

Defensive and non-productive responses to criticism:

1. **Withdraw:** We ignore what was said to us; we remove ourselves from the situation or avoid the individual. If you are criticized by being late you realize you left late but don't want to admit it.
2. **Rationalize:** We often make excuses for our actions when we are criticized. "I did my best to get here on time but there was more traffic than usual."
3. **Blame:** "But it wasn't my fault" is a common response. "The traffic was terrible and there was a car in front of me going 30 miles an hour. Sigh, huff!"
4. **Counterattack:** "if you gave better directions I would have gotten here on time."

Tools for handling to build better communication and relationships:

1. **Express immediate impact:** If the criticism hits like a hard blow, reflect how it feels and pause before responding such as, "Wow, I didn't see that coming. I need to sit down and collect my thoughts." You may want to acknowledge the statement and set a future date to talk about it, "Boy, it sounds like you are really angry about the way I treated you last night. I appreciate your sharing your feelings but I am going to have to think about what you said and respond when I can give you my full attention. Can we talk this evening around 8?"
2. **Listen with your whole body.** In other words, make eye contact; reduce outside interferences such as noise, paying attention to the feelings as well as the words that are expressed. When a person feels listened to they are more likely to become less emotional and more rational, even congenial. Sometimes we have to listen for quite a while.
3. **Acknowledge you have sincerely heard the other person and appreciate their speaking with you.** That doesn't mean you accept the criticism but rather, 'It sounds like I hurt your feelings when I said that.'
4. **Ask questions to clarify the point the person is trying to make or explore more deeply how the person feels.** For instance you can ask the questions, 'how does my action or inaction impact you?' or 'How did that feel?' or 'It sounds like I really hurt your feelings, is that right?'
5. **Paraphrase:** It is helpful to reframe what the speaker has said. 'If I understand correctly you are upset because I said you looked like a "gansta" is those baggy pants.'
6. **Acknowledge your failures:** Own what is yours by acknowledging your failures and shortcomings and consider ways to avoid the same pitfall in the future. For instance, "I am sorry I was sarcastic about your clothes. That wasn't kind and I am sorry I hurt your feelings. What would you like me to say or do when I think you are dressing inappropriately?'
7. **Take steps to resolve issue:** You might ask, 'What would you like me to do or say when I think you are dressed inappropriately for an occasion?'

Bibliography

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Stone, D., and B. Patton, and S. Heen. (1999). *Difficult Conversations*. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc. (If you just read one book, this is the one to choose!)