

# NEEDS VS. EXPECTATIONS DECODER

## Purpose

This tool helps separate true needs from habitual expectations to reduce conflict and improve alignment.

## Instructions

Think of a recent situation where you felt frustrated by unmet expectations (yours or someone else's). Work through each section below.

### Part 1: Situation Description

Briefly describe what happened:

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### Part 2: Expectation Identification

What specific expectation wasn't met?

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How long has this expectation existed?

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Is this expectation explicitly documented/communicated? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who holds this expectation? ☐ You ☐ Others ☐ Both

Is this expectation consistent across the organization? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

### Part 3: Needs Excavation

Ask "why does this matter?" three times to dig deeper:

Why does this expectation matter? (First level)

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Why does that matter? (Second level)

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Why does that matter? (Third level)

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#### **Part 4: Impact Analysis**

What happens if this expectation isn't met?

Tangible impacts (measurable consequences):

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Emotional impacts (feelings generated):

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Relationship impacts (trust, connection, etc.):

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#### **Part 5: Core Need Statement**

Based on the excavation above, what is the actual underlying need?

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How is this need different from the initial expectation?

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## Part 6: Alternative Paths

List three different ways this core need could be met:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 7: Expectation Evaluation

Rate the original expectation on these dimensions:

Dimension	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Clarity (1=Vague, 5=Crystal Clear)		
Reasonableness (1=Unreasonable, 5=Very Reasonable)		
Flexibility (1=Rigid, 5=Adaptable)		
Communication (1=Assumed, 5=Explicitly Discussed)		
Alignment with values (1=Misaligned, 5=Strongly Aligned)		

## Part 8: Action Plan

Which alternative approach will you try first?

\_\_\_\_\_

What specific conversation or change will you initiate?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When will you implement this?

\_\_\_\_\_

How will you measure whether the core need is being met?

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## Part 9: Reflection Questions

How might this situation look different if you had focused on needs rather than expectations from the beginning?

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What prevented you from seeing the distinction between expectations and needs earlier?

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What patterns do you notice in your own tendency to create rigid expectations?

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## Additional Context:

Remember these key principles about needs versus expectations:

- **Needs** are the fundamental requirements that must be met for success
- **Expectations** are specific ways we've become accustomed to meeting those needs
- **Needs** tend to be universal and constant
- **Expectations** are often shaped by past experiences and can vary widely
- **Needs** can usually be met in multiple ways
- **Expectations** tend to prescribe a single approach

When discussing expectations with others, focus on:

1. Expressing the underlying need clearly
2. Being curious about their perspective and needs
3. Collaboratively exploring multiple ways to meet everyone's needs

#### 4. Creating explicit agreements rather than assumed expectations

This approach transforms potential conflicts into opportunities for better solutions that work for everyone.

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