

Response levels. (September 18, 2025)

Proverbs 26:4-5 gives us some very confusing instructions when it says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Apparently, there is a time to refuse to answer a fool and another time when it would be helpful to answer a fool. How do we know if our response will help or hurt?

One important thing to consider in our responses is to understand the nature of our relationship with that person. We serve many different roles in other people's lives, and it is important to match our responses to the right level of relationship. Here are some possible scenarios...

If someone has committed a crime against you...report them to the proper authorities and get out of the way. (Romans 13:1-4)

If someone has abused you...set up boundaries to create and defend safe space. That is what Jesus did for His disciples when the Pharisees wanted to discipline His disciples for breaking Jewish tradition. (Matthew 15)

If someone sinned against you...confront them regarding the sin (Matthew 18:15-17) in an effort to see them repent and be restored (Galatians 6:1). For the unrepentant, Church discipline may be required. (1 Corinthians 5)

If someone has been socially appropriate with you...accept it and reciprocate without strings or obligations. (Matthew 10:13-14)

If someone is being reasonably friendly with you...be a friend in return. (Proverbs 18:24)

If someone is confiding deeply and personally in you...create space and maintain loyalty with that person. (Proverbs 27:10)

If someone is showing romantic interest in you...they should be your spouse or someone you might consider as a future spouse. That relationship is exclusive. (Matthew 19:5)

We live in a culture that will exaggerate offences by using labels that do not match the behavior. Terms like gaslighting, narcissism, and abuse are often overused, but inadequately responded to. Make sure your response matches the proper role and scenario you are speaking into.