

Strategies for Responding to Hostile Language

Before you know it, hostile language can hook you and draw you into an escalating argument (how did we get here?) where you are fighting fire with fire. More effective (though not always as emotionally satisfying) is to fight fire with water.

Take a breath, and instead:

- (1) Listen to what is true for this person at this moment
- (2) Acknowledge their reality (this does not mean agreeing with it): *"It must not be easy to..."*
- (3) Keep your voice and body relaxed, open, quiet, friendly
- (4) Don't argue with them. The less reactive you are, the easier it will be to handle the situation. Remember, keep your cool! Buy some time by taking a breath and counting to ten. By maintaining your self-control, you hold the power to deal with the situation.
- (5) Use personal language if you want to make a strong connection:
"Deborah, you've been working hard to figure all this out, and I understand you are frustrated."
- (6) Use general / impersonal statements to lower the tension level: *"It can be hard to have this kind of discussion when everyone cares so much."*
- (7) When labels and accusations are flying, ask them to describe the offending person's behavior.
- (8) Don't take the hostility as a personal attack, it is not about you.

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