

Some Classic Co-op Responses

1. Avoid – delay responding or delegate to others (staff, mediators such as me, lawyers)
2. Engage with rules – try to subdue those in conflict by telling them the rules, e.g. bylaws, codes of conduct.
3. We disagree poorly – this can lead to further escalation.
4. We reply with hostility – this can take the form of “standing up for oneself” or “correcting” the other – this generally leads to further escalation

Conflict offers opportunities for:

- ❖ learning
- ❖ resolution and transforming difficult situations
- ❖ transforming relationships
- ❖ community development

HOW OUR BRAINS WORK & SELF-PROTECTION

1. A World of Unconscious Bias and Stories
 - Preconceived notions and automatic associations are examples of cognitive bias and distortion.
 - Bias relates to how we understand and sort and respond to information and experiences.
 - They are automatic and occur in everyone to some degree.

Situation/ Scenario	The Story You Tell Yourself
Someone lets you down, and it's not the first time.	They are irresponsible and unreliable.
You let someone down, and it's not the first time.	It's because I'm overworked.
Someone cuts you off while driving.	They are rude, aggressive, and inconsiderate.
You cut someone off while you are driving.	It's because I'm in a hurry, and if I don't catch these lights I'll miss my doctor's appointment

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR BRAINS



- Through evolution we have learned to protect ourselves whenever we sense a threat. Our basic impulse to protect ourselves is automatic and unconscious.
- The amygdala is a part of your brain. It can be called the brain's smoke detector. It is what tells us to come up with an emergency response, the so-called fight or flight.
- When we perceive a threat, a cascade of chemicals is released in the body. Our instinctive function takes over, our ability to think rationally is hijacked.
- We notice immediate changes: increased heart rate, sweaty palms, shallow, rapid breathing as we take in more oxygen, preparing to bolt if we have to.
- We can become disoriented or muddled in a heated conversation. Access to multiple perspectives is reduced.
- We dig in - - to protect ourselves and focus on the one perspective that makes us feel the safest: "I'm right and you're wrong," even though we ordinarily see more perspectives.

What do we do? We protect our needs by:

- Defending our behaviour, character, etc.
- Attacking: criticizing, threatening, insulting, minimizing others' concerns, gathering allies, etc.

THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

When people hear another person's position, complaints or demands, it makes them fear that their needs will not be met. People then feel they must protect their needs by:

- Defending their behaviour ("I'm not doing anything wrong.")
- Defending their character ("I'm being reasonable.")
- Getting others to take their side

- Attacking the source of the threat by threatening, insulting or humiliating ('you're incompetent'), minimizing the other's complaint ("What are you getting so upset about?") or finding other things to criticize or to complain about.

When the other hears the attacks, they respond similarly by defending themselves and attacking the other. This escalates the conflict as both people shift their attention away from the problem and focus on defending themselves and attacking the other.

RESPONDING TO HOSTILITY: PRESENCE AND ATTITUDE

1. Stay present: notice you're provoked, be curious
2. Park your own feelings and reactions
3. Let go of the story: let go of the thinking and judging mind
4. Adopt an attitude of curiosity: lean in, pay attention
5. Breathe: Focus on the body

Why is this hard?

RESPONDING TO HOSTILITY: DEEP, REFLECTIVE LISTENING

1. Set the table: Encourage
2. Reflect feelings
3. Restate, summarize, paraphrase
4. Acknowledge interests
5. Ask open-ended questions
6. Connect for total meaning

Another approach is with C.L.A.I.M: Responding to a perceived opponent or angry person

- Centre yourself
- Listen for what's important to the other person
- Acknowledge & summarize what you heard
- Invite more information
- Move to problem-solving

NOTICE you do not try to solve problems until the person feels acknowledged and has de-escalated.

The Zigzag Effect

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH A NARCISSIST

Working effectively with a narcissist can be challenging because narcissistic behaviour is often characterized by self-centeredness, a lack of empathy, and a desire for admiration.

1. Set Clear Boundaries

- **Establish Limits:** Narcissists may try to take advantage of situations or push boundaries. Calmly and assertively state when something is not acceptable (e.g., "I'm happy to help with that but I need you to let me finish speaking.").
- **Be Consistent:** Consistently reinforce your boundaries. If they are crossed, respond in a predictable and assertive manner.

2. Manage Your Expectations

- **Don't Expect Empathy:** Narcissists typically struggle with empathy, so do not expect them to fully understand or care about your feelings or needs. Keep interactions focused on facts rather than emotions.
- **Realize They May Not Change:** Understand that a narcissist may not be open to personal growth or self-awareness. It's important to adjust your expectations accordingly and focus on managing the relationship rather than trying to change the person.

3. Avoid Engaging in Power Struggles

- **Stay Calm and Non-Confrontational:** Narcissists often thrive on conflict and may provoke arguments to gain control or validation.
- **Agree to Disagree:** Sometimes, it's best to avoid trying to "win" an argument with a narcissist. If a disagreement arises, acknowledge their perspective without validating it entirely.

4. Use Flattery and Praise (Strategically)

- **Appeal to Their Ego:** Narcissists often crave admiration and validation. If appropriate and genuine, using strategic praise for their achievements or qualities can help build rapport and make them more cooperative. However, be cautious not to overdo it or flatter insincerely, as they can sense manipulation.

5. Stay Focused on Facts and Logic

- **Be Clear and Direct:** Stick to clear, factual statements. Avoid showing too much emotion or vulnerability, as narcissists may use that against you. Present your points logically, with supporting evidence, to minimize emotional manipulation.
- **Avoid Personal Attacks:** Narcissists may react defensively if they feel criticized, even if it's constructive feedback. Keep the focus on the issue, not the person, and avoid criticizing their character or abilities.

6. Keep Communication Clear and Documented

- **Document Key Interactions:** Narcissists may distort or deny past conversations, so it's wise to document important discussions and agreements in writing.
- **Follow Up in Writing:** If the narcissist tends to forget or ignore requests or agreements, follow up with clear, concise emails or messages outlining what was discussed and agreed upon.

7. Avoid Being Swayed by Gas lighting

- **Recognize Gas lighting Tactics:** Narcissists may use gas lighting, a form of manipulation where they make you question your reality or memory. If a narcissist denies things that you know are true or distorts past events, trust your instincts and avoid getting caught up in their narrative.
- **Stay Grounded in Facts:** When faced with gas lighting, calmly reaffirm your understanding of the situation based on facts, without getting emotionally defensive.

10 Protect Your Well-Being: If interacting with a narcissist becomes toxic or abusive, consider distancing yourself, or even seeking professional guidance (such as therapy or conflict mediation).

Responding to Someone in a Mental Health Crisis

- Don't assume what the problem is or that they will be violent... people with mental illness are just like everyone else
- Treat people with dignity and respect: be sensitive and thoughtful
- Do not ask someone if they have a mental illness; wait for them to tell you
- Mental illness does not discriminate
- Decrease other distractions.
- Do not ask too many personal questions.
- Describe the behaviour you are observing in neutral language
- Explain clearly
- Be an ally

DELIVERING UNWELCOME NEWS: I MESSAGING

1. Prepare your approach and how you will respond to anger or distress.
2. Choose your intervention and timing thoughtfully.
3. Find a positive opener
4. Explain the context of your message.
5. Give your message clearly or describe the difficult behaviour in neutral language, the feeling it created, and the effect on you.
6. Listen actively and acknowledge impact of your message.
7. Be collaborative in resolving concerns and issues arising and ask to discuss or negotiate a solution.

Avoid the use of “You” or describe the other’s behaviour in neutral language.

Some Examples

“I feel upset people do not let me finish what I am saying because it is hard for me to hold on to my ideas.”

“I feel upset when you begin speaking when I am speaking because it is hard for me to hold on to my ideas.”

“I find you a persuasive speaker though I feel stressed when you raise your voice because it makes it difficult to collect my thoughts.”

“I feel angry and disregarded when you do not let me know beforehand that you will be bringing up additions for the agenda on the spot.”

“I become irritated when members let their dogs poop on my lawn and do not pick it up immediately. I spend a lot of time with my children on my lawn.”

SETTING BOUNDARIES

There may be occasions when you need to set a clear boundary regarding someone’s behaviour because it is aggressive, intimidating, racist, misogynist, etc.

You need to use a directive statement and get the other’s agreement to stop behaving that way. Then you can return to listening reflectively etc.

Steps:

- Prepare yourself and avoid escalating the situation
- Acknowledge their concerns and express willingness to help
- Use Directive Statements
- Get their agreement to behave / communicate differently
- Return to dealing with their concerns

Example

“I can see you are upset about your work order and I would like to help. In order for me to continue speaking with you I need you to stop shouting / stop swearing / stop referring to my background (gender, orientation, etc.)?”

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