Six Defensive Reactions
That Prevent Powerful, Non-Defensive Communication

When someone says or does something to make us feel put down, hurt, frustrated, or angry, we may feel attacked and try to protect ourselves by using one or more of these six defensive reactions. When we get defensive, we get into power struggles, which causes many unnecessary, destructive conflicts.

1. Surrender-Betray: We become a traitor to ourselves when we allow someone to mistreat us and then defend the person's behavior, taking the blame ourselves.

Example: We might say, "He just treated me rudely because he was in a bad mood. I should have known better than to ask a question just then."

2. Surrender-Sabotage: We outwardly give in or cooperate with someone and then undermine the person in some way.

Example: We might talk about the person behind her back, or procrastinate about doing something we told the person we'd do.

3. Withdraw-Escape: We avoid talking to someone about something we don't want to discuss.

Example: We might simply not answer, leave the room, or change the subject.

4. Withdraw-Entrap: We intentionally withhold information from someone as a way to trap her/him into making a mistake or doing something inappropriate.

Example: We might stare at someone and not answer a question he asks until he drops it or gets angry and says something that that makes him look bad.

5. Counterattack-Justify: We explain our own behavior or make excuses if someone questions or criticizes us to let him know he is wrong to be upset with us.

Example: We might say "I would have gotten that done sooner, but I've been really busy," or "I'm doing my best," or "I can't work any faster."

6. Counterattack-Blame: We attack or judge the other person to defend ourselves.

Example: We might blame the other person instead of looking at our own part in the problem, saying, "You are always so critical," or "You never listen to me."

Powerful Non-Defensive Communication

We are using non-defensive communication when we ask questions, make statements and predict consequences in an open, sincere way without trying to control how other people respond. We can gather accurate information, speak with clarity, protect ourselves, and hold others more accountable. People are more likely to respect us and we can strengthen personal and professional relationships.

1. Ask Questions: **Nature:** curious, open, innocent, neutral, inviting

<u>Purpose:</u> To gather information to clearly understand what the person means

<u>Example:</u> If someone acts upset, the first step is to simply ask the person directly about your own assumption so he can confirm, deny, or qualify, for example, "Are you irritated (frustrated, angry, upset) about something?"

<u>Avoid:</u> Using a question to *express your own opinion* or to entrap others

2. Make Statements: **Nature:** open, direct, vulnerable, subjective, descriptive

<u>Purpose:</u> The first three steps are to state neutrally our subjective interpretation of 1) what we hear the other person saying, 2) any contradictions we see (perceive) in the person's tone, body language, and words, and 3) our conclusions regarding the person's overt and covert messages. The fourth step is not neutral and is to 4) fully express our own reactions, our feelings, beliefs, and reasoning.

<u>Example:</u> If the person continues to act irritable and yet denies it when asked, saying harshly, "I'm *fine*!" — we might respond with this four part statement:

- **Hear:** *"When* I hear you saying that you are in a good mood
- **See:** *and* (at the same time) I see that you are rolling your eyes and shrugging,
- **Conclude:** *then* I believe that something is wrong and you don't want to tell me
- **Reaction:** *and* so I feel frustrated but don't want to try to make you talk."

<u>Avoid:</u> Stating *opinion* as fact or trying to convince others to agree

3. Predict Consequences: **Nature:** protective, foretelling, neutral, definitive, firm

<u>Purpose:</u> To create boundaries and security by telling another person ahead of time how we will react if he/she does make a certain choice, and how we will react if he/she does not make that choice.

<u>Example:</u> If the person still acts upset and continues to deny it, saying "I said I'm *fine*, there's no *problem!*" — we can set a limit using an "If . . . then" sentence:

- "If you would like to tell me what's going on, then I'd like to hear it."
- "If you don't want to tell me, then I don't want to try to make you."

<u>Avoid:</u> Using a consequence prediction to coax, *punish,* or *falsely* threaten others.