

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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Is there someone in your life – a relative, a co-worker, a customer – who drives you nuts? Do you feel your blood pressure start to rise just thinking about that person? Can an encounter with him or her ruin your whole day? Or does it seem like you're simply surrounded by people who are impossible to get along with?

Nearly everyone can point to a particular person, or a situation involving certain individuals, which makes them want to tear their hair out or run out the door screaming. Usually it's not possible to run away, so we try different strategies to get along, or to get that person to leave us alone. When those strategies fail, we may end up with nightmares or ulcers, or even get into a fight or quit the job.

There is a better way! You can learn how to deal with those difficult people in your life without losing your sanity, your health, your relationships, or your job.

The first step is to understand the reasons for difficult behavior. For example, small children become difficult when they are tired, hungry, sick or uncomfortable (too hot, too wet). Children can also be difficult when they are bored, or have too much going on. Well, guess what? Fatigue, hunger, illness, physical discomfort, boredom and overstimulation are all causes of adult misbehavior, too.

Some other reasons for misbehaving: looking for attention, wanting to be in control, or needing to feel powerful and important. Alcohol or drug abuse often leads to difficult behavior. Another cause of bad behavior is feeling threatened, e.g. one's "territory" is being encroached upon. And often people behave badly simply because they feel lonely, or misunderstood. But how to identify the cause of the difficult behavior?

As Yogi Berra said, "*You can observe a lot by watching.*" Notice how the person reacts to other people, or at different times of the day. Is their behavior situational, or are they always difficult? Do certain things seem to set them off? What does their body language tell you? If you can't figure it out by watching what they do, then try listening to what they say. Listen "between the lines" to hear what they may be afraid to say.

Observing and listening also takes your focus off your own reactions, and will help you respond less defensively. Their hostility may have nothing to do with you! Even if you feel personally attacked, keeping in mind the reasons for their behavior can help you choose to not take it that way. If you feel threatened, try breathing deeply or counting to 10. If that doesn't help, tell the person you are feeling uncomfortable, and ask them to back away, or lower their voice. Sometimes people don't realize they are intimidating.

Listening patiently, without getting defensive, often goes a long way in dealing with difficult behavior. But some people are so difficult that nothing seems to work. Next month we'll address strategies for dealing with bullies, narcissists, and other truly difficult types of people.