

# HELPING YOUTH TO RESPOND NOT REACT

RESTORING YOUTH COALITION OF NC  
LUNCH & LEARN SERIES 2025



## AGENDA

- Definitions
- Past Experiences Predict Future Reactions
- Where Your Mind Goes
- 5 Steps to Respond
- Responding Appropriately
- Tips



# React **Vs** Respond

What Is The  
Difference?



MINDJOURNAL



## DEFINITION OF REACT

It is a quick, sometimes instant reaction that is rarely preceded by any thought process.

A reaction is typically emotional, driven by our feelings.

Sometimes it is automatic and influenced by our past experiences.

We frequently don't choose our behaviors so much as just act them out.

## DEFINITION OF RESPOND

**A carefully thought-out response is the exact opposite of an instant reaction.**

**A response is more thoughtful, deliberate and rooted in higher levels of emotional intelligence.**

**It is an analysis of the situation and then considering what we're feeling and why we're feeling it.**

**It involves considering the possible outcomes and choosing a course of action.**

# SUMMARY



## REACTING

Happens without conscious thought or consideration

Instincts and learned behaviour take over

No second thought for whether the reaction will have a negative or positive outcome

We have little control

## V. S. RESPONDING

You are aware of your reaction by stopping and observing

You can identify and become aware of unpleasant or uncomfortable emotions, and mindfully select your response

Your internal reaction is still the same, but your external response will be altered



## OUR PAST EXPERIENCES CAUSE US TO REACT

An example: A young man has difficulty receiving any type of constructive criticism. His reaction is quick, furious, and inappropriate.

He isn't connecting his step-father's communication style with him (mean, critical) with his current reactions to others.

His brain stored that painful memory in an attempt to avoid future injury. He has developed a learned behavior of an emotionally negative response directed toward any criticism.

Our brains have developed to protect us, even when we can't tell that we are in no danger. Our minds become preprogrammed rather than reflecting our values and goals in a situation.

## WHERE YOUR MIND GOES...

### Survival Mode

Fight, flight, or freeze

The way our mind and body deals with an emergency that we feel underprepared for is to throw us into a fight, flight or freeze mode.

### Neuroscience

When we react, the more primitive part of our brain, which processes emotions, takes charge quickly. This is known as the AMYGDALA.

It doesn't consider long-term effects or rational thinking.

Instead, it focuses on quick responses to threats.



## THE URGE TO REACT

The urge to react is always strong and instant.

The first step to learning to respond accurately is to control this urge.

The urge doesn't disappear easily, but you can identify it, expect it, and not react to it.



## **FIVE STEPS TO RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY RATHER THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY**

### **1. Pause and Breathe**

**Give your mind a moment to catch up before you speak or act.**

**Take a short break (internally or externally) as soon as you feel overwhelmed or emotionally charged.**

**Deep breathing helps slow the physical sensations of stress.**

## **FIVE STEPS TO RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY RATHER THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY**

### **2. Reflect Before You Speak**

**Consider: What is your Goal here? What do you want to accomplish?**

**Ask yourself: What am I feeling right now? Will an immediate reaction help or hurt this situation?**

**Shifting: What might the other person be feeling or needing? Do I understand what is going on with them?**

**Being well-informed: Is there more information I need before responding? It is ok to ask questions or take time to gather more details.**

## FIVE STEPS TO RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY RATHER THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY

### 3. Identify Your Triggers

Everyone has “things” that provoke an intense emotional reaction.

It could be words, behaviors, situations and more.

Having an awareness of these triggers can help you feel prepared to choose a more thoughtful response.

## **FIVE STEPS TO RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY RATHER THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY**

### **4. Practice Active Listening**

**Give your full attention to the speaker. This is different from hearing or even paying attention.**

**Consider their words and try not to plan what you're going to say while they're speaking.**

**Use techniques like maintaining eye contact, asking questions in a respectful way, acknowledging the truth when you hear it, giving respect (so you may receive respect).**

**We often react without understanding the other person's views or situation.**

## FIVE STEPS TO RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY RATHER THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY

### 5. Use "I" Statements

When you do respond (thoughtfully), express your thoughts using this formula:

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_ and I need \_\_\_\_\_."

Example: "I feel disrespected when you assume I did something wrong, and I need you to give me the opportunity to explain myself."

When you start a sentence with "You" it sounds like a challenge or an accusation. When you shift to "I" you can focus on your personal experience rather than blaming or challenging the other person.

Before speaking, ask yourself: "What can I say to calm things down?"

**“BETWEEN STIMULUS AND  
RESPONSE THERE IS A SPACE.  
IN THAT SPACE IS OUR POWER  
TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE.  
IN OUR RESPONSE LIES OUR  
GROWTH AND OUR FREEDOM.”  
--- VICTOR FRANKL**



## **REACTING WITHOUT THINKING CAN BRING YOU TROUBLE**

- 1. Even if you are right, the other person may not be totally wrong. Being aggressive limits your options.**
- 2. Anger is an extremely powerful emotion. You should avoid reacting if you are angry as it usually clouds your ability to make responsible decisions.**
- 3. Sometimes choosing not to react is a reaction in itself. Some things can be ignored or handled at another time.**

## BENEFITS TO RESPONDING

Reaction is emotion-driven - Response is well-thought out

Reaction is aggressive - Response is calm

Reaction fuels disagreement - Response helps resolve it

Reaction weakens you - but Response empowers you



## WAYS TO RESPOND TO OFFENSIVE COMMENTS

1. Don't deny or defend the accusations against you. (this gives the power back to them)
2. Shift the focus back to the issues.
3. Ask "What do you mean?" – gives you time to think
4. Repeat it back in a calm tone and ask, "Is this what you really meant?" (bounce the ball back to them)
5. Attack the problem, not the person.

## WAYS TO RESPOND TO OFFENSIVE COMMENTS

1. Don't try to shout over them. (makes things worse)
2. Make the "time-out" sign with your hands.
3. Suggest that everyone take a step back.
4. Suggest this be continued at another time.
5. Seek outside help from a person with authority.
6. End with a downward inflection in your voice – be calm.



# THANK YOU

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