

Before You Decide What Their Reaction Means

*Learning to Look Beneath the Surface
With Curiosity*



SNAP-BACK CHECK™

Pause • Identify • Remember • Respond • Reset

Live by D.E.S.I.G.N., not by default.

What You See Is Not Always the Whole Story

When someone's behavior changes — a quiet response, a different tone, an unanswered text, or a strong reaction — it is easy to decide what it means. Our minds quickly fill in the blanks. We create a story, often without realizing it.

The real problem is often not simply what happened, but what we immediately decided it meant. What we see on the surface is only one part of the picture. Beneath a reaction there may be emotion, fear, an assumption, an expectation, an interpretation, a trigger, an urge, a familiar pattern, or a need. These are possibilities, not conclusions.

Slowing down gives us the opportunity to move from assumptions to understanding. It helps us respond with wisdom rather than react from a false story.

Observation Is Different From Interpretation

We often mix what we observed with what we assumed. Keeping them separate helps us stay curious and reduces unnecessary conflict.

Observation: He became quiet.

Interpretation: He doesn't care.

The observation is simply what happened. The interpretation is the meaning we attached to it. There may be other reasons for the quietness that we do not yet know.

Temperament Gives Clues, Not Certainty

Temperament can help us understand why a situation might affect someone more strongly or why they tend to respond in a certain way. It gives useful insight, but it does not tell us everything. We still need to ask, listen, and seek understanding.

A need can explain your reaction, but it does not create an entitlement.

Temperament explains struggle; never excuses harm.

Understanding what may be happening beneath a reaction increases compassion and personal responsibility. It helps us respond in a way that honors both the other person and God.

Putting Curiosity into Practice

After a long day, Daniel came home and seemed quiet. He sat down, looked tired, and didn't say much. Maria immediately felt hurt and began to think, *He's shutting me out. He must not care about me. I'm not a priority.*

Instead of staying in that story, Maria paused. She took a breath and reminded herself that what she was seeing might not be the whole picture. With curiosity, she chose to ask instead of assume. She said, *"I noticed you've been quiet since you got home. I don't want to assume what that means. Can you help me understand what's going on for you?"*

Daniel looked relieved. He explained that he had a difficult day at work and needed a little time to process before talking. He hadn't been withdrawing from her at all. He was simply trying to regulate and refocus.

What could have turned into a painful cycle became a meaningful conversation. By choosing curiosity, Maria created space for understanding, reduced unnecessary conflict, and strengthened their connection.

Reflect and Respond

What did you actually observe in the situation?

What meaning did you quickly attach to it?

What part of that meaning was something you knew, and what part was an assumption?

What might curiosity have sounded like instead?

*"Everyone should be quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to become angry."*

JAMES 1:19 (NIV)

One next step: Help me understand.

The next time you realize you are assigning meaning to someone's reaction, pause and say, "Help me understand."

Continue Your Journey

This teaching was adapted from *The Individual Temperament Handbook*.