



REACTING VS RESPONDING

In our daily interactions, how we choose to engage with others can significantly impact our relationships, either at home, school, work, clubs, etc. Often, we may find ourselves caught in the cycle of instinctive reactions rather than thoughtful responses.

However, recognizing and understanding the difference between reacting and responding is essential to fostering healthier connections with others and promoting personal growth.

REACTING VS. RESPONDING:

Reacting and responding are two distinct ways of approaching situations, and understanding the difference between them can alter the outcome significantly. Reacting typically involves a knee-jerk response, driven by unconscious impulses or emotions. In contrast, responding entails a thoughtful and intentional action, influenced by empathy, deep understanding, and considerate decision-making.

REACTING

1. Quick and impulsive actions or statements: Reacting often involves immediate, instinctive responses without much thought or consideration.
2. Heightened emotions: Reacting tends to be associated with intense emotional reactions, such as anger, frustration, defensiveness, or hurt.
3. Lack of self-control: When reacting, individuals may struggle to regulate their emotions, leading to outbursts, aggressive behavior, or becoming overwhelmed.
4. Blame and deflection: Reactive individuals may focus on blaming others or external circumstances, avoiding taking responsibility for their own actions or emotions.
5. Escalation of conflict: Reacting can amplify conflicts and disagreements, making it difficult to find common ground or work towards resolution.

RESPONDING

1. Thoughtful and measured actions or statements: Responding involves a more deliberate approach, taking the time to consider options and consequences before responding.
2. Calmness and composure: Individuals who respond instead of react tend to remain composed, even in challenging or emotional situations.
3. Empathy and understanding: Responding often involves demonstrating empathy, striving to understand others' perspectives, and showing respect for differing opinions.
4. Accountability and self-reflection: Those who respond take responsibility for their actions, seeking to improve and learn from their experiences.
5. Conflict resolution and cooperation: Responding helps foster better communication, find common ground, and work collaboratively to resolve conflicts.



REACTING VS RESPONDING

Reflect on the examples below and try writing out your own scenarios from your past experiences.



1. Reacting: Someone accidentally spills coffee on you, causing you to snap angrily and berate them for their carelessness.

Responding: Taking a deep breath, you recognize that it was merely an accident and respond gracefully, offering help or reassurance.



2. Reacting: During a heated discussion with a partner, you become defensive, lashing out with hurtful comments, escalating the argument.

Responding: You practice active listening, empathizing with your partner's perspective, and responding calmly and assertively to express your viewpoint.



3. Reacting: A colleague criticizes your work openly during a team meeting, prompting an immediate defensive reaction attacking their abilities.

Responding: You take a moment to reflect on their critique, acknowledge their perspective, and respond constructively by offering suggestions for improvement.





REACTING VS RESPONDING

THE NEGATIVE CYCLE

When a person consistently reacts instead of responding, it can create a negative cycle that can impact their well-being and relationships. Here's an explanation of this cycle:

1

TRIGGER

Something triggers a situation or event that may challenge or provoke the person emotionally.

2

Immediate reaction

Instead of taking a moment to reflect or consider their response, the person quickly reacts with impulsive and instinctive behavior or statements. This reaction is often fueled by heightened emotions such as anger, frustration, or defensiveness.

3

Negative consequences

Reacting without thoughtful consideration can lead to negative consequences. These can include escalating conflicts, damaging relationships, or harming one's own well-being. The impulsiveness can prevent effective problem-solving and communication.

4

Feedback loop

The negative consequences of reacting can further exacerbate the triggering emotions and reinforce the reactive behavior. This creates a harmful feedback loop where the person becomes trapped in a cycle of reacting without taking the time to respond thoughtfully.

5

Impact on relationships

Reacting often strains relationships as it can lead to misunderstandings, defensiveness, or heated arguments. Others might perceive the reactive person as hot-headed, insensitive, or unwilling to listen, which damages trust and connection.

6

Internal stress and negativity

The cycle of reacting can create internal stress and negative emotions for the person themselves. They may experience guilt, regret, or shame for their impulsive reactions, which can contribute to a negative self-image and decreased self-esteem.



REACTING VS RESPONDING

BREAKING THE NEGATIVE CYCLE

Breaking the cycle requires conscious effort and developing the ability to respond effectively. It involves recognizing triggers, managing emotions, actively listening to others, practicing empathy, and implementing healthy communication and problem-solving techniques. Over time, these efforts can help shift from reactive patterns to responsive behavior, resulting in healthier interactions, improved relationships, and greater emotional well-being.

1

TRIGGER

2

Immediate reaction

3

Negative consequences

4

Feedback loop

5

Impact on relationships



REACTING VS RESPONDING

TIPS TO BREAK THE CYCLE

1

Pause and Reflect

Take a moment before responding, enabling rational thought and preventing knee-jerk reactions.

Practice Empathy

Seek to understand the other person's perspective, validating their emotions and fostering open and respectful communication.

2

3

Active Listening

Listen attentively, showing genuine interest, and acknowledging the other person's concerns or viewpoints before responding.

Seek Feedback

Regularly solicit feedback from others to gain insights into your reactions and explore opportunities for personal growth.

4

5

Cultivate Emotional Intelligence

: Develop self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy, allowing you to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.



REACTING VS RESPONDING

1. How often do you find yourself reacting impulsively instead of responding thoughtfully?

2. In what situations have your reactions led to negative outcomes or strained relationships?

3. How can you cultivate a habit of responding rather than reacting? What steps can you take to improve your responses in different situations?

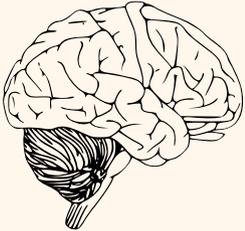
4. What emotions or triggers most frequently contribute to reactive behavior? How can you manage these emotions more effectively?



THE UPSTAIRS AND DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

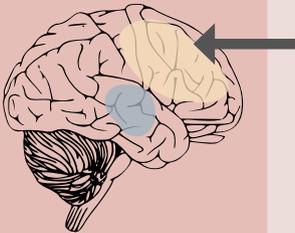
FLIPPING YOUR LID - A LOOK INSID YOUR BRAIN

INSIDE THE BRAIN



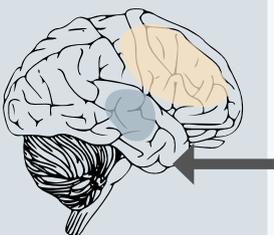
When someone gets angry and reacts instead of responding, it can impact both their "upstairs brain" and "downstairs brain." The upstairs brain refers to the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions like self-control, decision-making, and reasoning. The downstairs brain refers to the more primitive regions, such as the amygdala, responsible for processing emotions and initiating the fight-or-flight response. Here's how these parts of the brain are affected

THE UPSTAIRS BRAIN



Upstairs brain (prefrontal cortex): When someone reacts in anger, the prefrontal cortex's functioning can be compromised. The person may struggle to think clearly, reason, or exercise self-control. Their ability to consider the consequences of their actions or respond in a thoughtful manner may be hindered or overridden by the intensity of their emotions.

THE DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

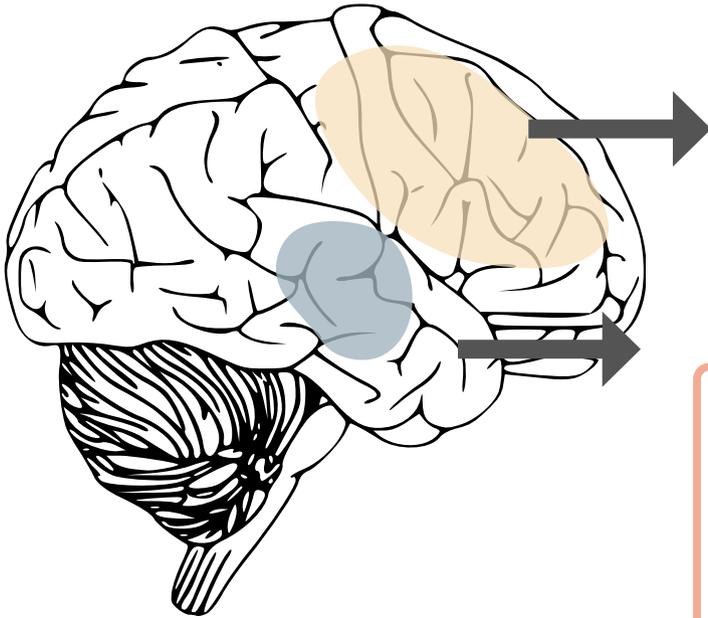


Downstairs brain (amygdala and other limbic system structures): Anger triggers an activation of the amygdala within the limbic system, which is involved in emotional processing. This activation boosts the production of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, preparing the body for a fight-or-flight response. When someone reacts impulsively in anger, they are mainly operating from the downstairs brain, which is responsible for instinctive and impulsive responses to threats.

The combination of a compromised upstairs brain and an overactive downstairs brain can lead to impulsive, irrational, or even aggressive behavior. The person may act without considering the potential consequences or solutions to the situation at hand. This can heighten the intensity of the anger and escalate conflicts or negative outcomes.



THE UPSTAIRS AND DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN



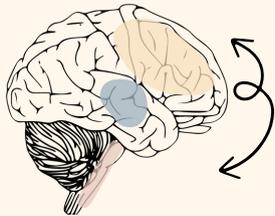
THE 'UPSTAIRS BRAIN' - ALSO KNOWN AS THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Regulates our thoughts, actions, emotions, planning, organization, and thinking.

THE 'DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN' - ALSO KNOWN AS THE AMYGDALA

Processes fearful and threatening stimuli and drives the “fight or flight” response. The main function of the amygdala is in emotional response.

CALM MIND

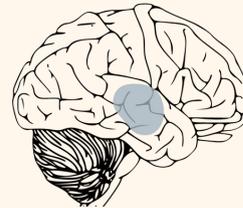


Every part of the brain is connected, you are balanced, and you can face your fears and emotions rationally.

Things that help keep your mind calm include,

- Mindfulness
- Reading
- Coloring in
- Exercise
- Playing with toys
- Breathing exercises

WHEN THE DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN IS IN CHARGE



When you flip your lid, you lose access to your thinking brain, and your downstairs brain takes over. Your downstairs brain, the amygdala, activates your fight, flight or freeze response. As a result, your emotions are heightened, and making sense of things is hard for you.