



Helpful recommendations for giving negative strokes

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The following recommendations are meant as a guide and a source of inspiration for using negative strokes constructively. They do not describe any logical sequence to be followed, step by step, with each and every reprimand. Nor is it realistic to follow all points in every situation.

Criticise the behaviour – not the person

Your criticism should concern only the person's behaviour – not the person.

Show that you feel that the other person is OK, but that their behaviour in the particular situation was not acceptable.

Only reprimand winners

Try to avoid giving negative strokes to someone who has a deficit in their stroke balance. First and foremost, this person needs positive strokes.

Your criticism could be the last straw. It is more likely that the criticism will cause a negative reaction rather than the desired change of behaviour.

This recommendation is difficult to follow in real life because a loser invites more criticism than a winner does. In addition, it may seem unfair that a loser can get away with things for which a winner would be criticised. Nevertheless, it is more important to turn a loser into a winner than to give everyone the same criticism for the same mistake.

Never in the presence of others

Never reprimand anyone in the presence of others. If you do, the other person may feel ridiculed and humiliated and as a result, may turn a deaf ear to your criticism.

People who witness the criticism of another person will probably feel uncomfortable or may gloat. At the same time, they will lose their respect for you and fear they will be your next victim.

To be given immediately

Reprimand as quickly as possible – preferably within 24 hours of the “offence”.

Don't harbour criticism over a long period of time. You run the risk that the other person will forget the inappropriate behaviour and not understand your criticism.

In addition, delayed negative strokes can cause great insecurity and can make the other person feel unsure as to what other unpleasant surprises you have hidden “up your sleeve”.

Only use first-hand knowledge

Never criticise another person on the basis of something you have heard but not experienced yourself.

You run the risk of creating a major conflict between the person you criticise and the person who “talked”.

If you allow the people around you to gossip **about** each other – and if you join in with the gossip – instead of speaking openly **with** each other – it can cause a deep-seated lack of confidence and insecurity to develop around you.

Be specific – not general

Stick to the point, and only talk about the particular behaviour in the specific situation.

Never use general expressions such as:

- Can't you ever do anything right?
- How often do I have to tell you something before you understand?
- Don't you have any sense of responsibility?
- Don't you ever think about anyone else besides yourself?
- Why do you always misunderstand everything?
- That wasn't a very bright thing to do.

The other person will only feel that remarks like this are a humiliation. Such remarks make constructive conversation impossible and will hardly lead to the desired change of behaviour.

Express your criticism as clearly as possible.

Avoid communicating indirect or implied messages.

Don't repeat "old criticism"

Never bring up old criticism like the old motto: "A good crime cannot be punished too often." This will only make the other person feel they are being treated unjustly.

It could also provoke despondency and indifference.

"There's no reason to change my behaviour. It won't help anyway. Everyone thinks I'm a blockhead no matter what I do. I can't do anything to change the other person's opinions of me."

Explain the consequences of the "offence"

It is important that the other person understands the consequences of the "offence":

- Explain the danger, risk or other unfortunate effects which are created or which could arise from the "offence" without exaggerating or playing them down.
- Explain as objectively as possible what damage, losses and other specific problems may arise as a result of the action. Be specific in terms of time, amounts and costs.
- Explain your feelings. Why are you reacting as you do? Why are you disappointed, hurt or upset?

Agree how to avoid repetitions

Both giver and receiver should perceive negative strokes as part of a learning process, and as a means of avoiding the same mistake in the future.

They should discuss and openly agree how to avoid repetition, and both should participate actively in formulating the desired change of behaviour.

The giver should assure the receiver that the matter is now completely closed, and that it will never be brought up again.

After the reprimand has been given, the receiver should feel that you wish to help them to function better and to achieve positive results.

You should both feel OK after the reprimand.

Even if you follow these recommendations, there is no absolute guarantee that you will achieve the desired effect. It takes much experience and human insight to give another person negative strokes so they produce the desired effect.

But every time you succeed in following some of the recommendations for giving negative strokes, they are more likely to have a positive effect.

Why not keep a "log" of which worked well and why. This will enable you to grow and develop your own skills.