

Daniel Wile's 44 Defensive Responses — Complete Clinician's Guide

This checklist compiles all forty-four defensive responses from Daniel Wile's **After the Fight** and groups them for quick teaching and client use. Each item includes a common phrasing and a plain-language reframe you can model in session.

Denying

1. That's not so

Typical line: "I talk to you all the time."

Reframe: Acknowledge their experience before facts.

2. Here's evidence

Typical line: "What about Wednesday when we talked all evening?"

Reframe: Acknowledge their experience before facts.

3. I was just about to do it

Typical line: "I was on my way to talk to you."

Reframe: Acknowledge their experience before facts.

4. I'm an innocent bystander

Typical line: "What have I done now? I just want peace and quiet."

Reframe: Acknowledge their experience before facts.

Explaining (Excuses)

5. I didn't know you felt that way

Typical line: "Why didn't you tell me? I'm not a mind reader."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

6. I thought it was what you wanted

Typical line: "You were with people all day. I figured you wanted space."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

7. It's normal

Typical line: "Married people talk less after a few years."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

8. It's a simple misunderstanding

Typical line: "I thought we'd each take a little time first."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

9. We have different styles

Typical line: "Your family talks a lot. Mine doesn't."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

10. I'm just not good at it

Typical line: "I don't have a knack for small talk."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

11. There are extenuating circumstances

Typical line: "Work has been intense lately."

Reframe: Validate first; ask a curious follow-up.

Counterattacking / Blame shifting & Accusatory Interpretations

12. You do the same thing / did it first

Typical line: "Last night I wanted to talk and you worked."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

13. What you do is worse (name-calling)

Typical line: "I'd talk more if you weren't such a nag."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

14. You're inconsistent

Typical line: "Saturday you said I talked too much."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

15. I did it only in reaction to you

Typical line: "I can't talk when you dump problems on me at the door."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

16. You go too far in the opposite direction

Typical line: "You always talk things into the ground."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

17. It's actually your problem

Typical line: "I just don't believe in gossiping."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

18. I have a right

Typical line: "I deserve some quiet when I get home."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

19. You should have told me

Typical line: "How was I to know you wanted to talk?"

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

20. You should have told me sooner

Typical line: "Why did you wait so long to say this?"

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

21. You should have told me nicely

Typical line: "You don't have to be so nasty about it."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

22. You knew what you were getting

Typical line: "You knew I wasn't much of a talker when we married."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

23. You should be more accepting

Typical line: "Learn to accept people instead of trying to change them."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

24. You have unrealistic expectations

Typical line: "One person can't satisfy all your needs."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

25. It's your problem, so you fix it

Typical line: "Call a friend if you need to talk."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

26. You had this problem before me

Typical line: "You said the same about your last partners."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

27. You complain about everyone

Typical line: "You say this about your father and brother too."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

28. You're immature/weak/inadequate/crazy/dependent

Typical line: "You want a mother, not a spouse."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

29. You're a bottomless pit

Typical line: "Nothing will ever satisfy you."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

30. I'm your whipping boy

Typical line: "You're taking out your boss issues on me."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

31. You're putting up a smokescreen

Typical line: "You blame me to avoid your own problems."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

32. It's minor; the real problem is you make a big deal of everything

Typical line: "You're oversensitive/overreacting... You must be getting your period."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

33. You've got a negative attitude

Typical line: "Why can't you appreciate the good things?"

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

34. You must enjoy being unhappy

Typical line: "You're wallowing in self pity."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

35. You're trying to control me

Typical line: "You want me under your thumb."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish.

36. Things were good; you're trying to ruin them

Typical line: "You're looking for an excuse to feel things are bad."

Reframe: Drop blame; state impact and a wish

Self-Accusing

37. You're right (self accusing)

Typical line: "I blew it again. Maybe I can't do adult relationships."

Reframe: Own your part without self attack; outline a next step.

Fixing / Rushing Past the Problem

38. I'll fix it (premature solution)

Typical line: "Well, what exactly do you want to talk about?"

Reframe: Don't jump to fixes; reflect feelings first.

39. I've improved

Typical line: "I'm better than I used to be."

Reframe: Don't jump to fixes; reflect feelings first.

40. I'm trying

Typical line: "Change is slow, but I've made progress."

Reframe: Don't jump to fixes; reflect feelings first

41. I can't change—accept it

Typical line: "You'll have to live with it."

Reframe: Don't jump to fixes; reflect feelings first.

Withdrawing

42. Delay / Put-off

Typical line: "Can we talk about it later?"

Reframe: Set a time to return; signal care before space.

43. Exit psychologically

Typical line: Say nothing; detach; go quiet; ambiguous door closing.

Reframe: Set a time to return; signal care before space.

44. Exit physically

Typical line: "I'm going out for some air."

Reframe: Set a time to return; signal care before space

How to use this list in session

1) *Spot and name the defense.*

2) *Slow down.*

3) *Replace it with a connecting move: validation, curiosity, or a clear request.*

Tip: Invite partners to circle their top three go to defenses and write a gentle reframe for each