



## Learn How to Manage Stress in the New Year

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A patient says, “I’m in pain and need to be seen now; nobody cares!” A staff member says, “I can’t do that; I’m still doing what you told me to do five minutes ago!” Your partner says, “I’m doing all the administrative work, and you’re just doing what you prefer!” Ack. How do you respond?

The **disarming technique** involves finding some truth in what the other person is saying, even if it seems unreasonable or unfair. The goal is to **defuse emotion** (yours and theirs) and give them a chance to feel heard and validated. You are also letting them know you want to work through the situation with them rather than dismissing them or being “right” yourself. It starts with “You’re right...”

So, deep breath. To the patient: “You’re right; you do need to be seen. Waiting is terrible when you’re hurting. What would help while you’re waiting?” To the staff: “You’re right; you need time to finish one thing before starting another. Let’s figure which comes first.” To your partner: “You’re right, I don’t enjoy the administrative work. Let’s talk about this first chance when we’re both not so busy.” Notice how you are not agreeing with everything, just finding a “truth nugget” to agree with. You are defusing the situation so both of you can calm down, not add stress!

Homework: This month, challenge yourself to find a legitimate way to agree with five things you hear from others that sound incorrect to you. Practice how you would communicate to the speaker that you agree with at least part of what they said. You don’t have to say it out loud to them while learning, but do formulate your words in your mind. Pay close attention to your own reactions — feeling defensive, self-righteous, personally attacked, etc., since managing your own reactivity is a major part of building the skill of the disarming technique.

*Adapted from David D. Burns, M.D., author of “[Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy](#).”*