



## UNBLOCKING THE DAM

For centuries, dams have been built across rivers and streams to irrigate farms, provide drinking water, prevent flooding, and more recently to generate electricity. But the new research shows that these dams are also choking the life out of our rivers. When a dam wall finally comes down, the river quickly begins to flow and rebound.

Human communication can also become damned up and sometimes turn toxic. This becomes especially true with behaviors that we do not know how to handle. The following are examples of some of these challenging behaviors along with tips that can help you to unblock the dam in order to create more flow.

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### 1. **Lack of transparency:** Withholding information and a hesitancy to share openly and honestly.

#### Tips:

- Build trust through actions and open communication. Share information generously.
- Be honest and authentic – admit your mistakes.
- Provide honest and constructive feedback. When you withhold your true feelings, it tends to leak through your body language.
- Encourage inclusivity where all voices and opinions are welcome.

### 2. **Silence:** Avoiding conversation and using the “silent treatment.”

#### Tips:

- Create a safe place for an open conversation. Timing and setting are important.
- Make sure you stay on your side of the fence by using “I” statements.
- Share your feelings. Ask the other person how they are feeling.
- If an apology is necessary, apologize.
- Make sure that you refrain from any blame or shame.

### 3. **Misunderstandings:** Lack of clarity and confusion in conversations, jumping to conclusions which can lead to escalating conflict.

#### Tips:

- Use active and reflective listening.
- Paraphrase to ensure that you heard message as speaker intended. Always ask if you correctly understood what they meant. If you don't receive an emphatic “yes” go for a round two.
- If you are asking someone to do something, ask if they have any questions before proceeding.

### 4. **Passive Aggressive:** Sarcasm and subtle jabs instead of expressing feelings directly.

#### Tips:

- Stay calm and grounded so that your behavior will not escalate the situation.
- Set clear boundaries, sharing what is OK and what is not OK. E.g., “I am fine with you having a difference of opinion, but I will not respond to your sarcasm.”
- Empathize and listen. Try to understand what might lie underneath. Ask yourself what this person might be needing and feeling?
- Ask for clarification in calm manner. This can encourage more direct communication where they express their concerns more openly and constructively.
- Choose your battles – not every passive-aggressive comment merits a response.

### 5. **Unresolved Issues:** Underlying issues that will not go away. They become the “elephant in the room.”

#### Tips:

- Begin by clearly acknowledging the issue.
- Share your thoughts, feelings, and hopes for resolution. Listen attentively and with curiosity to hear perspectives different from your own.
- Develop strong open-ended questions to dig deeper and understand the root cause.
- Brainstorm together and generate possible solutions for action.

### 6. **Lack of trust:** A boundary has been crossed which will need repair.

#### Tips:

- It begins with desire to repair and rebuild trust.
- Address the situation, what happened, let each person share their perspective without interruption or judgment.
- Listen carefully for a deeper understanding of what happened.
- Apologize and accept responsibility for any actions where you were at fault. Acknowledge the hurt you may have caused.
- Be patient. Rebuilding trust takes time and cannot be forced or rushed.