

How To Cope With Difficult People

Difficult People

Every now and then you will come across someone who is having a bad day. You can be empathic and understanding — you have probably been in that situation too.

But what do you do when you have someone in your life with whom getting along is difficult? How do you handle difficult people? It can be done if you make the effort to understand how to handle situations. You may not solve the problem, but you may be less frustrated!

Personality Characteristics

Personality is the total of the emotional and behavioral characteristics that make you who you are. The following is a list of difficult characteristics and behaviors.

- **Always right:** This person rarely loses an argument.
- **Bragging:** This person dominates others, and feels better about himself or herself by boasting about an accomplishment.
- **Clowning:** This person seeks recognition and attention. He or she tries to avoid reality by not taking anything seriously.
- **Competing:** Winning is the most important thing to this person. The feelings of others become secondary.
- **Conforming:** This person believes to get along, he or she must surrender all opinions to others.
- **Cranky:** This person has a long list of irritations, which he or she lets others know. Others are warned directly or indirectly they must not frustrate this person.

- **Cynical:** This person takes disappointments out on everyone else when things fail to turn out the way they were intended.
- **Dominating:** This person tries to control others' lives.
- **Gossiping:** This person tries to raise his or her self-esteem by talking about other people and spreading rumors.
- **Indecisive:** This person avoids mistakes and responsibility by not making a decision or by dragging out the decision process as long as possible.
- **Lonely:** This person shuts off from others. He or she tries to convince himself or herself that this is the best way.
- **Resentful:** This person spends energy expressing annoyance toward others.

Ways to Cope With Personality Characteristics

It is important to remember that when dealing with difficult people, you cannot control their behavior. They are responsible for their reactions to the situation just as you are responsible for your reaction. Identify who owns the problem by one or more of the following.

- Who is being directly affected by the situation?
- Who is making the complaint?
- Whose goals are being blocked by the problem?

(over)

Once ownership has been established, remember to use open, direct communication. (Use the following.)

- Give the person eye contact and your full attention.
- Empathize — try to see the other person’s point of view.
- Be patient — let the speaker finish.
- Clarify or restate (paraphrase) what is being said to avoid misunderstanding.
- Validate the person’s feelings.
- Be open and flexible. Be willing to accept the other person’s ideas.
- Use “I feel” and “I think” statements to help prevent the other person from feeling defensive.

When you have tried all of the above, remember it is OK to agree to disagree!