

DARVO: A MINDFUL RESPONSE

Gaslighting is a manipulation strategy in which a person tries to make you doubt your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The ultimate goal is to get you to question your own perception of reality. DARVO is a primary technique used in gaslighting.

DARVO stands for:

Deny
Attack
Reverse
Victim and
Offender

It describes a defensive pattern that may occur when someone is confronted about their own harmful behavior. A typical way this plays out in a conversation is:

DENY

“I didn't do (or say) that.”

ATTACK

“You're the one with the problem.”

REVERSE VICTIM & OFFENDER

The person confronted portrays themselves as the victim and the other person as the offender: “I didn't do that, *you* did that!”

DON'T GET PULLED INTO THE CYCLE

DARVO can trigger anger, confusion, guilt, or the urge to defend yourself. Mindfulness creates a pause between what happens when a person tries to use DARVO on you, and how you respond. Follow these steps to escape the DARVO cycle. If you need further help, there's a worksheet on the next page.

1. PAUSE

Stop and breathe. You don't have to respond immediately. Say to yourself, “I can take a moment before I answer.”

2. SET A LIMIT USING “HUG”

Give them a “HUG.” First, **H**ear what they're saying and reflect it back to them. Next, **U**nderstand the reasons they feel that way while realizing that you don't have to agree with their feelings. Finally, **G**ive an alternative that is acceptable to both of you by saying something like:

“I'm willing to discuss what happened, but I'm not going to defend myself against accusations that avoid the issue.”

“I hear that you're upset. We can talk about your concerns, but we also need to address what I originally brought up.”

“I'm not going to continue this conversation if it turns into blaming, shaming, guilt-tripping, denying, or attacking me. We can try again when we can talk about the issue respectfully.”

3. CHOOSE

Ask: “What response serves me best right now?” You can continue calmly, set a boundary, postpone the conversation, or leave it.

For more practice on mindfully responding to DARVO, go on to the next page.

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Mindful communication means staying present, listening carefully, and responding thoughtfully to the conversation rather than reacting impulsively. It involves noticing your emotions, assumptions, and urges without letting them control the conversation.

Boundary-setting means clearly communicating what you are willing and unwilling to accept, while respecting the other person's autonomy. Together, they allow you to express your needs without attacking, blaming, or controlling others. A mindful response to DARVO focuses on what you can control (your words, choices, and participation, and not the other person's) but without having your boundaries violated.

Use this worksheet to practice mindfully responding to DARVO.

DENY

How did the person deny your feelings or your intention?

ATTACK

How did the person attack you?

REVERSE VICTIM and OFFENDER

How did the person reverse the roles of victim and offender?

WAYS TO RESPOND

Look at some of the ways you can respond to a DARVO attack. Check the most appropriate one(s). If you wish, you may rewrite it so that it applies more accurately to your current situation. Use this method every time you feel the need to respond to a DARVO.

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| ☐ "I'm not going to defend myself against accusations that avoid the issue." | ☐ "I'm not going to argue about my right to have feelings or concerns." |
| ☐ "I hear that you're upset, but we also need to address what I originally brought up." | ☐ "We can talk about my actions separately, but that doesn't erase the issue I raised." |
| ☐ "I'm not going to continue this conversation if it turns into blaming, shaming, guilt-tripping, denying, or attacking me." | ☐ "I'm not going to respond to accusations or personal attacks. We can continue when we can speak respectfully." |

Write your response here:
