

# Grounded Responses for Challenging Comments

With LaShelle Lowe-Charde

Attempting to connect with someone by expressing clear feelings, needs, and requests sometimes evokes more vulnerability in the other person than they want to experience. From their own discomfort with vulnerability, they may respond with sarcasm, criticism, or an attempt to dismiss your feelings and needs. In these situations you might hear responses like these:

"You make such a big deal of everything. I was just joking."

"You're being oversensitive."

"I was just saying that. I didn't mean anything by it."

"You try to make everything deep."

"Lighten up, it's not a big deal."

"No, I don't have any feelings about it."

"You're just trying to manipulate me."

With sarcasm, "Okay, let's calm down."

Responses like these can trigger hurt and disappointment and don't meet needs for kindness and collaboration. You may need to pause and anchor or simply walk away and come back later. If you have the resources to practice with these responses, you can respond with clarity about your intention, your own need and request or with empathy.

On the one hand, this may be an advanced practice. On the other hand, if this is someone close to you, a particular challenging response may be repetitive and you can prepare ahead of time. Taking time on your own for reflection and curiosity when it's not happening, helps you to stay grounded when it happens again.

When you are able to take time for reflection, write down what they said. Identify the feelings and needs that came up for you in that moment and make two or three guesses about theirs. Then write down some possible responses for next time. Regardless of how you respond next time, this practice will help you get grounded. It will help you remember that you can stay with your intention and what's true for you without getting caught in defensiveness or other types of reactivity. Here are some examples of possible grounded responses:

"You make such a big deal of everything. I was just joking."

- "Yeah, I can see how it seems to you that I am making a big deal when I say that. What I really want is just to understand you better."

"You're being oversensitive."

- "Yes, it's true I am sensitive. I want to be sensitive so we can understand each other and get along better."

"You're just trying to manipulate me."

- "Yeah, the way I am talking is a little unusual, so I can see how you might have thought that. I am really just trying to communicate clearly."

With sarcasm, "Okay, let's calm down."

- "I am wanting kindness and respect. If you are not wanting to talk, please just say, 'I don't want to talk.'"

"You try to make everything deep."

- "Sounds like you just want ease and to talk about something else, is that right?"

Notice that in these possible responses, you are not agreeing or arguing with the speaker's comments. You clarify or acknowledge briefly and then stay with your intention. As you practice staying grounded with challenging comments, of course you hope that your response will shift how the interaction goes. And, in many cases, it will. At the same time, one of the most important aspects of staying grounded in yourself is staying clear that there is not some perfect way you can behave that would have them respond in the way you want. This kind of thinking; "If only I do it right, then they will love me (be nice to me, want to connect, etc.)," leads to enmeshed and sometimes abusive interactions.

As you transform and cultivate skills, you will be of benefit to yourself and others. Those that cannot yet respond to you with respect and kindness, are walking their own path and you cannot control their process. You can only care for yourself and do your best to stay grounded and clear in your own communication.

## Practice

Take a moment now to reflect on a comment you heard recently that you didn't enjoy. What feelings and needs came up for you? What feelings and needs do you guess were up for the other person? What grounded response might you have offered?