

2.15 Acknowledge When You're Triggered

When you are feeling emotionally unstable or overwhelmed, own it.

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When any person in a conversation is angry, scared, or defensive, it's extremely difficult to communicate productively. No doubt you've experienced such situations in which you've struggled to control your thoughts and think clearly.

This happens to everyone, and when you find yourself overreacting or feeling overwhelmed, it can be helpful to openly acknowledge your emotional state, giving yourself a chance to breathe, calm down, and be seen.

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- Helps prevent arguments from escalating.
- Nurtures trust between you and others.

2

- In the heat of the moment, both recognizing and naming your heightened emotional state can be very difficult.

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In order for this tool to be useful, you must be able to notice and honor your emotions in real time. Therefore, it is more about your relationship with yourself than with others.

When you notice an interaction approaching a boiling point to the extent that your defensiveness, anxiety, or other strong emotions are beginning to overrule your rational mind, simply accept and acknowledge what's happening. As clearly and non-judgmentally as you can, inform the other person that you are triggered (see Tool 2.7: Radical Honesty). Take a moment to think about what you need right now. Do you need a quick break? Would you like to continue the conversation a bit more slowly? Whatever it is, ask for it.

If your conversational partner is in a relatively calm state, they may be able to empathize. In this case, they may seek to understand what's happening and help you. If they, too, are on the verge of being triggered, however, it might be best for you to separate until you both feel more at ease.

Given how challenging it can be to recognize and name your emotions in the moment, especially when that moment is highly charged, you may find it valuable to memorize a few phrases you can draw on at these times. For example:

- I'm not in the right emotional place to have this conversation right now.
- I'm in control right now, but in ten seconds I might not be.
- I'm feeling triggered and need a break.