

Disarming: The Power of Finding the Truth

What is "Disarming"?

In the 5 Secrets of Effective Communication, "disarming" is the practice of finding a grain of truth in the other person's statements or criticisms, even if they seem unreasonable. The benefits of agreeing first are that it ensures the two of you are on the same page, and the other person is far more likely to hear what you have to say if you are not butting heads with them.

By agreeing, it does not mean you are admitting the other person is entirely right about everything. You still absolutely have the right to share your own experience and perspective. Hearing what the other person has to say first is simply an important step in the process. Once they feel heard and validated, their defensiveness will lower, and they are much more likely to truly hear you out after you have taken the time to listen to them.

While there are times we can easily agree because the other person's statement naturally feels true, other times it can be much harder to find the truth in what they are saying. Regardless of the situation, the agreement must always be genuine for you, rather than simply agreeing for the sake of ending an argument.

Here are key tips for how to effectively use Disarming in your communication:

1. The Importance of Genuine Agreement

It is absolutely critical that when we agree with someone, the agreement is completely genuine and true for us. People are highly perceptive and can easily detect when you are just agreeing for the sake of agreeing. In any form of communication, being genuine and honest is the ultimate key to fostering a closer, more connected relationship. To build this trust, it is important that we share our words in a careful, thoughtful, and loving manner.

2. Finding the Grain of Truth

Sometimes, when people are saying highly critical things about you or expressing opinions you fundamentally oppose, it can be extremely hard to find any truth in what they are saying. For example, imagine you agreed to wash the dishes but decided to wait until the morning. If your partner wakes you up and says, "You told me you would get the dishes washed by last night," your first instinct might be to argue. However, you can find the specific grain of truth in their complaint: you did agree to wash the dishes. A powerful disarming response would be, "You are right, I did tell you I would wash the dishes".

3. Agreeing with Something Specific

Often, people make sweeping or vague statements that are difficult to agree with as a whole. Luckily, we can usually find something specific within the statement to agree with. For example, if your son says, "The original Star Wars are bad movies," you might strongly disagree, especially if you love the films. Rather than agreeing that the movies are bad, you can validate a specific aspect by saying, "Yes, it is an older movie with lower graphics". In this situation, you are successfully disarming by agreeing that a specific element could be improved, or simply by validating a statement of fact.

4. Listening to the Music Behind the Words

What do you do if what someone is saying is absolutely not true to you, and it simply doesn't make sense to agree? For instance, if your child yells, "You don't love me," you are certainly not going to say, "You are right, I don't love you," because that is entirely false. Instead, you can agree with the intense feelings driving their words. In that moment, they are angry and genuinely do not believe you love them. You can disarm the situation by saying, "I can be doing a better job with showing you how much I love you". Of course, you must 100% agree that you can do a better job, rather than just saying it to placate them. If you hold the core belief that we can all do a better job at anything we do, then agreeing that you could be a better parent will feel deeply authentic and genuine.

5. Avoid Saying "I can see why you think that"

It is very common for people to use the phrase, "I can see why you think that," but this actually creates emotional distance. It is an indirect way of telling the other person that they are wrong, rather than truly agreeing with their perspective. It essentially communicates, "I can see why you think that, but it is wrong". This subtle invalidation will instantly make the other person go on the defensive, making it incredibly hard for them to listen to anything else you have to say.

What to do instead: Lean into direct, undeniable agreement. Use clear phrases like **"I agree," "You are right,"** or simply **"Yes."** Follow this immediately with Thought Empathy - summarizing or repeating back exactly what they said. For example: *"You are right. You mentioned that I have been distracted lately, and I agree with you."* This proves you are listening and genuinely validating their perspective.

6. Validating the Emotion

Beyond agreeing with facts, it is incredibly helpful to validate and explicitly agree with people's emotions. Sometimes, people escalate arguments because they believe that you do not want them to feel a certain way. By agreeing with their right to their emotions, you validate their internal experience. For example, you might say, "You have every right to feel upset and angry with me because I arrived late to our date".

7. The "No Buts" Rule

Sometimes when people attempt to agree, they might agree at first, but then immediately take it back by saying the word "but." For example, if you say, "You are right, I could have been better with my time management but, you just didn't give me enough time to do things," the disarm is completely undone. The word "but" acts as an eraser, wiping away the agreement and replacing it with an excuse or a counter-attack. The listener will instantly forget that you agreed and will only hear the defense that followed. True disarming requires dropping your defense entirely.

To make the agreement powerful and effective, simply state your genuine agreement and put a period at the end of the sentence.

What to do instead if you must add more: If you absolutely need to share your own perspective right away, replace "but" with bridge phrases like **"and"** or **"at the same time."** Even if it sounds slightly grammatically awkward in conversation, these words do not take away from the agreement you just made. They allow two opposing truths to exist side-by-side. For example: *"You are right, I could have been better with my time management, and I am also feeling incredibly overwhelmed by this timeline."*

8. The Need for Personal Work

Disarming sounds simple, but it can be incredibly hard to execute because our own pride, emotions, thoughts, and inner resistance often get in the way. It is exceptionally challenging to agree with someone when you are feeling intensely angry towards them. Because of this, it can be highly beneficial to learn ways to manage your own emotions using specific therapy tools, such as the Daily Mood Log or a Relationship Journal.