

Core Steps For Working With Reactivity

1.) Get to know the signs

Develop intimacy with your own patterns of reactivity. Learn how it shows up for you both emotionally and in your body. What sensations arise most often when you are experiencing reactivity, worry, stress or fear? These can be helpful flags for you to recognize it is happening and wake up in the midst of it.

2.) Notice and Name “I’m being reactive” or “reactivity”-- as soon as you recognize it

Say this out loud if possible and appropriate to the situation. Do not justify it. Simply acknowledge and accept that it this is happening.

3) Say what you are actually feeling

Work to simply with what you are actually feeling in the moment. This can be either an emotion or what is happening in your body. For example: I’m feeling angry/sad/scared or I’m feeling a knot in my gut and tightness in my throat. Be aware of the tendency to confuse feelings with thoughts or perceptions. “I’m not feeling heard”, for example, is a perception not a feeling.

4) Shift your attention from your mind to your body and breath

Pull your attention away from your cognition and focus on the sensations in your body —particularly helpful here is to drop your attention to your belly. Do 4 or 5 conscious breaths. Pay attention to your inhale and exhale. This will help to ground you so that you can stay present with what you are actually feeling.

5) Move in some way that matches your inner experience

Give the emotions and sensations somewhere to go with sound and/or movement. This is key to help digest and release the reactive energy that may be stored in your nervous system or physical body.

6) Work with what shows up

Use your capacity for self-reflection to become aware of what is arising underneath your original reactivity. For example: How old are you feeling? Is there a younger self showing up that needs attention? What do you want to do with what you are feeling? What patterns do you notice? Work to stay transparent. Work to move out of any dramatization or victim-identification with the reactive emotional state. Stay present and in contact with yourself and what you are feeling and with the person or situation that catalyzed the reactivity. Get support if you need it.