

React Vs. Respond

Overview: This lesson deals with a common issue of parents caught up in the emotion of the moment and “reacting,” to their loved one rather than having a measured, “response.” Reactions tend to be emotional and quick and many times leave parents feeling regret over their inability to take the time to make a better, healthier response to their addicted loved one. Addiction causes our loved ones to constantly be pulling us into their drama and trauma and making everything seem like it is an emergency. The theory here is to **take a step back** when we hear from our addicted loved one and **take the time** to have a reasonable response to whatever the request or situation may be. The hope is that as I change to healthier responses toward my loved one...I am changing our relationship.

Notes:

- Blanks: a = adult, sup = support, r _____ d = respond, r = relationship, ti = time, th = thought
- Notice this is an A,B,C,D lesson, so you can use that to help remember the key points, A = Acknowledge the condition, B = Be the adult, C = Choose to support rather than attack and D = Differentiate between the behavior and the person.
- According to dictionary.com:

React = verb (used without object)

- to act in a reverse direction or manner, especially so as to return to a prior condition.
- to act in opposition, as against some force.
- to respond to a stimulus in a particular manner: reacting to a shock by jumping; to react to the word “coward” with anger.

Respond = verb (used without object)

- to reply or answer in words: to respond briefly to a question.
- to make a return by some action as if in answer: to respond generously to a charity drive.
- to react favorably

Notice how respond uses the word react in the definition but adds “favorably,” Our goal is **not to react** as noted above “to act in opposition, as against some force.” But rather to respond – to react favorably which **takes more thought and time**.

- “Acknowledge the condition” is the opposite of denial. It can also be explained as “acceptance” ...accepting our loved ones’ choices. This does not mean condone, just accept. Similar to the loss of a loved one--at some point hopefully most people get to the final stage of grief which is acceptance. It’s not that you are happy that you lost someone, or that you wanted to lose them...but you get to the point of acceptance. In other words, I can’t control or change the situation.
- Notice under “Be The Adult” that we will stop manipulating and controlling, and rather, **respond** after thinking and praying etc. This is a good reminder about why our loved ones manipulate us (to get their way--in other words keep them in their addiction), in the same way we manipulate them because of our codependence and not wanting to give up control of the situation. Hence, be the adult, step out ~~and above~~ of the ~~scene~~ cycle so you can have better judgment.

- There are two acronyms under C section. Choose to support rather than attack. We probably don't see that what we are doing is attacking. We probably think we are being reasonable and trying to help, but when we criticize and make accusations, such as "Of course you can't keep your job. You are on drugs...don't you realize that will get you nowhere?" This is not treating them like an adult but rather as a child. We want to turn the focus onto CARE – and think in terms of compassion, acceptance, respect and encouragement.
- Under section D, if we are dealing with someone active in their addiction, or new in recovery, we realize that we are dealing with "addict son or daughter" so it's "addict Mark," not just "Mark." Addict Mark makes decisions that are unhealthy and based on past behavior and manipulation, so I need to not jump to judgment, but rather accept that I am not dealing with "Mark," therefore, it is better to look for positive things to acknowledgment them for and to encourage them and tell them you believe in them.
- Possible questions for the group:
 - What is the difference between a reaction and a response?
 - Why is a response better/healthier for us and our loved one?
 - What things can I do to do a better job in responding rather than reacting? (Suggestions: always say "I will get back to you, or " I need to discuss that with your father, or _____" or write down what you will say on a 3X5 card so that you won't get caught up in the emotions of the call.
 - Why do we have such a hard time treating our addicted loved one as an adult?

Driving points home:

- Explain to everyone that we do have the ability to cause some changes in our loved one. The simple way to do this is think about a mathematical equation where you are one side of the equal sign and your loved one is on the other side...the equal sign stands for your relationship. So in math terms, you can then ask everyone, "What happens in an equation if I change something on one side of the equal sign?" "What will happen to the other side? Can it stay the same or is it required to change?" (It must change. So the reality is if you change the relationship by making changes in your ways of "responding;" to your loved one you are forcing a change on their side of the equation. So for example, you decide when they call in a panic saying their phone will be shut of immediately if you don't help pay the bill and "how will I get a job if I don't have a phone?"...you tell them you will get back to them. Remember no instant answers. **Then** you ask your spouse or a PAL friend or a counselor what they think you should do. You decide to tell them you are not going to pay for the phone but you are sure they will figure it out. By doing this you are forcing a change on their side of the relationship equation. They must do something different if they want a phone.
- Review Cardinal Rule #1 and #2 in Mike Speakman's book, *The Four Season of Recovery*, pages 50-58. Consider reading excerpts from this. Cardinal Rule #1 = Give no un-asked for help and #2 = No instant answers. Ask the following question: "Why do I not want to give an instant answer?" (Responses should be: It will be emotional, it might be unhealthy or not the best answer. Then ask, "What is likely to happen if I give no instant answer and I take the time to respond rather than react?" (Responses should be: It is healthier; they may figure it out on their own...or even forget that they asked me! etc.)

- Make up 3x5 cards with CRAM on one side and CARE on the other- with room for them to take notes and take the cards home with them. Also a card with Mike's cardinal rules listed on them can also be a good take-away for the meeting.
- Turn the lesson around – and ask everyone how it would look if you the facilitator treated them like we treat our addicted sons and daughters when we do not treat them like an adult. **If** you know someone well in the group, do this as an example: State to the person, “So you came to the meeting tonight and I can see you need some help, so here’s what you need to do: First, stop coming here and telling us all your problems. What good does that do, just start doing what I’m telling you and everything will be fine. So start with not letting your son live with you, cut off all the money you’re giving him and stop enabling immediately, and in the meantime, why don’t you get yourself into a good counselor, as clearly you need it! (Of course this is all sarcastic)—~~but~~ Then ask the group, “What would happen if I treated every new person that way on their first meeting?” (Expect responses such as: They wouldn’t come back, that’s mean, that’s not treating them like an adult, etc.) then follow up with “So why do we talk to our sons and daughters this way?”

Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery*

- Page 50-58 Cardinal Rules #1 and #2
- Page 123-124, Parents new roles – treat them like an adult
- Page 42 When Helping isn’t Helping
- Page 66 (Addiction and Delayed Emotional Growth and Resistance to Change)
- Page 67-68 (Adult Coping Skills – What is known and not known)