

Why Do I Get Defensive So Fast?

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"Can I give you some feedback?"

For some of us, those words are enough to make the body react before the conversation even starts. Your shoulders tense a little. Your stomach drops. You're listening, but part of your brain is already preparing your response.

Then the feedback comes: "I think you could've handled that differently."

Almost immediately, your mind has an answer:

*They don't understand what happened.
They don't know everything I was dealing with.
I need to explain.*

So you do. Maybe you explain a lot.

Why feedback can feel so personal

The interesting thing about defensiveness is that we can know someone has a valid point and still feel ourselves resisting it. That's because feedback sometimes bumps into something much more personal than the issue being discussed.

Imagine that being competent is an important part of how you see yourself. You've worked hard to become good at what you do, and you care about doing things well. Then someone questions your work.

In Mind-Body Bridging® (MBB), we might look for a Requirement underneath that reaction. Requirements are internal rules about how we, other people, or the world should be. In this situation, yours might be:

I should be competent.

*Other people should see me as capable.
I shouldn't make mistakes.*

Suddenly, the conversation isn't only about something you did. It feels connected to who you are.

The same thing can happen outside of work. Your partner asks why you forgot something, and your mind hears, You're unreliable. Your teenager questions a decision, and it feels like disrespect. A friend disagrees with you, and somehow the conversation starts feeling like a judgment about you instead of a difference of opinion.

When a Requirement connected to our identity feels violated, the I-System can become active very quickly.

"Let me explain..."

This is where Fixers can be sneaky. In MBB, Fixers are things we do in an attempt to get rid of discomfort or get ourselves, other people, or the situation back to how we think it should be.

Explaining can become a Fixer. So can proving your point, repeating yourself, mentally collecting evidence that you were right, shutting down, or sending a follow-up text after the conversation because you thought of three more things the other person needs to understand.

None of those behaviors automatically means you're Fixing. Sometimes an explanation really is necessary. Sometimes you need to advocate for yourself or correct information that isn't accurate.

The useful question is what's driving the behavior. Are you explaining because the information will help the conversation, or because you desperately need the other person to see you differently so the uncomfortable feeling will go away? That can be a harder question to answer.

What happens if you don't fix it immediately?

This is where Defusing can be surprisingly helpful. You might notice, *I really need this person to understand that I'm competent*. There's the Requirement. Then you notice the overwhelming urge to explain every detail. There's the Fixer.

You don't have to make either one disappear. You're simply recognizing what's happening instead of automatically following it. That recognition can begin to

Defuse some of the I-System activity and create enough space to hear what the other person is actually saying.

Maybe the feedback is useful. Maybe you disagree with part of it. Maybe the other person communicated it terribly. You can still decide all of that. Defusing doesn't mean becoming passive, avoiding conflict, or agreeing with everyone. It gives you more choice about how you respond.

If the I-System is especially loud, you can also Bridge by bringing some attention to what you can see, hear, or physically feel in the moment. Even a few seconds of Coming to Your Senses can interrupt the rush to defend yourself long enough to choose what you want to say next.

Sometimes the biggest shift in a difficult conversation comes from realizing you don't have to defend your entire identity just because someone questioned one thing you did.

Put MBB into practice

Recognizing our Requirements and the patterns that follow takes practice. If you'd like to explore these tools more, join an upcoming [Building Resilience workshop](#) or learn more about our [free individual sessions](#).