their part, of course, but by then

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you may have remembered that your stack of specially cut wood had no signs on it that would have told your partner that it was all set and not just kindling wood.

## **Your brain – on Startle** **~ whether good or bad**

The brain is an organ of the body. We are familiar with the idea that all of the body reacts to stress, responding with changes in chemistry and function when put on alert. Our stomach may get tight when we are afraid. Our hands may go numb or shake and sweat. Our mouth can become dry. When we are very relaxed, our bowels may also be more comfortable and more willing to move the contents along. All organs have reactions to various states of energy and input. So, it's no surprise that the brain does too. So, what does that mean for you? Well, we all get accustomed to our brain being always available for full processing of information, decision making, emotional assess-

ment, and evaluation. But when the brain is strained, perhaps with a **Startle**, it will react and reroute energy, impulses, and even blood flow; and this will affect the functions we rely upon.





## **So, what specifically will happen to my brain on startle?**

The frontal lobe of the brain has many complex functions. It houses the processes of: sequential planning, problem solving, creativity, evaluation of consequences, empathy, acts as the gateway to feelings, and the sense of feeling-like-yourself, among other functions. This portion of your brain is also quite susceptible to electrical ‘brown-outs’ during stress.

Ever wonder why you didn’t think straight when someone threw you a curve ball? Did you get ‘jammed up’ in your mind and could not evaluate the situation or come up with that snappy retort? Well, it is likely that your frontal lobe went on ‘dim’ when you got startled. Understanding this can help us remove the self-doubting layer that usually sets in when this occurs.

If we understand that our lights just dimmed, we can do a few things to brighten them up, instead of wondering why we handled the last situation so poorly. If we can become aware of our dimming lights as this is happening, we may even be able to use ‘auxiliary power’ to get them back up to full beam again, perhaps before the situation slips away from our control. At the least we might be able to practice a few ‘brown-out’ drills that will get us safely to the ‘power restored’ status.

Awareness of this situation is similar to night drivers noticing their ‘headlights.’ You have experience as a driver keeping track of your own beams and noticing others’ headlights, whether they are dim or on bright, or whether they are on at all. How many of us flash our lights on & off when we come across a driver with their lights off? That is a courtesy to assist them in being safe. Well, the

same courtesy can be needed when dealing with your loved ones at home. Their lights may be dim or off, and yet they still are driving around and trying to work or interact. If you can signal them or they signal you when this happens, you have a chance to quiet down and restart your engines. Each of us has different ways to quiet and soothe ourselves. One important warning is: don't use chemicals to do it! No alcohol, drugs, or the like (unless your doctor has given other instructions), because alcohol will take you too far off the road and will do nothing to restore your frontal lobe function.

Review this chapter with your partner – and kids too. It is really good news to understand the user's manual better when the equipment (the brain) functions so erratically.

Talk with each other about your own dim events, and give signals to each other when you don't seem to be on 'high beam.' It will be important to give permission to others as you work out these signals so that they are not used to be smart-alecky or to sass back (especially if the kids use them).

It could be that the kids need to go to the other parent and ask them to tell you. That is OK too. Just find some peaceful, respectful ways to signal. Remember – signals like these are a pretty personal interruption, and should only be done with prior permission and in private, or in subtle ways that are known only to the receiver. (If you embarrass the receiver, it will only bring more stress to the brain that is already on dim.)

Work out in your mind what simple clock-stopper techniques you would want to use under different conditions to give yourself a chance to restore your lighting. If you expect to be going into a stressful situation, you may even want

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to rehearse some lines that will help you delay response and give you a chance to bring your brain back up to bright levels. Look at the Table in this chapter to see some restorers to use or to help you think of others that will work well for you.

A number of these techniques will help calm you, and some will even bring the mental machine back up again and restart the frontal lobe functions. For example, in humor, the joke might be useful internally, and even if not told, the mental exercise of thinking about how it would be received by each individual will send impulses to the empathy area of the frontal lobe. And this will in itself have a neurological impact. Each person is different and will find unique solutions to coping with stress. The important part here is to understand the variations in the brain's ability to work at full strength, and to adapt to it and lovingly help each other as a family.



## Notes from Surprises

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**Startle - how does your brain do on it?**

### Think back

Thinking back on some startling events you have experienced, think about how some of these sensations and changes may have been operating - *check any that you can notice as you look back:(Use Xs & Os like in tic-tac-toe again to indicate your own)*

<b>Physical</b>	Tingling in hands, or other numbness	<b>Temporary Signs</b>
Blowels queasy	Poor handwriting	
Breathing awkward	Tight teeth, jaw, facial muscles	
Stomach tight	Shaking - slight or more	
<b>Social/Emotional</b>	Not see others point of view	
Flood or numb to emotions	Not feel like myself - but outside myself	
<b>Intellect</b>	Not creative	
Confused	Trouble thinking ahead	
Can't solve Problems	Can't follow steps in order	

OK, you now have just identified your own shut-down list

Now, identify some personal actions you can do that usually calm you:

1	
2	
3	

Take a few minutes to think in your head about those calming actions. Next, conjure in your mind the signs you experienced.

Now, quickly - think back - of each sign / and then the calming action, back and forth over & over for a few minutes.

You can set up a personal plan to notice when your brain has startled so you can use the calming action on the spot to bring your brain back onto its alert status.

You can rehearse the paired signs and actions in your mind when you are relaxed sometimes.

**If you find this too difficult to do and you really would like to get it, consult with a counselor for some assistance; they won't bite.**

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