

How Do You Combat DARVO?

Description



Attacks Like A Quiver Of Arrows

What Is DARVO?

DARVO is an acronym used to describe a specific type of reaction to being accused. It stands for Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender. [Studies](#) have shown that each of the DARVO techniques often are used together, hence the acronym. It is often used when a victim finally finds the confidence to confront the perpetrator.

Emotional abuse is a set of actions or words used to undermine a person's sense of self worth or identity. These actions or words must fundamentally misrepresent reality to be emotionally abusive. Yes, DARVO is a type of emotional abuse.

Why Does DARVO Happen?

Perpetrators **use DARVO to avoid being held responsible** for their behavior. This avoidance can be conscious or subconscious.

Purposeful DARVO means the person is likely malicious. They could be **suffering from narcissism** or

anti social personality disorder. Diagnosis is only something a licensed therapist should do, but you can look for certain traits as a warning sign. ASPD often manifests as a lack of empathy, though this lack can be masked with cognitive empathy skills. Narcissism often manifests as an excessive need to be admired, sometimes combined with a lack of awareness of reality.

In contrast, subconscious DARVO often comes as **a response to pressure**, stress, or an uncomfortable situation the person doesn't want to accept.

3 Steps to Recognizing DARVO

You can recognize DARVO by looking for the following techniques. Each of the 3 techniques is required for it to be considered DARVO. However, each technique alone is still fundamentally maladaptive. Relationships where someone is not willing to change any of these behaviors should be strongly reconsidered.

The [techniques and tactics](#) are:

Denial: Perpetrators deny the event. Denial can take a few forms. Flat out denial that the event ever occurred, denial that the victim's version of events happened, reframing the event to appear a different way, or denial that the victim's level of response to the events is warranted. Denial is a form of [gaslighting](#).

- "You are really being emotional and over reacting right now. It really wasn't a big deal."
- "What proof do you have that that happened to you? It seems pretty unlikely."

Attack: Part of DARVO is an attempt to reduce the victim's character. If the victim is guilty of the same behavior or if the victim isn't credible, the perpetrator doesn't have to accept responsibility. Check out [our article](#) on character assassination for more on how this works.

- "You act like you are perfect. You were did the same thing five years ago."
- "Last week you said you were coming straight home but you stopped at the store."

Attacking in this way maladaptive because it skirts the core issue. It is a distraction from the discussion of whether someone did something or not. Whether both people are guilty is irrelevant to whether the behavior should be stopped or not. Counter accusations should be held and discussed in a separate discussion, after the topic at hand is resolved.

Reverse Victim And Offender: The final element of DARVO is for the attacker to move themselves into the victim role. This makes the whistle blower appear like the actual attacker. The effectiveness of this step rests primarily on how well the perpetrator performed the first two steps, denial and attack. The better they were able to deny that the attack happened, and show the accuser has personal flaws, the more able they are to place themself into the victim position.

Perpetrators argue that they are the victim of a false accusation. This step can include techniques like accusation maximization and other character assassination tricks. See [the article here](#) on two ways to categorize attacks. They include methods for increasing the target's perceived responsibility and methods for increasing the perceived offensiveness of the act.

- “I wouldn’t have had to do that if you paid more attention to me.”
- “I’m the only one who has ever been nice to you. This is the way you treat me?”

DARVO is a strategy used to silence a victim by making them blame themselves. The more DARVO is used, the more the victim blames themselves. Education can help the victim mitigate the effect of DARVO. Describing what DARVO is and why it is used makes the perpetrator less believable.

[This site](#) links to many useful DARVO information and research.

Tactics And Counter Measures (How to beat DARVO)

Here is another study on the [tactics](#) used by perpetrators to avoid responsibility.

Covering Up Actions: Covering up actions happens in order to avoid taking responsibility. In companies, managers cover up problems because they fear the negative press more than they believe openness will deter future harassers.

The counter measure to cover up is **Exposure**. Exposure happens when the people share proof of an event with friends, associates, or the media. The most powerful version of exposure can be directly having a conversation with the person doing the harassing. Tell the perpetrator the behavior is not acceptable and is harassment.

Devaluing The Target: This typically involves negative labels like “slut” or “poor sport.” The victim is often labeled as dishonest or incompetent or a problem causer. This leads some to believe they are the ones at fault for the original issue.

The counter tactic to devaluation is **Validation**. Validation is when the victim shows their good character through their actions. This means solid performance, ethical behavior, and other positive characteristics. This can be very powerful because it can discredit the accuser. If the accuser says the victim is a liar, but the victim never lies, the accuser’s credibility drops.

Reinterpreting Events: This happens when the perpetrator denies actions or minimizes their seriousness, and explains the event away as something else.

The counter tactic to respond to reinterpretation is **Interpretation**. Interpretation is simply to reassert what the victim originally said. This includes simply presenting the original assertion as the most obvious way of looking at what happened.

Giving The Appearance Of Justice: This happens especially in the workplace. The appearance of justice could happen when a person files a complaint, people review the complaint, but nothing really changes.

Avoiding or Discrediting the process is the best counter measure. Instead of using these channels, gain support via personal relationships or publicity.

Intimidating Or Bribing People Involved: Intimidation and bribing involves threats of poor performance reviews, undesired job assignments, and gifts.

Counter intimidation or bribing by using **Resistance**. Resistance is when the victim exposes the bad incentives and verbal threats.

Steps To Fighting Back



Fight Back

One study [mentions counter tactics](#). We cover some here and have also added our own. See also our article on [character assassination defenses](#).

1. **Learn how to spot and understand DARVO.** Studies show that understanding the technique reduces its effectiveness. Read this article and others on DARVO. The link above contains examples of public figures using DARVO to defend themselves.
2. **Keep proof.** Part of the reason DARVO works is the attacker refuses to accept what they did. They present a convincing and certain front to persuade the victim and avoid [feelings of guilt](#) and upheaval. Eventually victims begin to question whether they correctly remembered the event they are confronting the person about. This can be combated by keeping a specific record of DARVO occurrences. Detail and dates are important as the person will likely deny accusations of past DARVO. This is the “exposure step” mentioned in the study.
3. **Actively protect your character.** The easiest way to do this is to simply demonstrate behavior contrary to whatever the perpetrator is accusing you of. If you tell them you don’t appreciate them lying to you, and they accuse you of lying, simply make an effort to build up your image of not lying. Find ways to illustrate your good deeds in a tactful way. You can also draw out their argument against your character by asking for evidence of your supposed lies. Often the person has to refer to issues many years back. If this is the case, ask them why they didn’t bring up that

as in issue back then if it bothered them. Typically this 'reaching back in time' is a disingenuous attempt to DARVO.

4. **Actively attack the perpetrator's character.** Those who use DARVO techniques typically do so in an unplanned way. Often the most effective method is to simply shine the light back on the perpetrator. Use questions to highlight their negative actions and to show the ways their behavior is malicious. Consider finding other people they have DARVO'ed. Team up and attack back.

Similar Articles

Are you being manipulated? Check out our article [here](#) to learn the signs and ways to spot manipulation.

How to **deal with stubborn people**. Read [this](#) article to learn 1 mistake you cannot make when dealing with stubborn people.

[What everyone ought to know about brainwashing.](#)

[How to Make a Narcissist Respect Me](#)

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1. Personal Development

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