

Article: Tips for Handling Difficult People

Why are they like that? What can I do?

- The Bully
- The Gossip
- The Misery
- The Complainer
- The Know-It-All
- The Procrastinator
- The Silent Presence
- The Grumbling Volcano
- The 'I Want to Be Everyone's Friend'

We've all met them. In fact, if we were totally truthful, there's probably a little of these in all of us!

Let's get one thing straight from the start: we can't change other people. We can only change how we behave towards them, which will influence their behaviour. You can use the 6 strategies below to help.

1. Notice your reactions

- For example, when someone is angry with you, is giving you feedback, or when you're in a tricky situation.
- Who is in control, them or you?
- Do you fight back, back down or assert yourself?
- Can you put yourself in the other person's shoes? How they are feeling and why?

Theory: We all have a choice regarding how we react to events. Exercise your choice by 'standing back' and noticing how you feel before proceeding.

2. Be assertive

Assertive people feel good about themselves and help others to feel good too!

- Deal well with feedback by accepting what you feel is fair and discarding that which is not. Ignore exaggerated, judgemental and emotional feedback.
- Say how you feel, simply and calmly.
- It's ok to say 'no', to take time to think it through, or to change your mind.
- Express your views honestly and respect those of others.
- The other person has rights, and so do you!

Theory: Aggressive people aim to satisfy their own needs, never those of others. Submissive people meet other people's needs, rarely their own. Assertive people look out for their and others' needs. It's a win-win!

3. Be a good communicator

- Actively listen: show this in body-language and words. Check you've understood by reflecting back what was said, asking open questions.
- Ensure your non-verbal communication matches what you say. Watch the body-language of others.
- Express your views and feelings.
- Use clear, concise, appropriate language. Request feedback.

Theory: A person is not always looking for an instant solution, often they just want to be heard!

4. 'No' is ok

- Use slow, deep breathing and a calm voice.
- Listen, paraphrase and empathise with the request.
- Is the request reasonable?
- Do you want to say yes or no?
- Explain why clearly and simply, several times if necessary.
- Suggest alternatives, but without being drawn into a debate.
- Use depersonalised language like 'The situation is...' rather than 'I think...!'
- If you've already said yes, you CAN change your mind!
- Don't apologise for saying 'no'.

Theory: It's hard to say 'no' for many reasons, but saying no is important to well-being, credibility and self-confidence.

5. Handle conflict constructively

- Get to know people: their interests, opinions and behaviours.
- Encourage people to express their ideas and views assertively and constructively.
- Listen actively, don't judge.
- Accept you will not always agree with everyone.
- Be fair and objective.

Theory: Conflict CAN sometimes be helpful, when under control. It can challenge people to think differently, to look for alternatives. However, prolonged conflict is draining and counter-productive.

6. Be an effective negotiator

- Listen, putting your own agenda aside.
- Agree needs, goals and success criteria.
- Ask questions, gather information and ideas.
- Avoid judgements or assumptions.
- Assess options against criteria.

Theory: Effective negotiation is when all parties feel their needs have been heard and met.