



How to Handle Difficult People

“Believe it or not, you can stay calm, defuse conflict and keep your dignity”

Doesn't it feel like we deal with difficult people in all aspects of our lives? We have all been there, trying valiantly to reason with an incredibly difficult person. The situation proves frustrating, maddening and sometimes even frightening. It is not always easy to reason with an unreasonable person, however, there are proven strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult people.

1. **Listen** – Listening is the number one step in handling “unreasonable” people. Everyone wants to feel heard and no progress can take place until the other person feels acknowledged. While you are listening, really focus on what the other person is saying, not what you want to say next.
2. **Stay Calm** – When a situation is emotionally charged, it is easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment.
3. **Stick to the Facts** – Keep a short, clear narrative that is not bogged down with too much detail or emotion.
4. **Ask what you can do to resolve the issue** - by asking this you show that you want to be helpful and want to seek a resolution.
5. **Do not Judge** – You do not know what the other person is going through. Chances are, if a person is acting unreasonably, they are likely feeling some sort of vulnerability or fear.
6. **Reflect Respect and Dignity Toward the Other Person** – No matter how a person is treating you, showing contempt will not help productively resolve the situation.
7. **Do not Act Defensively** – This is tough. You are naturally not enjoying the other person saying nasty things or things that you know are not true. You are going to want to defend yourself and it is not going to help as the other person is emotionally revved up.
8. **Do not Return Anger with Anger** – Raising your voice or speaking disrespectfully to the other person will add fuel to an already heated situation. Use a low, calm, even monotone voice and do not try to talk over the person.
9. **Set Limits and Boundaries** – While some of the above tips have encouraged listening and letting the angry person vent, you also have the right to be assertive and say, “Please don't talk to me like that”.

Give yourself credit for going through an uncomfortable situation. It takes a lot of energy not to overreact when someone else is behaving badly.

