



2GetHelp Wellness Center

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EIGHT WAYS OF INITIALLY RESPONDING TO PEOPLE

1. **QUESTIONS:** The first way most people initially respond is with a question, and the worst kind of question is a why question. Why questions are usually accusatory and make people defensive. But if you need specific information about a specific thing, questions are appropriate. In general, questions lead people where you want them to go, but you may not find out where the person really is and what the person is feeling. Questions often put people on the defensive. If you must ask a question, try asking open-ended ones such as "Can you tell me more about what happened?"
2. **ANSWERS:** Giving answers can be a putdown. It's like telling someone, "You're too dumb to know what you should do." People usually do not want answers given them unless they specifically ask you for one. We often, however, offer our unsolicited answer in the form of a Why question. "Why don't you tell the teacher?" That's not a real question; it's your answer for their situation.
3. **JUDGMENTS:** After we have asked the questions, given the answers, we often will hand out our judgments, "That was a dumb thing to do" or "That was irresponsible." Judgments create anger. Some judgments are camouflaged as feelings. "I feel that you are..." is a judgment, not a feeling. Judgments are debatable; feelings are not.
4. **ORDERING OR DEMANDING:** After asking our questions, giving our answers and issuing our judgments, we usually order and demand. This just makes the other person feel powerless and angry and does not get us the response we wanted.
5. **SILENCE:** Silence can either be helpful or not helpful. When someone is really, really angry, probably the best response is to be silent and to listen. But silence can also communicate a message of apathy or indifference or be used as a means to punish someone.

We tend to use the above initial responses 75% to 80% of the time. If, however, we would use these only 25% of the time and the next three 75% of the time, we could be much more constructive in our communication.

The better responses are:

6. RESPONDING

TO FEELINGS:

Responding to feelings communicates that I have felt similarly. It is *not* saying "I *know* what you are feeling." This type of response is very affirming. "If someone else has felt this way, then I must not be so crazy, after all."

A. Verbal to Verbal—"If that had happened to me, I think I would feel angry, upset and embarrassed."

B. Verbal to Non-Verbal—"You seem somewhat down today."

7. USING "I AM..."

MESSAGES:

"I am..." messages are internal reports of what I am feeling. This type of response works best with people who care about my feelings. "When you say that, I feel used and unloved, like a servant." A model for the "I am..." message is:

"I feel (angry, sad, hurt, etc.)

about...

when

(picture and describe content)

because...

and what that means to me is...(state your meaning: "that you believe that women are servants for men.")

8. PARAPHRASING:

Paraphrasing is best used when the other person is very emotional or angry. When we communicate, we communicate on three levels at the same time: the Content, the Meanings and the Feelings. When we paraphrase, we need to hear the person on all three levels and reflect back what we hear in his words or pick up from his behavior.

For example:

"I hear you saying you feel (angry, sad, hurt, etc.)

about...

when...

(picture and describe content)

because...

and what that means to you is...(fill in with your guess)