



PRAWDA NA WIERZCHU / GUIDE

THE POWER OF COMPOSURE

Keep control of your response,
even when someone provokes you.

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Before you respond, regain your choice

Someone makes a remark. You spend half the evening working out what you should have said straight away. In this version, of course, you are calm, precise and end the conversation with dignity. The real version went a little differently.

This guide will not turn you into someone without emotions. It does not promise a sentence that will suddenly make every difficult person reasonable. It will help you separate three things: what happened, what your mind added, and what you want to do now.

You do not have to win every exchange. Sometimes the win is a message you do not send. Sometimes it is one specific question. Sometimes it is leaving an exchange that has stopped being a conversation.

In *The Magic of Lies*, the starting point is the difference between a signal and evidence. Here we start even earlier: in the moment between a provocation and your next action.

The aim is not to feel nothing. It is to stop an emotion from writing your whole response for you.

Your guide to this book

First you will learn how provocation works and a simple framework called PAUSE. Then you will work through six situations: a conversation at work, a message, a public comment, a confrontation in the street, a family gathering and pressure to decide quickly.

Later you will find ready-to-use sentences, a way to repair your own overly harsh response, a seven-day practice plan and worksheets. Read in order, or go straight to a situation you recognise from your own life.

PAUSE is the author's memory aid, not a psychological test or a validated therapeutic method. The examples are fictional. They are not tools for diagnosing other people. One unkind remark does not prove manipulation, and a calm voice does not prove honesty.

If a situation involves threats or violence, do not treat the exercises as a test you must pass. Safety matters more than handling a conversation well.

Choose one sentence from this guide and try it in a low-pressure situation. A library of good responses will not help if every response stays in the library.

01 / A provocation is not an instruction

"Of course. There is always a problem with you." It sounds like an invitation to explain yourself. In fact, it does not even contain a specific complaint. Yet it is easy to start defending your entire life, including how punctual you were in the third year of primary school.

A provocation may touch something important: competence, loyalty, honesty or belonging. That is why your response can be bigger than the remark itself. You are defending both the issue and your view of yourself.

Interrupt that jump. Someone said something. That is a fact. The belief that you must immediately prove your worth is already an interpretation. You do not have to accept it automatically.

Ask yourself: is there anything specific in this remark that I can answer? If so, separate it from the packaging. If not, ask for an example or end the exchange. You do not have to establish whether the provocation was deliberate before refusing a conversation about what you "always" or "never" do.

"Which specific situation are you referring to?" This question does not reveal hidden intentions. It checks whether there is an actual issue to discuss.

02 / The three layers of one sentence

Imagine receiving this message: "I see you have no time for me again." Someone may be trying to make you feel guilty. They may also be expressing disappointment badly. The text alone does not settle that question.

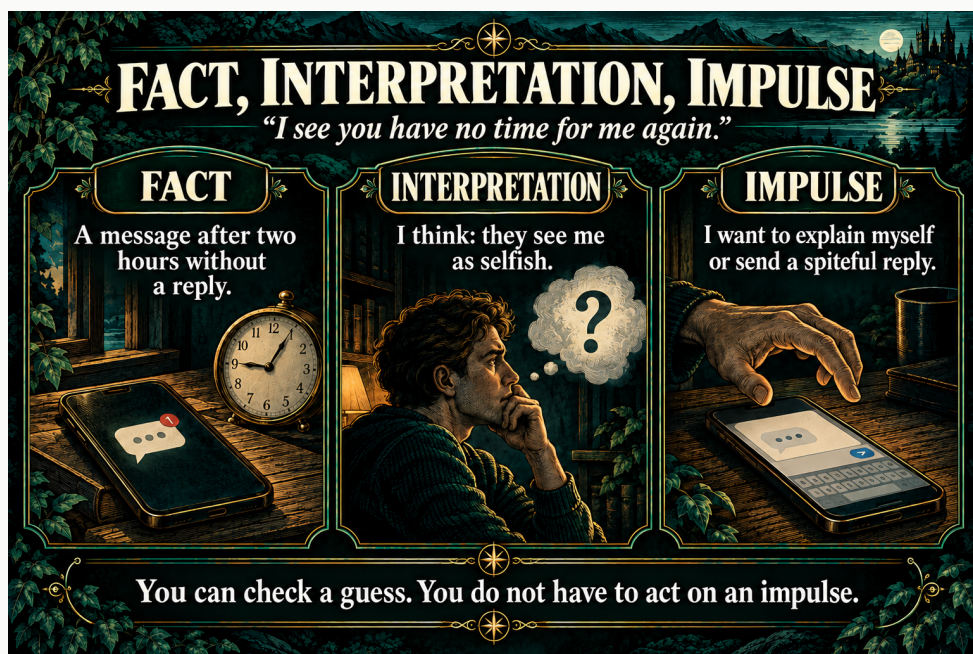
Separate three layers. Observation: I received this message after not replying for two hours. Interpretation: this person thinks I am selfish. Impulse: I will prove how much I have done today, or send an equally spiteful reply.

You can describe the first layer. You can check the second. You do not have to act on the third. This distinction matters because your mind can join all three into one apparently obvious "I have to".

A possible reply: "I can talk after 7 pm today. Is something urgent?" You are not accepting the accusation, but you are leaving room for a real need.

If similar messages keep coming despite your agreements, look at the pattern and its consequences. One sentence is too little to support a diagnosis. Repeatedly crossing an agreed boundary gives you information you can use when deciding what to do.

Recognise the three layers



Separate the fact from your interpretation and your impulse.

What happened? What am I adding to it? What do I feel like doing?

03 / What your body is telling you

Your jaw tightens. Your fingers move faster on the keyboard. Your voice rises. Treat these as signs of your own tension, not as evidence about the other person.

You do not need perfect calm. Start by noticing: "I am worked up and want to answer immediately." Simply telling an impulse apart from a decision creates a little room for choice.

If you can, rest your feet on the floor, put your phone down and breathe normally for a moment, without forcing it. Do not turn this into another test of self-control. A pause can be simple: a sip of water, a glance at a note, or "I need a moment".

Do not measure success by whether your anger has disappeared. Check whether your next action caused fewer problems. You can still feel tense and choose not to send a message you would later regret.

Your warning sign:

Your small action instead of reacting immediately:

.....

04 / PAUSE: five small steps

P / Pause the automatic response. Do not send the first draft. In conversation, you can say: "Give me a moment. I want to answer clearly."

A / Ask what is a fact. Name the behaviour or what was said, without labelling the person. "The word incompetent was used" is an observation. "They are a narcissist" is not a description of the event.

U / Understand your aim. What do you want to achieve in this conversation? Clarify a deadline? Say no? Obtain a document? You do not also have to win a contest for the last word.

S / State your boundary. Say what you will not accept and what you will do. Choose actions that are within your control.

E / Either respond or step away. One question, a short statement, an agreed break or an end to contact. The choice depends on your aim and your safety.

PAUSE does not guarantee a good response from the other person. Its purpose is to organise your next action, not to control someone else's behaviour.

Before you respond



PAUSE: a reminder of the five steps.

Pause the automatic response, ask what is a fact, understand your aim, state your boundary, then either respond or step away.

05 / A question, an answer or an end?

Different situations call for different approaches. Before choosing your words, choose the kind of action you need.

A question makes sense when something specific is missing and clarification seems possible. "Which part of the document needs changing?" is more useful than "Why do you always attack me?"

An answer makes sense when the issue is clear. "I will send the revised version by 3 pm" resolves more than a lecture about your intentions.

A boundary is needed when the way someone is speaking makes discussion difficult. "I will discuss mistakes, but I will not respond to insults."

An end or a break makes sense when the conversation goes round in circles, a boundary is ignored, or further contact becomes unsafe. A break does not have to be a punishment. If you plan to return, say when: "I will come back to the deadline tomorrow at 10."

Do not return simply because someone calls your departure a defeat. That is their comment, not a rule you have to live by.

Choose your next action



Choose a response that fits the situation.

You do not need to use all four options. Choose the one that fits the issue and is safe.

06 / At work: separate the task from the personal judgement

In a meeting you hear: "Maybe someone more competent should do this." You want to list every success you have had over the past three years. But the meeting is about one spreadsheet.

You can answer: "Which result in the spreadsheet are you concerned about?" If they name something specific, return to the task: "I will check that formula and confirm the result by 2 pm." If another personal judgement follows, separate the two issues: "I will discuss the error. Personal comments do not help us find it."

Do not promise a deadline simply to make the tension disappear. If you need information first, say so: "I will confirm the deadline once I receive the figures."

After the meeting, write down the task, the agreement and the deadline. Leave guesses about the other person's character out of the note. If the behaviour repeats, keep a factual record and consider the appropriate support within your organisation.

Your minimum aim: establish what needs correcting. Not: persuade everyone present that you are a person without flaws.

07 / In a message: do not send the first draft

Messaging gives you a remarkable opportunity: you can think before replying. Sometimes we mainly use it after sending the message. Reverse that order.

Write your first version in a notes app, not in the conversation window. Then remove diagnoses, "always", "never", claims about other people's intentions and questions you do not really want answered. Keep the fact, the need and the next step.

Instead of "You are manipulating me again and making a fool of me", try: "We agreed a different deadline. I will not agree to a change today. I can return to this tomorrow."

A short reply does not have to be cold. You can add: "I understand that this makes planning harder for you."
Recognising a difficulty does not mean accepting a demand.

If the issue is complicated, do not try to solve it in twenty messages. Suggest talking at an agreed time, or writing down two possible options. Not every chat has to become a round-the-clock appeal court.

08 / In public: you are also writing for the audience

Under your post someone writes: "Nonsense. You clearly have no idea." You are tempted to respond more sharply and impressively. Before you do, check whether the comment contains a specific objection you can examine.

If it does, answer it and provide a source. If you really made a mistake, correct the material. A correction does less damage to credibility than defending an error at any cost.

If there is nothing specific, you can ask once: "Which claim are you challenging, and on what basis?" No answer also brings that stage of the exchange to an end. You do not need to send five reminders.

In a public conversation, your audience includes people who never comment. Let them see your standards: facts, sources, corrections and boundaries. Avoid turning it into a public humiliation.

Moderate according to clear rules. Criticism of content and a threat are different things. Do not publish a commenter's private details or send your audience to their profile. Having a large audience does not turn retaliation into analysis.

09 / In the street: safety comes before the last word

"What are you looking at?" Someone makes a hostile remark, comes too close or tries to draw you into an argument. You do not have to establish their intentions or prove your courage. Your aim is to end the contact safely.

If you can, keep your distance and move towards other people, shop staff or security. Do not move closer to explain yourself, and do not answer with an insult. A short "I do not want any trouble" may be enough. You do not have to reply, however, if walking away is safer.

If someone follows you, blocks your way or threatens you, seek help. Instead of a general "Someone do something", address a specific person: "You in the blue jacket, please call for help." In immediate danger in Poland, call 112 as soon as you can do so safely. [2]

If you are physically attacked, Polish law provides for lawful self-defence. Do not risk another confrontation to get a recording, deliver a comeback or have the last word. Once the danger has passed, do not chase the attacker. [3]

Leaving does not mean agreeing with the other person. It means deciding that your safety matters more than their provocation.

10 / With family: do not put your whole life on trial

"You used to be normal. Now nobody can talk to you." At a family table, it can be hard to refuse an argument, especially when the audience knows your childhood nickname.

You can recognise a difference without accepting a label: "We have different views. I do not want to discuss this through personal judgements." If the issue concerns a specific decision, return to it: "We will not come on Sunday. We can meet in two weeks."

Do not keep explaining the same boundary in greater detail, hoping it will finally become acceptable. An explanation gives information. It is not an application for permission to make your own decision.

At the same time, check your tone. A boundary does not require contempt. "I will not discuss this at the table" is different from "You do not understand anything anyway."

If tension rises, take a break if it is safe to do so. You do not have to deliver a closing speech that finally proves who started it.

11 / Time pressure: someone else's hurry

"If you really cared, you would decide now." Notice how two separate things have been joined: the speed of your decision and a judgement about how much you care.

There may be a real deadline. Do not immediately assume bad intentions. Ask: "What is this deadline based on? What would happen if I decided tomorrow?" A specific answer helps you assess the situation. More shaming does not provide the missing information.

You can say: "I will not make this decision without the terms in writing." Or: "If the deadline is today, I will pass." This is not a negotiation trick. Only say it if you are genuinely prepared to make that choice.

Do not promise yourself that you will recognise every form of pressure. Prepare one rule for important matters: I do not take on a commitment in response to a challenge to my courage, loyalty or intelligence.

"I must decide quickly" and "I must say yes" are different statements. Do not let them merge into one.

12 / A boundary is your next action

"You must stop disrespecting me" describes what you expect from someone else. "If the insults start again, I will end the conversation" also describes your own action. The second version is easier to carry out because it does not require control over someone else's will.

A useful boundary is specific and proportionate. Do not threaten to end a relationship over a late reply. Do not promise to make a report you do not intend to make. A grand announcement without action soon becomes part of the next argument.

Use three parts: the behaviour, the condition for continuing the conversation and your action. "When there are insults, we cannot discuss the issue. I can talk without them. If they start again, I will take a break."

If stating a boundary could increase the danger, do not treat this formula as a requirement. Choose safety and support rather than a display of firmness.

The other person does not have to like your boundary for it to be clear. Judge its effectiveness by whether you can carry out the action you said you would take.

From an expectation to an action



A boundary includes an action you can take.

Name the behaviour, the condition for continuing the conversation and your next action. You do not have to persuade someone to accept your boundary.

13 / Do not confuse a pause with the silent treatment

A pause should interrupt escalation. It should not force someone to guess how to regain your attention.

If you want to continue and it is safe, give an approximate time for returning: "I need a rest. I will come back to this tomorrow after work." If you cannot talk then, let them know. Do not use a promise to return as a way to keep putting the issue off forever.

A break does not resolve the disagreement. It creates conditions in which checking facts and agreeing next steps may be easier. When you return, start with one issue rather than reviewing everything that happened during the break.

If someone is harassing you, you do not owe them the promise of another conversation. Ending contact and taking a temporary break are different decisions. Be clear with yourself about which one you are making.

"I will return to the payment deadline tomorrow" is specific. "I will speak when you understand what you have done" traps the other person in an exchange with no clear rules.

14 / Twelve sentences to choose from

When you get a judgement instead of something

specific: "Give me one example." "Which agreement are you referring to?"

When the topic drifts: "Let us return to the question about the deadline." "That is a separate issue. Let us note it for later."

When there is pressure: "I will not make a decision right now." "I need the terms in writing."

When the way someone speaks crosses a boundary: "I will discuss the problem, but without insults." "If this happens again, I will end the conversation."

When you need a break: "I cannot give a useful answer right now. I will return to this tomorrow." "I am stopping this exchange before we make it worse."

When you need to put your own behaviour right: "My tone was wrong. I am sorry." "My decision stands, but I take back the insulting comment."

Do not memorise them all. Choose two that sound natural when you say them. A sentence delivered like an automated announcement can be less helpful than a simple "I do not want to talk like this."

15 / Five impressive-looking traps

A diagnosis instead of an answer. "You are a manipulator" shifts the disagreement from behaviour to a label. Describe what happened and what you will do.

Sarcasm as a boundary. A clever comeback can intensify a conflict. Looking good on a quote card does not make it a good choice in this conversation.

Over-explaining. A third version of your explanation does not always add a new fact. Sometimes it just opens three more arguments.

Pretending not to care. You do not have to claim that nothing affects you. You can admit: "This upset me, which is why I am taking a break."

Fighting for the last word. If you have achieved your aim or the conversation has no further purpose, the other person's closing comment does not require an answer.

Check your plan with one question: will this sentence help resolve the issue, or will it make me feel better for a few seconds at the cost of the next hour?

16 / When you have already answered too harshly

You will not always pause in time. Sometimes the message is already sent, the door has already slammed, and a second performance begins in your mind: explaining why it had to happen that way.

"I am sorry, but you provoked me" will not repair the situation. It shifts responsibility for your action to the other person. You can acknowledge their behaviour and still take responsibility for your own.

Try: "I called you an idiot. That was insulting, and I am sorry. I still do not agree to changing the scope we agreed. I can discuss two options tomorrow."

An apology does not require you to give up your boundary. A boundary does not excuse you from apologising. Both can belong in the same conversation.

Then write down the moment you missed. Not "I am hopeless", but "I started replying when I noticed my hands shaking." Next time, that may be your signal to take a break.

Repair does not erase the effect of what happened. It does show that you can stop adding further harm.

17 / Take a step back, without looking down on yourself

When you replay a conversation for the twentieth time, check whether you are actually looking for a solution. You may simply be replaying the same scene, this time with a better comeback.

A useful question is: "What would I advise someone close to me to do in this situation?" The aim is not to dismiss your emotions, but to see your goal, your limits and your available choices as well.

Research on distancing yourself from your own experiences suggests that taking an observer's perspective may support more constructive reflection. That does not guarantee calm or validate the whole PAUSE framework. [1]

Write three sentences: what happened, what I want to protect, and what I will do next. If your note becomes several pages of accusations, return to the question of the next action you can actually take.

Distance does not mean "Nothing happened." It means "This happened, but I do not have to see it only from the very centre of the tension."

18 / This is no longer an ordinary provocation

Threats, violence, persistent harassment or the publication of private details require more than a well-chosen response. You do not have to prove your composure to someone who poses a danger.

In an immediate threat to life or health in Poland, call 112. This number is for situations requiring urgent intervention, not ordinary arguments online. [2]

If someone physically attacks you, Polish law allows you to defend yourself and repel an immediate, unlawful attack. Defence is meant to stop the danger, not to take revenge, and the response should be proportionate to the danger. If you can move away safely, do so. Call 112 as soon as it is safe, or ask a specific person to call for help. You do not have to wait until the incident has ended. [2] [3]

If it is safe, end the contact and seek help from someone you trust or an appropriate organisation. Keep messages you receive and a record of the context, but do not risk a confrontation simply to collect more material.

Do not respond by exposing someone else's private details or organising retaliation. For ongoing harassment, decide on further action with an appropriate professional. This guide does not replace individual legal or psychological help, or intervention by the emergency services.

An imperfect response does not make you responsible for someone else's violence. Safety matters more than completing a communication exercise.

19 / Your "if, then" plan

When you are tense, it is hard to invent a sensible plan from scratch. Prepare one small action in advance for a situation that often repeats. Make it specific and realistic.

Instead of "I will stay calm", write: "If I start writing a reply full of exclamation marks, I will move it to my notes and will not send it straight away." Instead of "I will not let them get to me", choose: "If there is a personal judgement, I will ask for one example."

Your plan should not require the other person to behave perfectly. "If they insult me, I will make them apologise" is not a plan within your control.

Try the sentence in a minor situation. Then check whether it worked as a reminder. If not, simplify it. This workbook does not need an impressive declaration. It needs an action you will also take on an ordinary, tiring Tuesday.

If I notice:
Then I will:
Instead of:

20 / Seven days of small steps

Day 1. Notice one situation in which you wanted to answer immediately. Do not change anything yet. Write down the signal.

Day 2. Separate an observation from an interpretation in one sentence. Look for a second possible explanation.

Day 3. Choose two phrases that feel natural to you from Chapter 14. Say them aloud without putting on a show of firmness.

Day 4. Use a short pause before a non-urgent reply. Assess the decision, not the absence of emotion.

Day 5. Write down one boundary together with your next action. Check that you can actually carry it out.

Day 6. Practise an "if, then" plan in a low-pressure situation. Do not deliberately seek conflict.

Day 7. Compare the consequences of one response with earlier ones. What helped? What was too complicated? Keep just one habit for the next week.

This is a suggested practice, not a treatment programme. Missing a day does not cancel your earlier attempts.

Worksheet 1 / Before the conversation

The topic in one sentence

.....

Facts I can identify

.....

My interpretation that I have not yet checked

.....

My minimum aim for this conversation

.....

My boundary and what I will do if it is crossed

.....

One question I will start with

.....

Worksheet 2 / After the conversation

What actually happened? Write down the behaviour or a short account, without a diagnosis.

.....

Which moment triggered my automatic response?

.....

What did I do, and what were the consequences?

.....

Is there anything I need to put right?

.....

One action for the next similar situation

.....

Do not judge yourself by the other person's reaction. Check whether you acted on what was within your control and took care of your safety.

Pocket checklist / Before you send

Am I responding to a specific issue or to a judgement about my worth?

Have I separated a fact from a guess about someone else's intentions?

Do I know what I want this reply to achieve?

Does my sentence include a diagnosis, an insult or a threat I do not intend to carry out?

Do I need a question, a statement, a boundary or an end to contact?

Is the situation safe?

The shortest version: pause the automatic response, name the fact, choose your action.

You do not have to have the last word. It helps to have a choice about your next one.

What next? The Magic of Lies

Provocation is one of the moments when it is easy to mistake an emotion for information. The wider question is: how do you check a situation when someone's story does not fit what you observe?

The Magic of Lies explores that question: signals and their limits, alternative explanations, questions, boundaries and decisions made without pretending to be a lie detector. The aim is not to see an enemy everywhere. It is to stop handing your judgement to the first appealing story so often.

Take one thing from this guide that you can use today. Not ten declarations about a new life. One question. One first draft you do not send. One boundary you can act on.

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A calm response does not always end a conflict. It can end your part in automatically making it worse.

Sources and publication note

[1] Ayduk, Ö.; Kross, E. (2010). From a distance: Implications of spontaneous self-distancing for adaptive self-reflection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(5), 809-829. This study is cited only as support for the observation about taking an observer's perspective, not as validation of the whole guide.

[Full study](#)

[2] Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration. What should be reported? Official information about the 112 emergency number in Poland. Accessed: 6 September 2026.

[Information about 112](#)

[3] Polish Criminal Code, Article 25. The provision on lawful self-defence against an immediate, unlawful attack on a legally protected interest. Consolidated text published by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. Accessed: 20 October 2026.

[Polish Criminal Code - Article 25](#)

Author: Marek Jankowski. Illustrated English edition, October 2026. Original companion material for *The Magic of Lies*, inspired by its tone and design. The examples are fictional.

Educational material, not a diagnosis or individual advice. The PAUSE framework, phrases and exercises are the author's practical suggestions. They do not guarantee a change in another person's behaviour.