

Response Patterns

Resource developed from *How We Love* ©2006 by Milan and Kay Yerkovich

Introduction: The purpose of this resource is to generate a greater awareness of how we personally respond to conflict. Generally speaking, our natural responses to conflict are self-serving. When we become aware of these patterns, we can begin to combat them. We combat these self-serving response patterns in order to grow spiritually (i.e. growing closer and closer to Jesus by becoming more and more like Him).

We all have a default response pattern—try to identify yours in the patterns listed in this resource. Depending on the circumstances, it's very likely that we respond using some of the other patterns as well. The goal, however, is to learn respond to conflict in a manner that honors our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ is our perfect model of a Secure Connector.

1. The Avoider ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- I am usually “fine,” and when something bad happens I try to get over it quickly.
- In my family growing up, we rarely discussed personal concerns.
- I’m usually happiest when others are happy and don’t want a lot from me.
- I don’t really think about my own feelings and needs very often.
- I don’t really miss my spouse or family if I’m away from them.
- I need my space.

“I like people, but I’m not very comfortable when they get emotional. I like to keep it simple... it’s so much easier when people just take care of themselves.”

Summary: Coming from often affection-less homes that value independence and self-reliance, the Avoider grows up learning to just take care of themselves. The catch? They restrict their feelings and needs so they can deal with the anxiety of having little to no comfort and nurturing from their parents.

2. The Pleaser ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- For most (or all) of my childhood I could have been described as “the good kid.”
- I feel very upset if someone is upset or annoyed with me so I am good at “keeping peace.”
- I seek connection and avoid rejection by anticipating and meeting others’ needs.
- Conflict makes me uneasy and I prefer to deal with disagreement by giving in or making up for it quickly and moving on.
- I have difficulty confronting or saying no and sometimes it makes me less than truthful.

“I work hard at making those I love happy, and I’m not great at saying ‘no’ or keeping boundaries. But anything is better than having people upset with me.”

Summary: Pleasers usually grow up in a home with an overly protective or angry critical parent. Pleaser children do everything they can to “be good” and avoid troubling their reactive parent. These kids don’t get comfort: rather, they spend their energy comforting or appeasing their troublesome parent. As adults, Pleasers tend to continually monitor the moods of others around them to keep everyone happy. Eventually, they can become resentful and break down or leave the relationship.

3. The Vacillator ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- I feel like no one has really understood what I need.
- I experience internal conflict and a high level of emotional stress in relationships.
- At times, I find myself picking a fight and I'm not sure why.
- I've always been especially sensitive and perceptive and can tell when others are pulling away from me.
- Others have said they feel like they're walking on eggshells around me.

"I long for relationships and connection, but people always let me down. Sometimes I wonder if it's even worth it anymore."

Summary: Growing up with an unpredictable parent, Vacillators' needs aren't top priority. Without consistent parental affection, they develop feelings of abandonment. By the time the parent feels like giving again, their child is tired of waiting and too angry to receive. As adults, Vacillators are on a quest to find the consistent love they never received as children. They idealize new relationships, but then get tired of it once life (and the relationship) gets less than perfect.

4. The Controller ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- No one protected me from harm when I was growing up, so I had to get tough and take care of myself.
- Life has taught me to either "be in control" or "be controlled."
- People would probably describe me as intimidating.
- I prefer to solve problems on my own.
- I need things to be done a certain way or I get angry.
- I have few feelings about my childhood except I'm glad it's over because I wouldn't go back.

"I don't like being outside of my comfort zone, so I always make sure I'm the one in charge. That way I know for sure that I won't be taken advantage of."

Summary: Controllers need control to keep vulnerable, negative feelings that they experienced in childhood from surfacing in their adult lives. Having control means having protection from the feelings of fear, humiliation and helplessness. Anger is the one emotion that is not vulnerable, so intimidation and anger are often used to keep control. Control may be highly rigid or more sporadic and unpredictable, but Controllers rarely realize the real reason they need to be in charge.

5. The Victim ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- Growing up, I experienced a great deal of intense anger and stress from a parent or parents.
- I'm used to chaos and calm makes me anxious because something bad is always just around the corner.
- If I spoke up more and had stronger opinions, my spouse (or other significant relationships) would be even angrier.
- I feel like I'm just "going through the motions" and I'm tired and out of energy.

"I keep my needs quiet, and honestly, I'm not even sure what my needs are. It's safer when I just go with the flow... there's less opportunity for a blow-up."

Summary: In chaotic homes, compliant kids survive by trying to stay under the radar and be as invisible as possible. They hide, appease and learn to not be fully present in order to lessen the pain from their angry, violent, chaotic parents. Some kids build whole imaginary worlds in their heads where they can escape the pain of abuse. Victims lack a sense of self-worth or personhood and are often anxious, depressed and just going through the motions. They may replicate their childhood home environment by marrying a Controller and using the coping methods of compliance and retreat to get by. Suppressed anger may be inflicted on the kids when the Controller is not present.

6. The Secure Connector ©Milan and Kay Resources, Inc.

- I have a wide range of emotions and express them appropriately.
- It is easy for me to ask for help and receive from others when I have needs.
- I can say "no" to others even when I know it will upset them.
- I'm adventuresome and I know how to play and have fun.
- I know I'm not perfect, and I give my loved ones room to disagree.

"I am comfortable with myself and with others, able to handle conflict, negative emotions, and both giving and receiving. When I need help I'm not afraid to ask for it, and I'm able to give and receive comfort freely."

Summary: Secure Connectors are comfortable with reciprocity and balanced giving and receiving in relationships. They can describe strengths and weaknesses in themselves and others without idealizing or devaluing. Good at self-reflection, Secure Connectors clearly and easily communicate their feelings and needs. Resolving conflict was modeled for them growing up, so they know they're not perfect and can apologize when wrong. Setting boundaries and saying "no" is also no problem for a Secure Connector. They are comfortable with new situations, can take risks, and delay gratification. When upset, Secure Connectors seek help and comfort.