

Dealing with Difficult People

Objective

To effectively deal with the difficult people you encounter in your life.

What to Know

You've probably had to deal with difficult people throughout your life. Maybe you've had a hard time with coworkers, a boss, neighbors, or even family members.

Instead of trying to figure out *why* some people are so difficult, you can focus on what you can control—your reactions. Here are thirteen tips to deal with difficult people.

- 1. Use kindness.** Your first reaction might be to get defensive or be difficult right back. But kindness goes a lot further than being difficult. If you respond aggressively, the situation may escalate. Kindness may diffuse the situation.
- 2. Be compassionate.** You don't really know what other people are going through. Maybe the difficult person is going through hard times or dealing with a major problem. When you show compassion to that person, you might find they respond in a positive way.
- 3. Find common ground.** Finding something in common can create a strong connection because people like to feel like they belong. If you can find something in common with a difficult person, it can help make for a smoother conversation.
- 4. Stay calm.** Pause before responding to avoid making things worse. If you can find the patience to remain calm and wait before you respond, the results tend to be better.
- 5. Share your perspective.** Sharing where you are coming from can make a big difference. For example, a customer service representative might simply use a standard script on how to manage situations. If you provide some context about your situation, it can make a big difference.
- 6. Be respectful.** No one likes to be treated like they are stupid or incompetent. When dealing with a difficult person, treat them with respect. If you attack someone it almost always makes things worse.
- 7. Ignore or avoid them.** When possible, avoid interacting with difficult people. Sometimes the best course of action with a difficult person is to ignore or avoid them.
- 8. Control what you can.** You can control some things in life, but many things are out of your control. Focus on what you can control, like how you react.
- 9. Reflect on yourself.** Make sure you aren't making things worse. Is there something you're doing that's making dealing with someone harder than it needs to be? If you have a lot on your mind maybe you come across as abrupt or condescending. Your response might make an

already upset person even more upset.

10. Overcome your fear of conflict. If others are disrespectful or treat you like a “doormat,” maybe you’re not standing up for yourself or establishing boundaries. Don’t allow yourself to be treated poorly because you fear conflict. Set limits and stand firm.

11. Avoid making assumptions. Don’t assume the worst about a difficult person. Think of a time when someone misunderstood you.

12. Release your stress. You put your reactions on hold, so it’s important to release pent-up stress in a positive way. Go for a hike or take your dog for a walk. If it’s helpful, vent about the situation to a loved one.

13. Listen. Everyone wants to feel heard and acknowledged. While you're listening, focus on what the other person is saying instead of what you want to say next.

This worksheet will help you deal with difficult people by using the above tips.

What to Do

Over the next month, use the following chart to record interactions with difficult people. Write down the date and describe what happened and with whom. Then, write down which of the thirteen tips you used in the situation. Finally, describe the outcome.

Date	What happened?	With whom?	Tips used	Outcome

Date	Situation	With whom?	Tips used	Outcome

Did this exercise help you effectively deal with difficult people? Why or why not?

What else can you do to deal with difficult people? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
