DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES
Participant Handout

You will gain an understanding of the most common types of difficult people and what motivates their behaviour, along with tips on dealing with difficult people, and an opportunity to recognize any areas of personal development!
COMMON TYPES OF DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES

The Bully

**KEY MOTIVATORS:** POWER and LOOKING GOOD. Bullies enjoy getting their own way. They have a need to be right. They want to look good in front of the people that are important to them. Usually bullies are masking their own insecurities and lack of self-esteem through their attacks on others. Their comments are frequently critical and often rude. They mistakenly perceive that in putting other people down, they are raising themselves up.

- **Stand up to them.** Assert your position and express your opinion without getting into an argument. Try to stay calm and respectful, even in the face of rudeness.
- **Respond to friendly overtures.** Reciprocate their kindness in like.
- **Don’t embarrass them.** When bullies look foolish or bad in front of others, it simply heightens their need to make themselves look good.
- **Get the result by sharing the credit.** Let them feel that it was their idea, and you will get your way more often than not.
- **Stroke their ego.** Ask them about their favourite subject – themselves
- **Remind them to be a ‘team-player’.** Show them how working with others will help them get their job done faster, and how good they’ll look when a project is completed successfully.

The Gossip

**KEY MOTIVATORS:** ATTENTION and POPULARITY. Gossips want to have the spotlight on themselves, and their self-esteem gets a boost by the mistaken belief that their audience really likes them, just because people are listening to their stories. In fact, people may not like a Gossip personally, but might simply enjoy listening to details of behind-the-scenes goings-on in peoples’ lives. Gossips seek to make themselves look interesting vicariously through the sharing of personal things going on for other people.

- **Share your discomfort.** Let someone gossiping know that you are uncomfortable with the discussion and you would rather concentrate on discussions that would enhance people’s lives, instead of the negative situations of other people.
- **Don’t confide in them.** Personal details should only ever be shared with people that have earned your confidence… and maintain it through respect for your privacy.
- **Don’t participate in listening to their stories.** If a gossip starts sharing a story, simply say “I’m not interested in listening to this,” and leave the conversation if the topic does not change.
- **Defend the people who aren’t present.** If you happen upon a conversation where gossip is occurring, you could take a stand for the person being discussed. Point out the positive aspects of that person, and share how one can’t always be sure that the things being shared are true.
The People-Pleaser

KEY MOTIVATORS: HELPING OTHERS and BEING LIKED. People pleasers are typically passive, and have a high need to avoid conflict. They have a strong desire to take care of and nurture others. The thought of upsetting someone or letting someone down is very upsetting for them. They believe that if they do nice things for people, then people will like them.

- **Challenge their over commitments.** People pleasers often over commit because they are uncomfortable saying no. Help them understand that you count on them to keep their promises. Show them that saying yes and not delivering is disappointing and unhelpful.

- **Encourage them to express their displeasure.** If they are unhappy, people pleasers tend to bottle up their feelings and react through passive/aggressive behaviour. Make honesty safe. Subtle sarcasm can indicate displeasure. You may have to ask how they’re feeling.

- **Coach them on standing up for themselves.** Practice responses in advance so that they don’t ‘choke’ under pressure and find themselves at a loss for words.

- **Help them recognize when other people are taking advantage of them.** People pleasers tend to not set boundaries, and as a result some people will make unreasonable demands of them.

- **Teach them how to say “no”.** Coach them on how to tactfully decline requests on their time and energy. Role-play scenarios and have them say ‘no’ in a respectful and diplomatic way, so that they are ready when the time comes.

- **Remind them they can’t please everyone.** Help them see that if they say “yes” to everything, they really say “no” to everybody. If necessary, help them draw out a list of their responsibilities, the time and energy required for each task, and realistically assess what they are capable of doing in a day.

The Martyr

KEY MOTIVATORS: SYMPATHY and ATTENTION. Martyrs enjoy people commiserating with them and acknowledging the tremendous hardships they’ve endured. They derive pleasure from people feeling sorry for them, and recognizing the sacrifices they’ve made. They need people to see what they’ve endured.

- **Cautiously offer empathy.** Use your own best judgment; for if they start to think that you will give them the sympathy they crave, you are going to be the first person they go to for venting and complaining.

- **Say ‘no’ to their volunteering.** Recognize that martyrs are not good at setting personal boundaries and saying ‘no’. Tell them “I would prefer that you go home and relax and come into work refreshed the next day.” Find someone else to help out.

- **Help them to manage their time better.** If they say they are ending up working late into the night and over the weekend because they can’t seem to get the work done, coach them on improving their time-management. Try to identify ways that they can be more efficient.

- **Do not fall into the trap of feeling guilty.** Ask yourself: “Have I taken advantage of them? Am I an unfair person? Have I abused this relationship and made unreasonable demands?”

- **Recognize any truth in their complaints and address the issue.** Perhaps they are pointing out a problem that is genuinely challenging; use this as an early-warning system and address the issue before it grows.
The Complainer

KEY MOTIVATORS: MISERY LOVES COMPANY. Complainers have a tough time being optimistic; the glass is always half empty. They end up bringing people down by expressing their displeasure with the world. They spread negativity everywhere they go.

- **Create an environment where complainers feel heard.** Often complainers simply need someone to listen to them. Frequently they are not demanding change, and perhaps do not even want things to change; they just like to be heard. So, do take the time to make them feel listened to.
- **Listen without passing judgement.** Listen while the complainer is talking. If you have to say something, rephrase what you’ve heard to see if you’ve really understood it. For example, “So the problem is that some people are having longer breaks than you”.
- **Assign them to problem-solving tasks.** Ask complainers what they want done or how they would improve things.
- **Protect your own attitude.** Negative thinking is contagious. If you associate long enough with any type of thinking or philosophy, it is very difficult not to begin to agree with it. When necessary, take a break and think things through for yourself.
- **Don’t join and begin to complain yourself.** When listening to a complainer you may realize that you agree with some of their complaints. You may even want to begin to complain yourself. Beware, and realize that nothing encourages a complainer more than agreement.

The Know-It-All

KEY MOTIVATORS: ARROGANCE, ACCURACY and CONTROL. Know-it-alls believe they are superior to others; more intelligent, better informed and more experienced. They enjoy it when others look “less” than them. They have a strong need to have things go their way, and will bully and push towards this. They also have a high desire for logic, data, accuracy and precision in everything they do.

- **Don’t be too quick to dismiss their ideas.** Sometimes you will find that know-it-alls have exactly the information you need so be willing to listen even if you find their attitude annoying.
- **Acknowledge their expertise.** Show your respect for their knowledge by paying attention to what they are saying. Paraphrase their statements to show your understanding.
- **Know your facts.** If you ‘ball park’ any data, know-it-alls may dismiss you as being incompetent. Check your details in advance, and make sure everything you are saying is accurate, complete and thought out.
- **Point out errors with care and diplomacy.** Don’t challenge them directly. It is certainly possible they are wrong, but they will never think so. Practice gently offering alternative viewpoints or ask them a question that encourages them to consider something more openly.
- **Try not to point out your own credentials & expertise.** They will either have their feelings deeply hurt, since their identity rests to a large part on being ‘right’ or being ‘an expert’. The other possibility is that they will dig in their heels in resentment and fight back.
- **If you think you’re right, don’t let them dominate the conversation.** Request the opportunity for equal air time so that you are also able to express your viewpoint.
Are There Any Behaviours You May Notice In Yourself?

I might be a… BULLY.
“I love the ‘Big Win’. I’ll make sure that my ideas get pushed through. I’m tough, I go after what I want and I get it. I can be a little hard to get along with, but if people can’t take the heat, stay out of the kitchen! They need to relax sometimes and just take a joke.”

I might be a… GOSSIP.
“People love to listen to my stories. I’m popular and have lots of friends. I’ve got the ‘down and dirty’ on just about everyone, and I’m well connected to the action. If something’s going on, I know about it. If you need to know the behind-the-scenes scoop, I’m the first one you should come to.”

I might be a… PEOPLE-PLEASER.
“Nothing makes me happier than seeing the people around me taken care of. I don’t need a lot, and I prefer not to have a lot of attention. It’s nice to have people say ‘Thank you’ for all the help I give them, but I understand that they get busy sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I’m being taken advantage of, but who am I to kick up a fuss? I’m just glad to help.”

I might be a… MARTYR.
“No one really knows how hard I work. If they did, they’d be thanking me all day long and apologizing for taking advantage of me. I’m happy to help out, but I’d like more recognition of my contributions. I don’t have it as easy as everyone else. I’ve got my own problems. Because I’m such a nice person, I’m always getting work dumped on me. Someday, they might just learn the hard way to appreciate me…I don’t really mean that, I just wish they’d see how much I do for them.”

I might be a… COMPLAINER.
“I can see the problems we’ve got. People have their heads buried in the sand about how bad things are. In fact, most people are so ‘Pollyanna’ that they’re going to get hit really hard when the bad news goes down. Me? I’m ready for it. I don’t get disappointed because I never expect very much. After you get burned enough times, you start to realize that people are out for themselves. I know what I’m talking about. I’m not getting suckereded again.”

I might be a… KNOW-IT-ALL.
“I find it amusing when people think they know more than me. In fact, I find it amusing right up to the point when they challenge my obvious insight and expertise. Then, I get upset. Who do they think they’re dealing with? I’m a highly credentialed person with considerably more experience than them. Plus which, I’m just generally smarter. I don’t have the time or patience to deal with incompetence. People would do well to simply listen when I speak and take notes. I know I’m dealing with an intelligent person when they agree with me. It’s refreshing.”
What are common “Difficult Behaviours”?

Below are examples of negative behaviours and qualities of character that might cause a negative emotional reaction in other people. As an exercise in self-reflection, you may wish to review the list and check off examples of behaviour you see in yourself. Then, answer the questions below and take steps to modify and improve your interactions with people.

- Hurtful to others
- Demanding
- Disrespectful
- Cuts others off
- Rude
- Profanity
- Pushy
- Arrogant
- Raising of voice
- Threatening
- Untrusting
- Judgemental
- Controlling
- Finish sentences
- “I’m always right!”
- Argumentative
- Racist/ Prejudiced
- Off-colour jokes
- Sexist behaviour
- Easily enraged
- Not a ‘team player’
- People disagree

- Attention-seeker
- Break your word
- Take all the credit
- Gossip
- ‘Kiss up’
- Play favourites
- Ignorant
- Dumps work
- Easily offended
- Won’t finish tasks
- Forgetful
- Disorganized
- Sloppy or messy
- Vain
- Condescending
- Self-absorbed
- Interrupts others
- Wastes time/money
- Inconsiderate
- Melodramatic
- Blames others for mistakes

- Hides upset
- Won’t share your opinion
- Indecisive
- Risk adverse
- Passive/ Aggressive
- Sabotage
- Won’t take action
- Irresponsible
- Socially awkward
- Painfully shy
- Laugh inappropriately
- Poor personal hygiene
- Stand around socializing
- Can’t take a compliment
- Lazy
- Play the martyr
- Speak too quietly
- Speak too slowly
- Unfair
- Won’t follow directions
- Put people down
- Perfectionist
- Unemotional
- Uncaring
- Stern
- Rule-follower
- Complains
- Negative
- Obsessive
- Won’t change
- Critical of others
- Fear mistakes
- Worrier
- Too intense
- Not courteous
- Speak too quickly
- Nit-picky
- Won’t ‘chit-chat
- Speak in a monotone
- Hide mistakes
- Poor listener
- Impatient

Are there any other specific ‘difficult behaviours’ that you do that might be upsetting to others?

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How Can YOU Improve?

Start by selecting ONE behaviour to ELIMINATE. Over the coming days begin to notice when you demonstrate this behaviour. Stop yourself, and think of another approach to the situation. Remember, start small, and practice makes perfect.

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