

Respond

You've spent a lot of time with Angela, who is struggling as a mother of three young children. She's exhausted, isolated and convinced she's a bad mum. She's told you of the many times she's lost her temper with her children and said things she regrets. She wants to be a better parent, but she doesn't know how.

When Angela says, "When it's time to make dinner, and the three kids are arguing and whingeing and throwing tantrums, I find myself screaming at them. I tell them I wish they'd leave me alone. I just feel so tired and overwhelmed at that time of day.

Which response do you think will help Angela?

"You should just set some boundaries for the kids and tell them they can't come into the kitchen while you're cooking. You should punish them if they break the rule. You should make sure they know who the boss is."

"Angela, that sounds exhausting and hard. I understand your frustration. What do you think would really help you while you're trying to make dinner?"

We know that Connecting and Understanding are the two most vital steps of the process, and it really is only when these two steps are done well that we can then respond with love.

Responding to someone without the first two steps is often counter-productive and in fact, can damage a relationship. It's very important to firstly make sure that connection and understanding have taken place. If you are connecting and understanding well, you are already responding.

So why is there a separate step for respond? Why bother? Why don't we as individuals, as couples, as friends, as colleagues and as small groups just connect and understand? Why don't we simply stay with the first two steps?

If all you do is connect and understand with each other, your spouse, your friend or your small group, your relationships will be better off. But there is a further step.



The step of connecting is about loving someone where they're at.

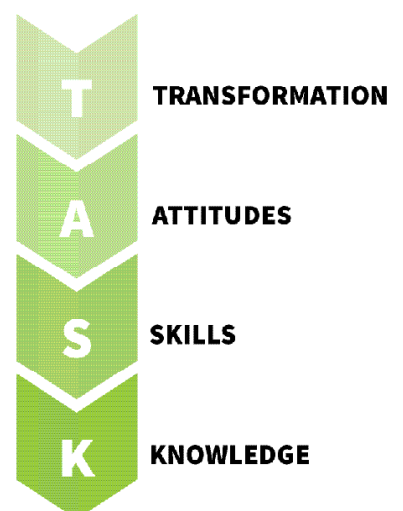
The step of understanding is about understanding someone and accepting them for who they are. The step of response is to assist someone to grow.

In other words, if all we do is connect and understand, we never get to the growth stage. Growth is where we learn and change.

Why do we need respond?

There are two dimensions of individual and group growth. One aspect is growth in maturity, attitudes knowledge, and skills. This is life growth – where we learn and mature from our experiences and education. There is also growing in transformation with God, which is about becoming more like Jesus. Such growth enables us, through the power of God, to bear spiritual fruit like patience, joy, perseverance and forgiveness.

Transformation comes through God toward becoming more like Jesus. Then our attitudes, skills and knowledge grow and change as we mature with regard to our work, family, relationships, and education.



How do we need to respond?

Ask yourself: What would a person look like in this situation if they were flourishing in God-centred transformation? How can we help them get there, from where they are currently, whether or not that's a place of difficulty?

The first thing is not to tell them what to do. Most people hate being told what to do and some personalities will purposefully not do what you've told them to do. Telling someone what to do is a great way to shut down a relationship and stunt someone's growth.

The better thing to do is to ask response questions. Asking questions also helps connect the response step with the underlying steps of connection and understanding.

5. EVALUATE

for you, then others

4. ENGAGE HELP

the pyramid corners

3. RESPOND

utilising their skills & yours

2. UNDERSTAND

know and be known

1. CONNECT

in S.A.F.E.TY.

What does a response question look like?

The first question to ask is: where are you right now and what do you think about this? And where do you want to go?

Other helpful response questions as the conversation or relationship unfolds could be:

What do you think you should do? What difference is God making in your life? What thoughts do you have about praying about this? To what extent are you becoming more a follower of Jesus? How are you growing to become more like Jesus? What do you need to do to grow more? What's really going on for you at this time, do you think? What do you think would help at the moment?

Notice that none of these questions are closed questions, but open-ended, and rather than directing someone to take a certain course of action, they invite the other person to solve their own problems.

At points during the relationship, you may be asked for your opinion, and it's okay to tell them. Avoid taking the directive route of saying "you should..." but instead phrase it like "I wonder if you could try..."

In the example of Angela and her three kids above, asking her what she needs as opposed to telling her what she should do will keep the relationship and conversation open.

Jesus is the ultimate example of a person who perfectly connected, understood and responded to people while he was here on earth. When he was talking with the woman at the well, his first response to her was knowing how God-centred transformation could help her to flourish.

"If you knew who were talking to, if you knew what the gift of God was, if you only knew what you were asking, you would receive water that meant you'd never be thirsty again."

She replies: "You don't even have a bucket. How is this possible?"

Jesus responds: "I can see you are thirsty (I know and understand who you are) and I can offer you water that will quench thirst (and I love and am responding to you.)" In his response, Jesus shows that he knows all about her and still loves her, while at the same time, showing her his capacity for response and who she can engage help with.

Similarly, we can be Jesus to the people in our lives. A person who is desperately thirsty needs to know that you know who they are and still love them – just as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman at the well.