

Responding Without Escalating

Choosing low-drama responses to difficult people

When dealing with difficult people, the goal does not have to be saying the perfect thing or changing the other person. Often, the most helpful skill is choosing a response that keeps the situation from escalating and protects your energy.

This worksheet focuses on identifying low-drama responses that reduce stress during the interaction and limit rumination afterward.

Common Triggering Behaviors

Check any behaviors that tend to raise your stress or frustration.

- Criticism or nit-picking
- Dismissive or minimizing comments
- Controlling or demanding behavior
- Passive-aggressive remarks
- Interrupting or talking over me
- Guilt-based pressure

How my body reacts in these moments:

The Response Ladder (Lowest Drama → Highest Drama)

Not every situation requires a strong response. Lower-drama responses often reduce long-term stress.

| Response Option | Examples |
|------------------------|--|
| Pause or say nothing | Take a breath, delay responding, allow silence |
| Neutral acknowledgment | "I hear you." / "Okay." |
| Brief redirection | "Let's focus on the task." |
| Set a short boundary | "I'm not discussing this right now." |

My Low-Drama Response Plan

The behavior that triggers me most:

The response that escalates things for me:

The lowest-drama response I can try instead:

What helps me remember to pause:

After the Interaction

How you respond to yourself afterward matters just as much as what happened.

One thing I handled reasonably well:

What was outside my control:

A closing statement I can tell myself:
