

Lesson 2: Spot the Bait - Recognise the Lure Before You Bite

In the last lesson you started asking three questions instead of trying to diagnose your ex:

- **What pattern is happening?**
- **What effect is it having on me?**
- **What response serves me and my children?**

Now we go one step further. Recognising that an interaction is high-conflict is useful. Recognising the exact moment you're being pulled into one changes everything.

A fish doesn't bite a bare hook, so the hook gets disguised as something worth moving toward. High-conflict messages work the same way. The lure might be guilt, anger, fear, urgency, jealousy, hope, a character attack, a legal threat, pressure from other people, or something involving your children.

It doesn't matter whether the lure was deliberate or just part of an established pattern. Your task is the same either way: **recognise what activates you before you respond to it.**

This isn't about becoming immune to emotion. You may still feel angry, frightened, or guilty. The difference is learning to treat that feeling as information rather than an instruction. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to spot the lures in your own communication and separate them from the parenting information that may or may not need your attention. Once you can see the lure, you don't have to bite it automatically.

The Hook Hidden Inside the Message

Picture a fish that suddenly notices something interesting dangling in the water. It doesn't see the hook, just the bait.

- That's why a message can wreck a morning you'd promised yourself would stay calm: *"Clearly your social life is more important than your children again. I need an answer NOW about Saturday."*
- Heart rate up, attention narrowed, fingers typing before you've decided to respond: *"I ALWAYS put the children first. How dare you suggest otherwise..."* Saturday has vanished from the conversation entirely.

You may never know whether you were deliberately baited, and it doesn't matter. The useful question isn't "did they mean to hook me," it's **"what in this message hooked my attention?"** Two people could get the identical message and react to completely different words in it, one to the accusation, another to the word "NOW." Your particular activation matters as much as the message itself.

A lure is anything in a message that pulls your attention away from what actually needs addressing. Take: *"You never tell me anything. I suppose I'll have to find out from the school again. What time is the appointment?"* The real question, buried at the end, could be answered in one sentence. ***Everything before it is emotional material, dressed up to look urgent.***

Every activating message has two layers: **information** and **emotional material**. Your job is to separate them before you respond, not to decide whether the emotional material is true. If someone accuses you of being disorganised and asks about a uniform in the same message, disagreeing with the accusation doesn't obligate you to address it. The task might just be: *"Yes, the uniform is in the bag."*

That can feel too simple when you're used to explaining yourself. Your nervous system may insist you correct the record. That urge is exactly what you're learning to notice rather than obey. You're allowed to think it was unfair, vent to a friend, or draft the angry version somewhere you'll never send it.

Feel what you feel. Send only what is necessary.

The moment you notice "there's the lure," you've created a small gap, and that gap is what keeps an evening from being consumed by a message that took someone thirty seconds to write.

Know the Lures Most Likely to Pull You In

Lures take different shapes, and knowing the common ones makes them easier to spot.

- **Guilt:** *"A good parent would agree to this."* *"They're upset because of you."* Ask whether your child genuinely needs something here, rather than accepting an invitation to defend your worth as a parent.
- **Anger:** *"You've always been selfish."* Before firing back, ask what practical information is actually in the message. Often there is none, which tells you something useful on its own.
- **Fear:** *"You'll regret this."* Threats, harassment, and safety concerns are real and this course never asks you to ignore them; if something indicates genuine danger, get professional support. But not every intimidating message needs an instant emotional response. Separate *feeling* frightened from automatically deciding you must answer right now.
- **Urgency:** ***ANSWER ME NOW.*** Sometimes something truly is urgent. Often the tone is urgent while the issue isn't. Ask yourself: is the situation urgent, or does it just sound that way?
- **Jealousy:** comments about your relationships or social life. Find the legitimate parenting issue, if there is one, and separate it from the invitation to defend your personal life.
- **Hope:** a sudden warm message can make you think things are finally changing. There's nothing wrong with hoping, but if warmth and conflict keep alternating, watch the pattern before you loosen a boundary based on one good message.

- **Character attacks:** *"You're unstable." "You're a terrible parent."* Ask whether defending your entire character actually resolves the logistical issue in front of you.
- **Legal threats:** don't ignore genuine legal matters; get proper advice when needed. But notice whether legal-sounding language sends you straight into panic before you know what's actually being asked.
- **Third-party pressure:** *"My family agrees." "Everyone thinks you're unreasonable."* Come back to what's actually relevant to you and your children.
- **Children drawn into adult communication:** *"Your son agrees with me." "She told me what you said."* This one deserves extra care. Resist questioning your child, defending yourself through them, or asking what happened in the other household. Don't make them the messenger, witness, or referee. **Grey Rock the conflict, not the child.** You'll get a dedicated approach to protecting kids from adult conflict later in the course.

You don't need to master every lure this week. You just need to start noticing: **which one am I most likely to bite?**

From Bait to Information: Your First Recognition Practice

Pick one recent message that bothered you, something manageable, not something that feels unsafe to revisit. Read it once, then stop before drafting anything.

- Ask: **What did I feel first?** Anger, fear, guilt, jealousy, hope, panic, the urge to prove yourself? That first reaction is a clue to your personal lure.
- Ask: **Which words pulled my attention?** Often it's four or five words out of a whole paragraph, while the actual question sits quietly at the end.

Then split the message into two columns: **Bait / Lure** and **Information**. Don't draft a response, just sort. Once it's sorted, ask whether anything in the information column genuinely requires action, and notice how much smaller the message becomes once the emotional material is set aside. A five-paragraph text often contains exactly one practical question.

Choose one internal phrase you'll use when you notice yourself getting hooked, something like *"there's the lure"* or *"what are the facts?"* It's not for your ex, it's a reminder to yourself that a message arriving doesn't remove your ability to choose.

Action Steps

1. Open your **Bait & Lure Recognition Guide** and review the different forms a lure can take.
2. Choose three recent messages that activated you, nothing that feels unsafe to revisit.
3. For each, name the first emotion you felt and the exact words that grabbed your attention.

4. Sort each message into **Bait / Lure** and **Information**.
5. Ask whether the lure itself requires a response, separate from whether it's true.
6. Ask what parenting issue remains once the emotional material is removed.
7. Pick your personal reminder phrase and practise using it before you respond.
8. Complete: "**The lure I am most likely to bite is _____.**" Keep this answer for the next lesson.

You Did It!

You're starting to see that the part of a message that hits hardest isn't necessarily the part that needs a response. A character attack makes you want to defend yourself. Urgency makes you feel you must answer instantly. Guilt makes you question yourself. None of that means you've lost your choices, it just means you've been hooked before.

Your challenge: next time a difficult message lands, try naming the lure before you type anything. *There's the guilt. There's the urgency. There's the character attack.* Then look again for the actual information. You don't need a perfect response or even to feel calm, just to notice.

Recognise the lure before you bite. Every time you do, you move another step from emotionally hijacked toward unshakable.

One more piece remains. Two parents can get almost identical messages and react completely differently, because the lure is only half the equation. The other half is your **personal button**, the specific words, topics, and vulnerable moments that make you easier to hook. That's what Lesson 3 uncovers, so you can start recognising the interaction even earlier, sometimes before you've taken the bait at all.