



## Cognitive Skills:

## The Five Fingers Method

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### Purposes:

This technique may help (1) stop your “automatic” negative reactions (e.g., defensiveness, malicious debating, withdrawal) to your partner’s comments and behaviors; and (2) prepare you for cooperation as a “team”.

### Cognitive Skill:

When your partner says or does something that stings, hurts, worries or angers you:

1. pause; don't impulsively react or respond.
2. take a deep breath to calm yourself so you can think.
3. as you pause, rest, hold one of your own hands and use its 5 fingers to consider 5 options to understand the possible meanings of the words or behavior you've just experienced.

EXAMPLE: Your partner shouts: **“What’s wrong with you?!”**



**# 1 -->** If you felt stung, attacked, or put down, identify the thought, idea or interpretation that you have for it, and let that represent your hand's middle finger! Yes, it seemed your partner gave you “the bird”. When this occurs, we often have automatic negative thoughts like:

**“You’re saying it’s all my fault! You’re blaming me!”**

**# 2 -->** Now, pick another finger to represent another negative interpretation of the possible intentions of your partner’s statement such as a criticism like:”

**“You’re angry with me! You are putting me down!”**

**# 3 -->** Next, pick another finger to represent another negative interpretation.

**“You’re saying I’m a disappointment and you don’t care... You don’t love me...”**

**# 4 -->** With your 4<sup>th</sup> finger, imagine a positive interpretation such as:

**“Maybe you said those sharp words because something must have hurt your feelings and you want my understanding...”**

**# 5 -->** Finally, with your last finger, imagine another positive meaning:

**“Maybe you’ve had a terrible day. Even though you used firm words, you don’t want me to negatively react but rather be there for you; be a ‘safe harbor’ for you...”**

**YOU CAN NOW CALMLY ASK YOUR PARTNER IF THE MEAINING WAS ONE OF THE POSITIVE ONES. If not, ask for clarification. Together, find the way to join hands as an ‘intimate team.’**

