

Understanding and Working with Our Defensive Responses

Our defensive responses are a way to protect ourselves from ourselves

All people need to feel¹:

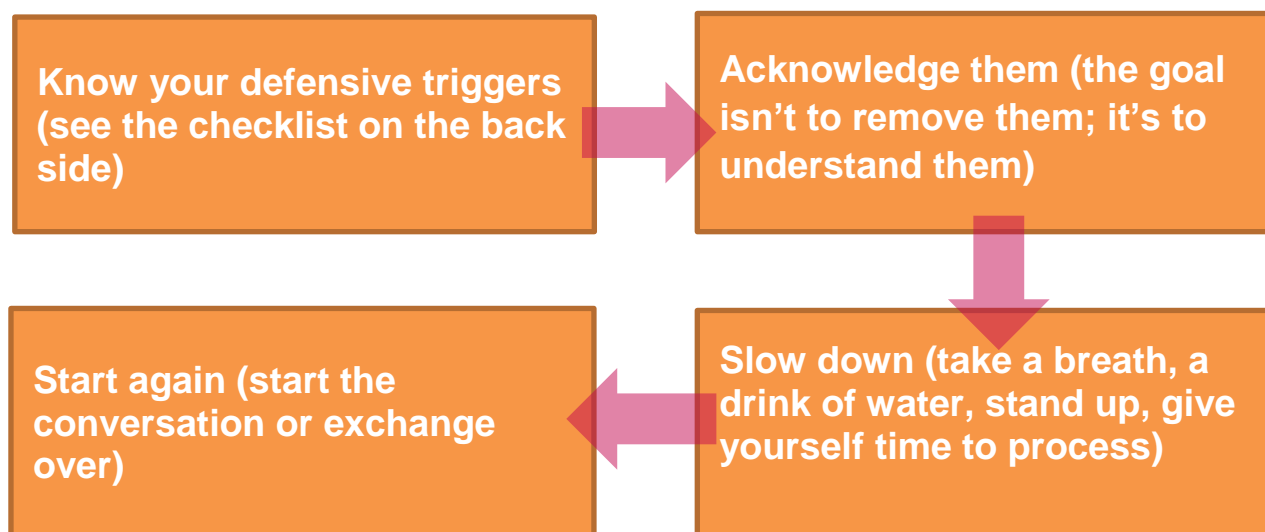
- ❖ **Significant**
- ❖ **Competent**
- ❖ **Likeable**

We need to feel these things both from people we know well and people we don't. We need to feel these things at work, at home, and in relationships.

- ❖ If our **significance** is challenged, we will feel **ignored**. When we feel ignored, we tend to react in ways that either force others to notice or include us, or we will remove ourselves from the situation—either physically or otherwise.
- ❖ If our competence is challenged, we will experience humiliation. When we feel humiliated, we tend to react in ways that either force our ability to control a situation or we will refuse to take any responsibility for the current situation or what happens next.
- ❖ If our **likeability** is challenged, we experience **rejection**. When we feel rejected, we tend to either force people to understand us more by telling them or giving them reasons to like us, or we reject them equally.

These are defensive responses.

How can we keep our defensive responses from getting in the way or resolving issues?



¹ Adapted from *Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships*, Tamm & Luyet, (2004), Collins.

What are your responses when your significance, competency or likeability are challenged? Check all that apply.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Physical responses | <input type="checkbox"/> tight stomach <input type="checkbox"/> fast breathing/heartbeat <input type="checkbox"/> suddenly tired or sleepy <input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate laughter or giggling <input type="checkbox"/> addictive behaviour (alcohol, drugs, shopping, gambling, food, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> skin temperature change (cold/clammy; hot/sweaty) <input type="checkbox"/> becoming physically immobile or shaking |
| Communication responses | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking offence/denial/attacking <input type="checkbox"/> Wanting to be right ("No question about it") <input type="checkbox"/> Wanting the last word/flooding with information to prove point <input type="checkbox"/> Endless explaining/rationalising <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawal into silence <input type="checkbox"/> use of sarcasm <input type="checkbox"/> Being highly critical (making fun of others, belittling ideas) <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming and/or cynicism <input type="checkbox"/> Selective deafness <input type="checkbox"/> "I'm aware of that, leave me alone!" (defence of awareness) <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too fast or too loudly <input type="checkbox"/> dominating the conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching or preaching |
| Emotional responses | <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessive thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional rigidity (If I feel it, it must be true) <input type="checkbox"/> Jumping to conclusions <input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading <input type="checkbox"/> Magnifying or minimising everything <input type="checkbox"/> All or nothing thinking (inability to compromise) <input type="checkbox"/> Personalising everything <input type="checkbox"/> Being too nice <input type="checkbox"/> Playing "Poor me." |