

Understanding Children's Secret Code

Possible Responses	Possible Explanations (Can you think of others?)
"Code Quiet"	People keep their mouths shut because those around them are critical, disapproving, intimidating, or shaming.
"Code Underground"	What people feel deep in their hearts may be too painful, embarrassing, or anxiety-provoking to say out loud.
"Code Unknown"	People can't say exactly what they're feeling because they may not understand the situation or their emotions just yet.
"Code Foggy"	People are so overcome with emotion that they say something that doesn't make sense or isn't accurate.
"Code Smoke Screen"	People say things wildly different (or opposite) from how they're really feeling in order to hide their pain.
"Code Clown"	People joke, play, and put on a happy face out of nervousness or to mask the sadness they really feel.
"Code Barbed Wire"	People are so scared of revealing their true feelings that they act out or even lash out at others.

How do you know something is code?

- Coded messages can be hard to spot. They range from total silence to violent acting out.
- Coded messages are sometimes belied, revealed, or translated by body language.
- Look for code when you find yourself saying: "*Something about that interaction doesn't sit well with me.*"

Why do people use code?

- Codes may be defenses against uncomfortable feelings. (Freud had lots to say about this!)
- Codes are sometimes first drafts of what people really want to say. (Adults use code, too, of course.)
- Code is sometimes used unintentionally, or unconsciously when people are afraid to trust another person with their authentic feelings, are afraid of rejection, or afraid of offending another person.

What do you do with a coded message?

- Decode the message with careful listening, observing body language, and reflection.
- Diffuse the strong emotion with empathic statements and gentle guesses at true feelings.
- Enhance understanding with sensitive observations about the uncomfortable situation.
- Work to enhance the connection you have with the other person (e.g., conversation or shared activity).



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