

Worksheet 4.14 Active–Constructive Responding (Gable et al., 2004) Homework Instructions

When other people you care about tell you good news, how do you typically respond? There are four possible ways in which you can respond to the good events in the lives of those with whom you interact. See the chart below for examples of these response styles.

Situation: A husband responds to his wife’s good news that she is being considered for a promotion.

	Constructive	Destructive
Active	<p><i>“That is wonderful! I am so happy for you. You would be excellent in that new position.”</i></p> <p>(responding enthusiastically; maintaining eye contact, smiling, displaying positive emotions)</p>	<p><i>“If you get the promotion, you are going to have to be at work all week and on Saturday mornings too.”</i></p> <p>(pointing out the downside; displaying negative nonverbal cues)</p>
Passive	<p><i>“That’s nice that you are being considered for the promotion.”</i></p> <p>(happy, but lacking enthusiasm/downplaying; little to no active emotional expression)</p>	<p><i>“A promotion, huh? Well, hurry up and get changed so we can get some dinner. I’m starving.”</i></p> <p>(lacking interest; displaying little to no eye contact, turning away, leaving the room)</p>

Of the four styles, only the active–constructive style benefits both the individual you are interacting with, as well as your relationship with that person. In contrast, the other three response styles are negatively related to well-being for both the person with the good news and your relationship with that individual (Gable et al., 2004).

In order to get better at active–constructive responding, you can consciously work on becoming aware of your usual style of responding by keeping a daily log of your interpersonal interactions. If you are not often engaging in the active–constructive style, you can write down what could have been said to make the response active and constructive and then consciously think about responding in this way in the future. In addition, if you have access to the person/people who you failed to respond to in an active–constructive manner, you can intentionally seek out the person/people whose good news

had been shared and apologize for not being more enthusiastic the first time. Finally, you can practice this response style by purposefully trying to elicit information about the positive events in the lives of those with whom you interact on a daily basis.

The chart on the next page has been designed in order to help you get started on becoming better at active–constructive responding. Over the course of the next week, please listen carefully for others to report positive events to you and go out of your way to respond enthusiastically to their good news. As noted above, if in retrospect you realize that you failed to respond actively and constructively to someone's good news, please consider seeking out the person and apologizing for not responding more enthusiastically and be sure to respond in this manner the next time they share their good news.

Finally, you are encouraged to take note of how those in your personal life respond when you share good news with them. If you identify that your friends, family, or significant others fail to respond in the active–constructive style, you might want to teach them about the value of active–constructive responding and how to implement it. Indeed, many people are willing and able to use the active–constructive response style once they understand the importance of this response style in terms of relationship enhancement.

Active–Constructive Responding Log

Positive event reported	Reported by	My response (verbatim)	Type of response (active/passive; constructive/destructive)	Others' reaction to my response	What I could have said/did that would have been better