

Reacting versus responding

You may have done things in the moment that you later regret. Maybe you went along with something that felt uncomfortable. Maybe you said something online that you would never say to someone's face, or maybe you froze up when you wanted to speak out.

That does not mean you are a bad person. It just means that your emotions took over before your thinking caught up. But you can change what happens next time.

This resource will help you understand how you can navigate different situations or experiences. For further support, see the organisations listed at the end of this resource.

React or respond?

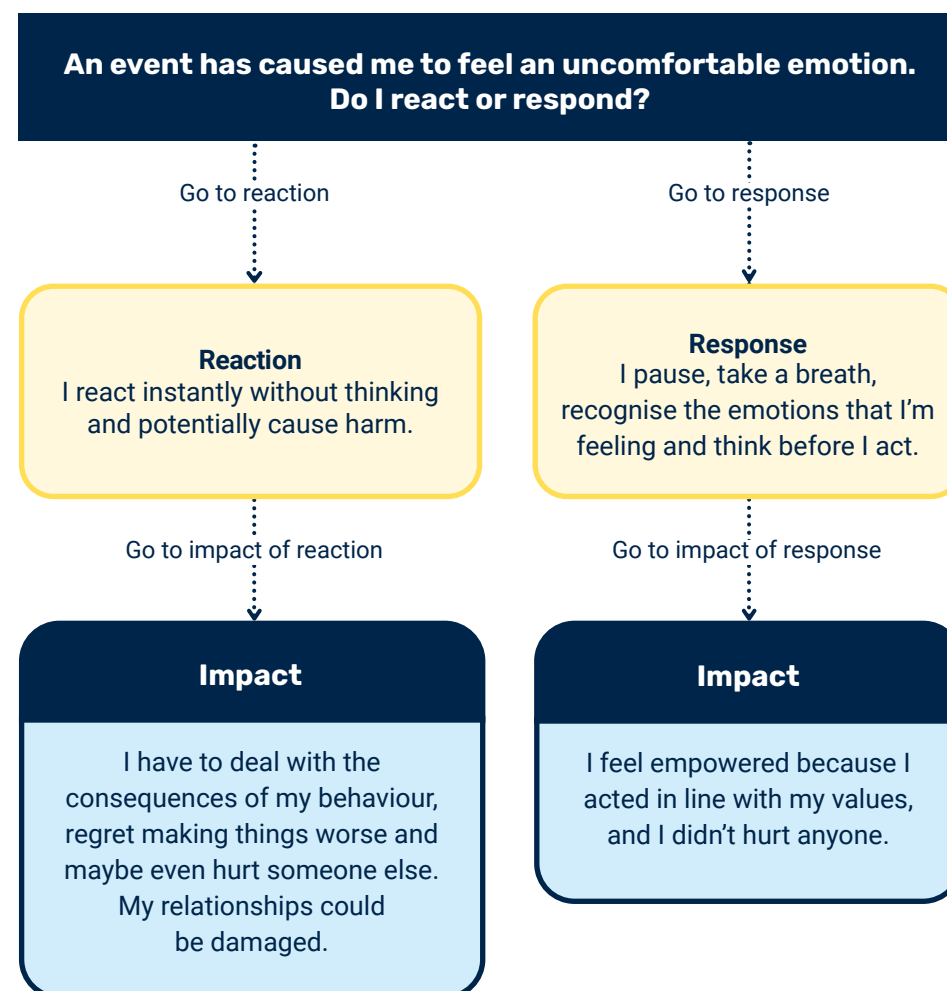
It is important to understand the difference between reacting and responding.

Reacting is an immediate, automatic response that is driven by your emotions. It can happen before you have had a chance to think about things clearly. This is why it can lead to saying or doing things that you later regret or that make you feel like this isn't who you want to be.

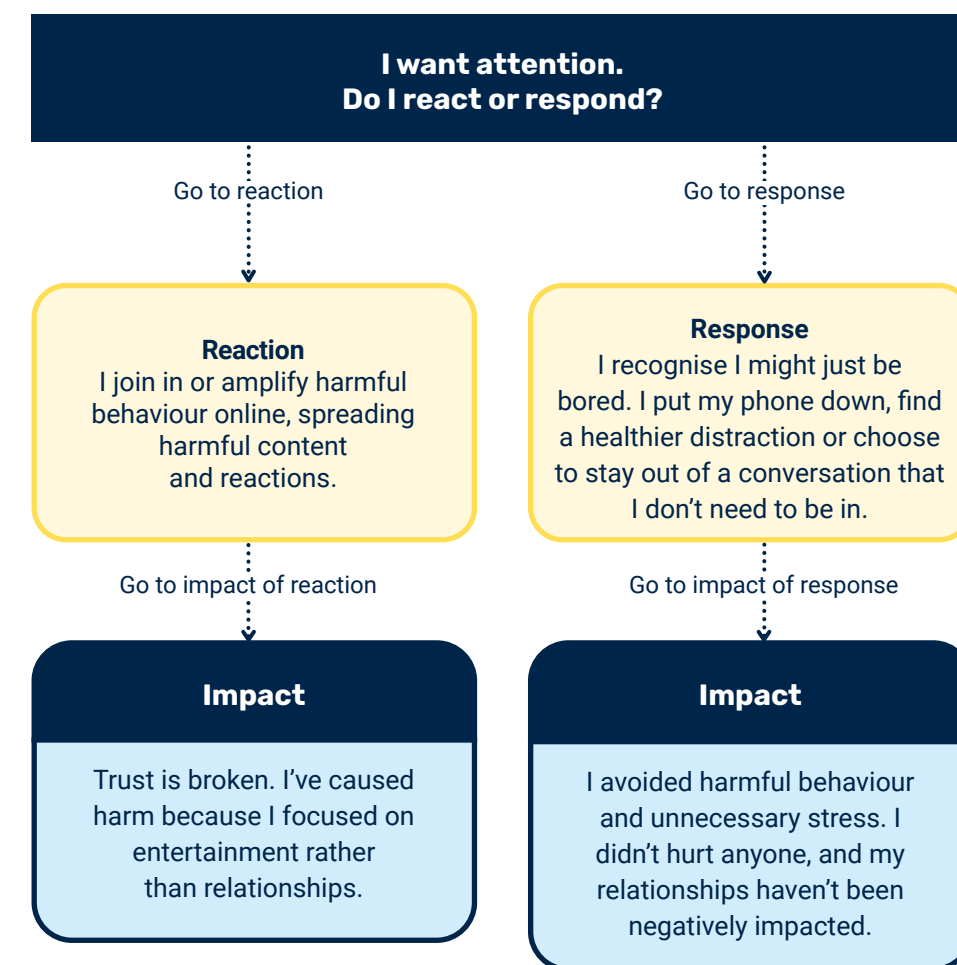
Responding is a more considered way of acting, where you pause between feeling something and doing something. This gives you a chance to think clearly before you act. A clear, intentional response usually leads to better outcomes for everyone involved.

There are many situations where your emotions can take over and lead you to react without thinking. These flowcharts give some examples of common situations to help you navigate them with confidence.

Look at the flowchart to see the difference between reacting and responding:



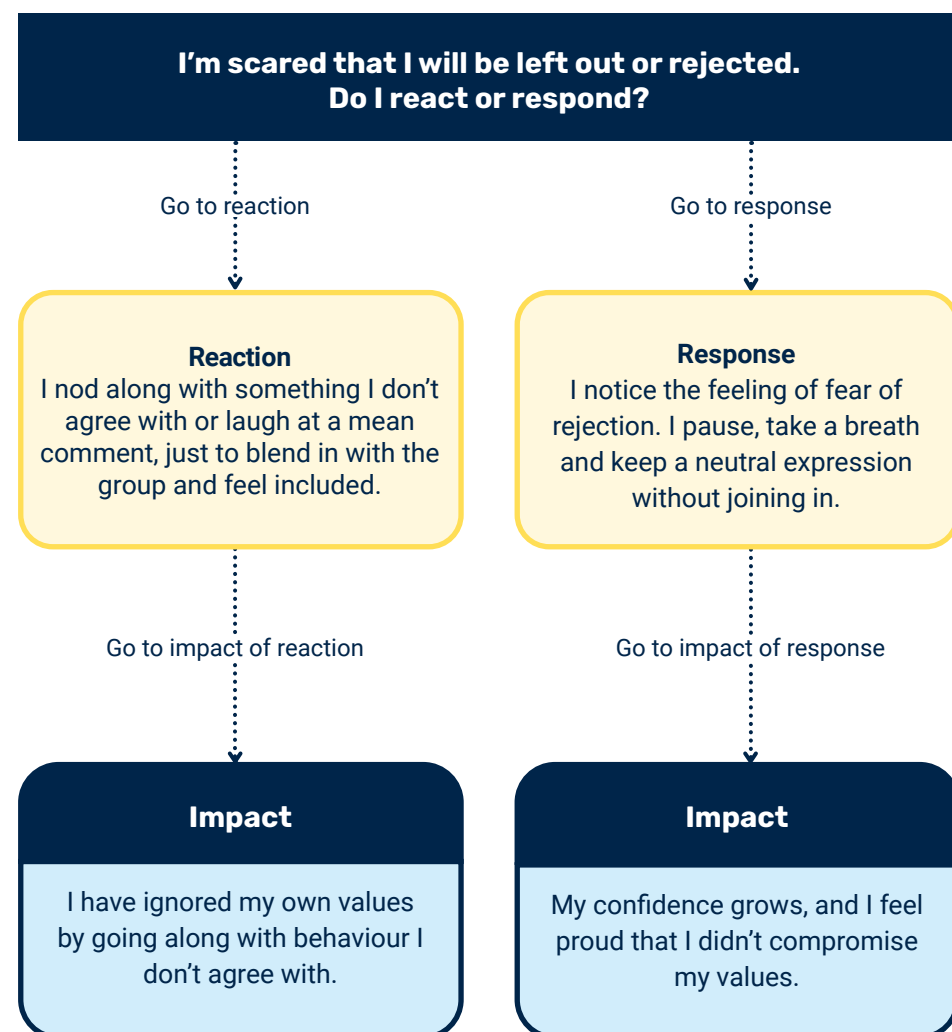
I'm seeking attention



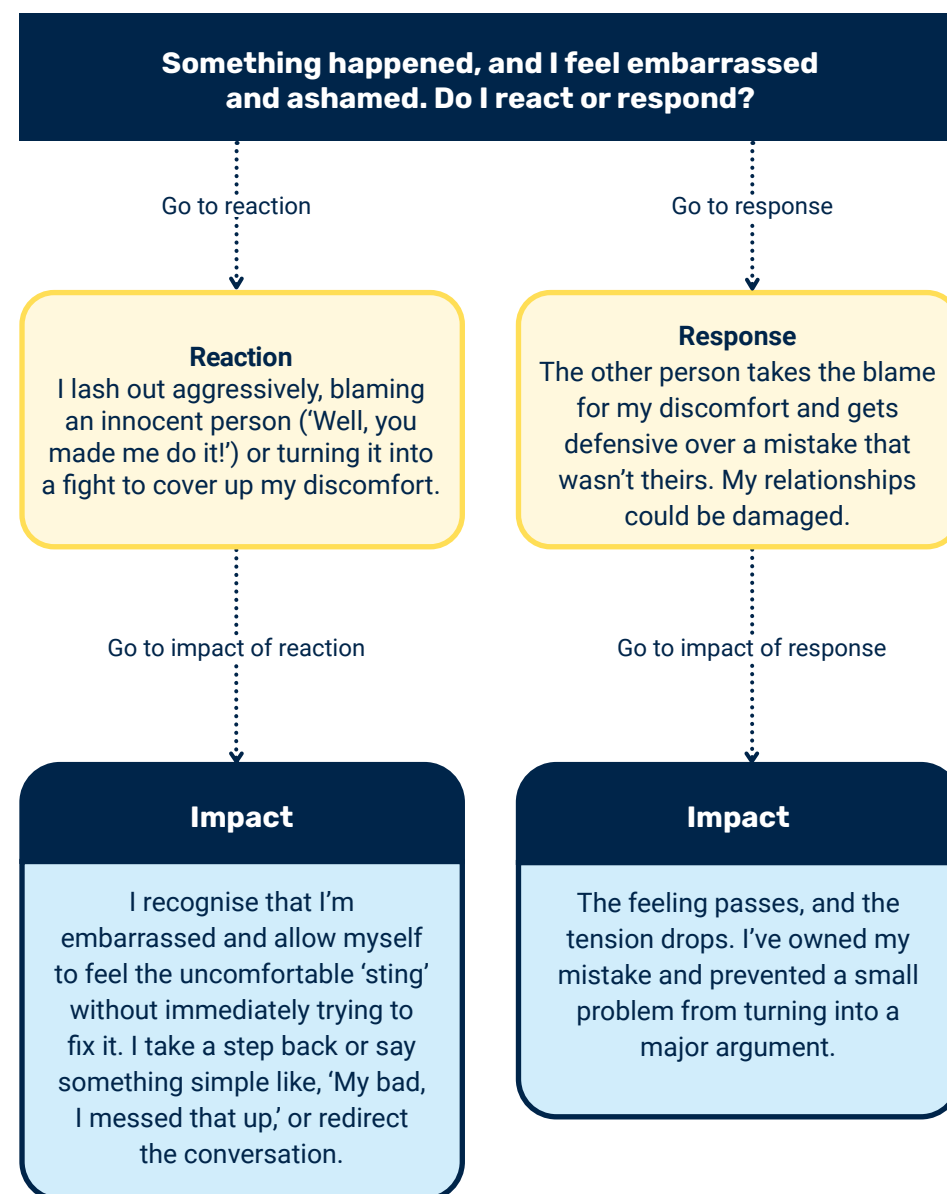
'The need for validation is so harmful and can change the course of someone's life.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

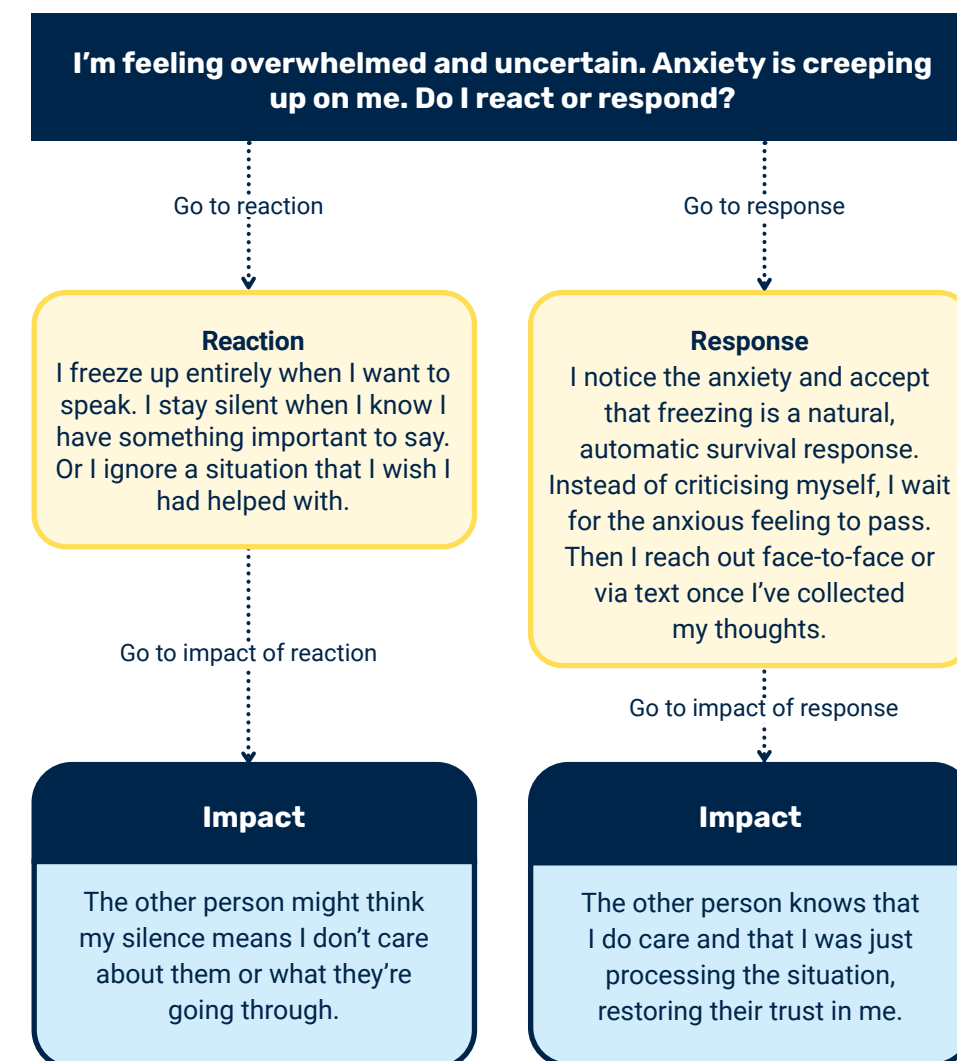
I'm scared of being rejected



I'm embarrassed or ashamed of something I did



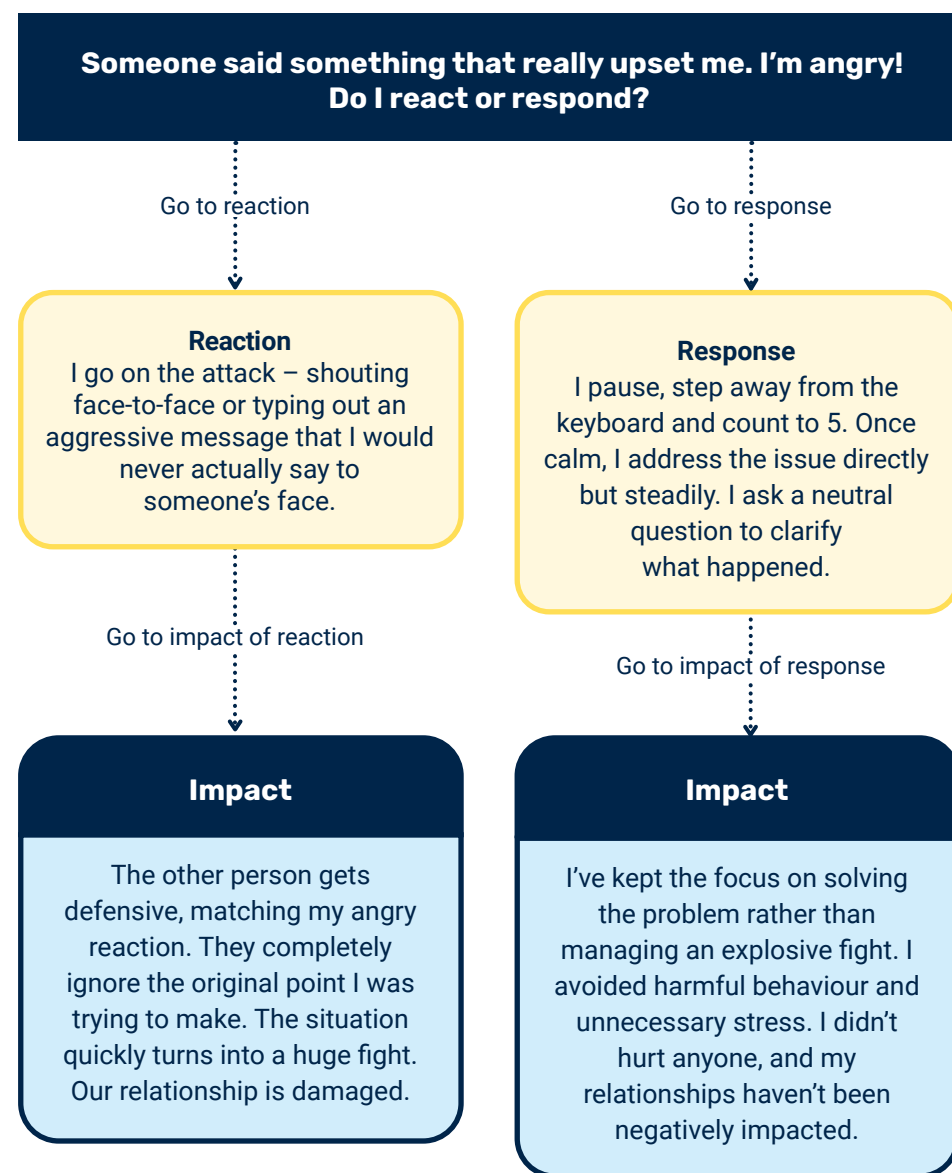
I'm overwhelmed or uncertain about a peer relationship



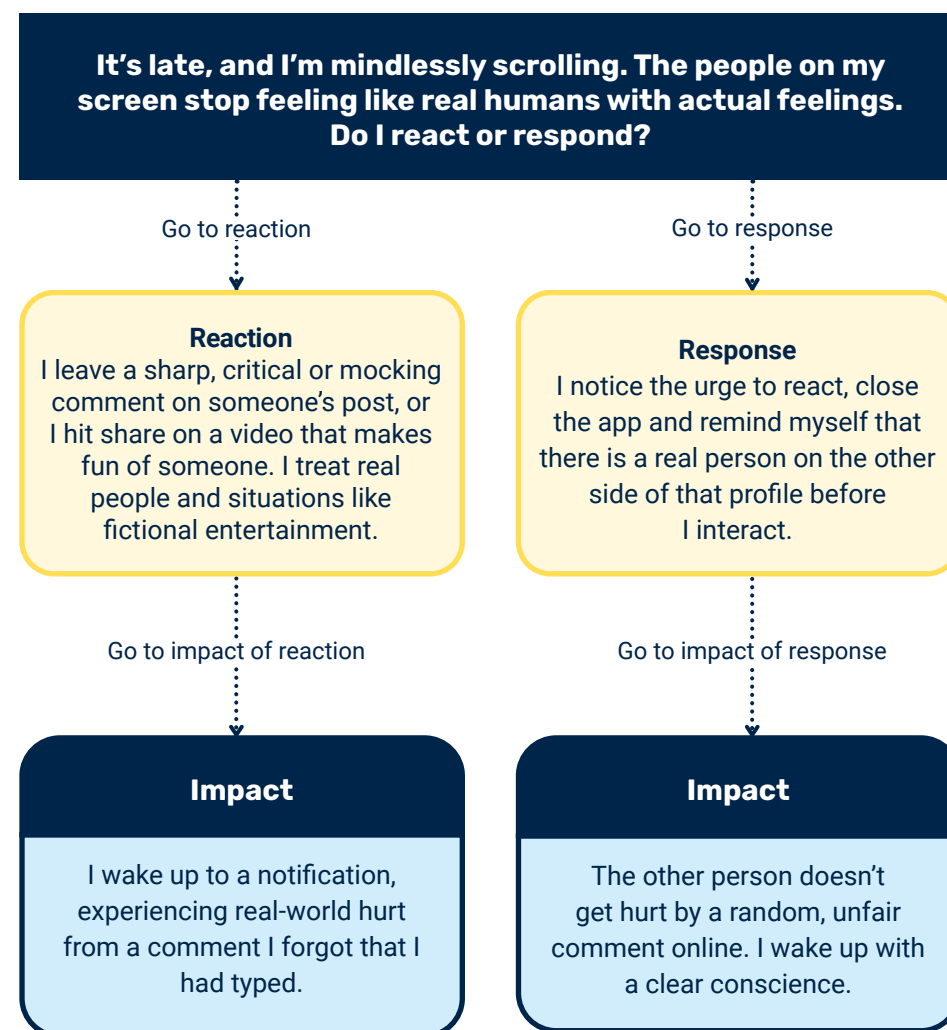
'When you try to fit in with how other people feel, you lose more of yourself. You're making everyone else happy, but you're not making yourself happy.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 15, PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

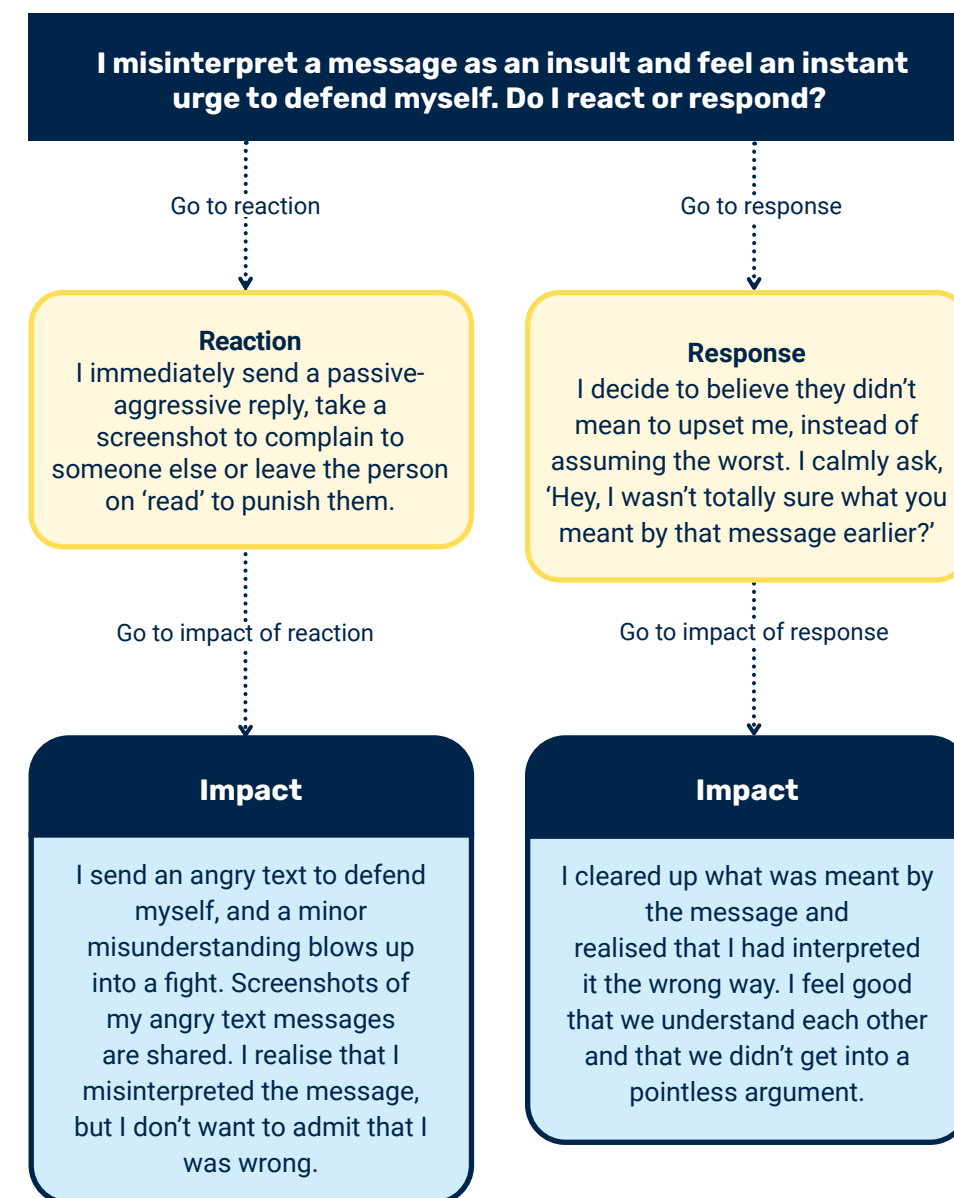
I'm angry



I'm tired and over it



I misinterpreted a message



Note

Noticing the gap between reacting and responding is the hard part. If you've recognised a pattern, you can work on ways to respond better next time. You could also talk to a trusted friend or adult. For further support, see the organisations listed at the end of this resource.

Identifying how you feel when you have been triggered by an event is the first step. You can then decide if you want to pause and respond intentionally. This can help you build healthier relationships.

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety or overwhelm, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Counselling and guidance for children and young people experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76 or 13yarn.org.au. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people): 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

eSafety Commissioner: esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via their website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

Connected resources

- Who are you online?
- What does courage look like?
- Understanding the bystander effect
- Support systems

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local polices and school context.