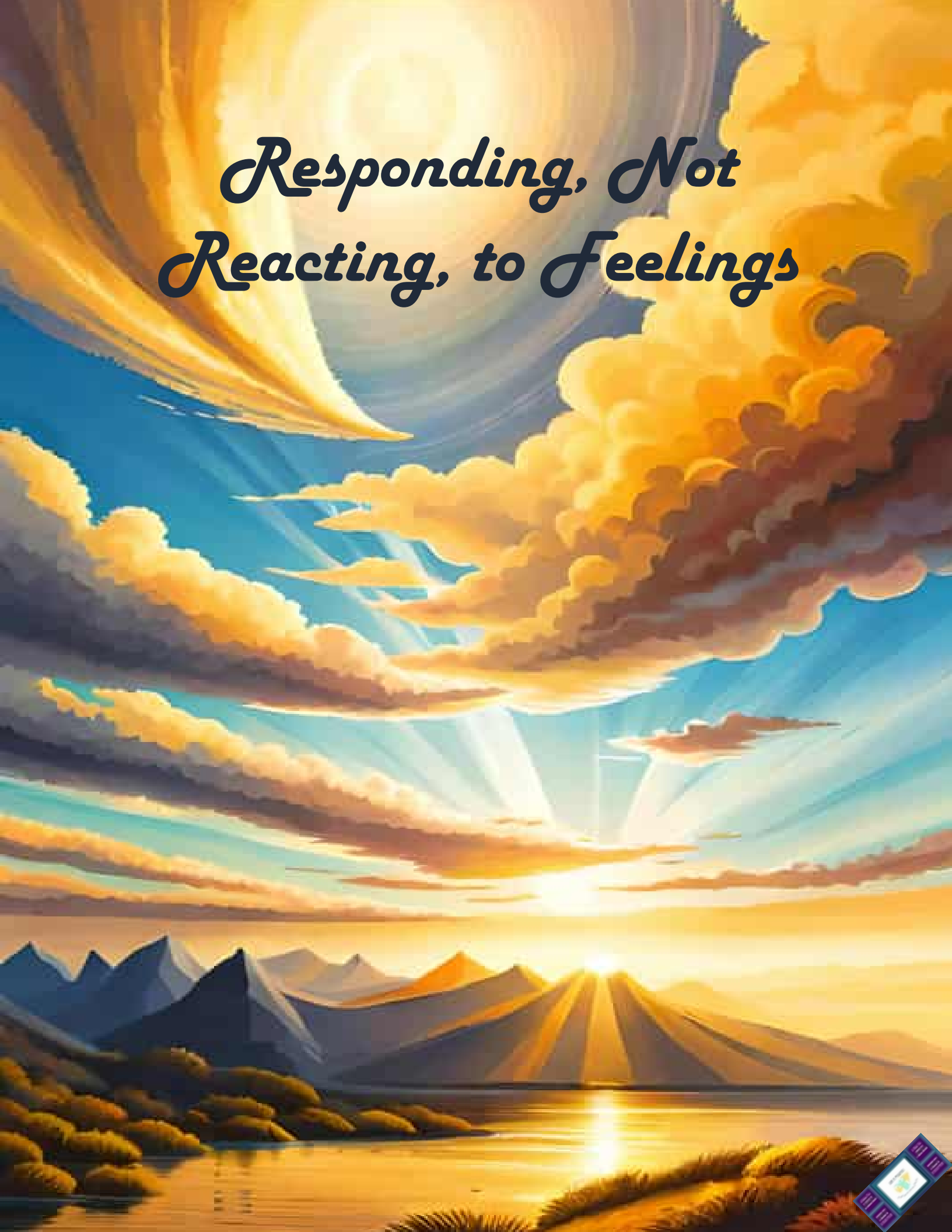


*Responding, Not
Reacting, to Feelings*



Responding, Not Reacting, to Feelings

Good mental health means becoming familiar with and accepting all your feelings and not trying to escape or avoid them. Simply acknowledging your feelings, especially unpleasant ones, without doing anything about them can be a powerful skill in learning to deal with emotional problems.

The world is full of triggers that cause us to react rather than respond wisely:

- uncooperative, unsympathetic, or demanding people
- events and situations beyond our control
- disappointments and dashed expectations
- crazy drivers—they're everywhere!

But it doesn't mean you ignore your reaction; you can learn ways to work with it.

As with any new skill, it takes practice and a willingness to experience something new and unfamiliar. There will always be external events that bother us, but if we learn to respond and not react, we can make things better for ourselves, even if we can't change the world to our liking.

Reacting happens instantly, usually from anger, fear, or feeling overwhelmed.

We all do it. It usually happens when we're not thinking clearly or logically—that gut reaction.

When we respond, we stop, notice what we're feeling, assess the situation, and then thoughtfully and wisely decide what to do next. This definition is very similar to mindfulness— noticing what's happening in the present moment without judgment and with acceptance. Then, mindfully, you can choose what to do next.

Mastery Steps

Can you think of a situation when you reacted, that is, became emotional without thinking through your response? What about a time when you responded rather than reacted? Briefly describe each situation.



Notice where in your body you experience feelings and their intensity. This will help you respond instead of react. Remember not to judge yourself harshly. That won't help. Start with these steps:

- Take three deep, conscious breaths.
- Notice what you are feeling and where in your body you are feeling it (for example, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest, stomach).
- Note the intensity of the feeling (mild, moderate, strong).
- Let go of any tension you are aware of to the best of your ability.
- Consider what is at stake—is it worth reacting angrily or impulsively? What will the consequence(s) be?
- Respond compassionately to the person or situation, using clear, simple language.

Fill in the chart for one week. Keep note of any incidents that might typically cause you to be upset and even do something you might regret. See if you can respond positively to the incidents. Describe the situation, how you reacted, and the feelings you experienced in your body, including a rating from 1-10, where 1 = minimal sensations to 10 = severe physical reaction. Then, write about your response and the outcome.

| Day | Situation | Reaction | Feeling/ Intensity | Body Sensation | Response | Outcome |
|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|
| Sunday | | | | | | |
| Monday | | | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | | | |
| Friday | | | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | | | |

