

Dealing with Difficult People

1.. BEHAVIOR:

Rambling -- wandering around and off the subject. Using far-fetched examples or analogies.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Refocus attention by restating relevant point.
- b.. Direct questions to group that is back on the subject
- c.. Ask how topic relates to current topic being discussed.
- d.. Use visual aids, begin to write on board, turn on overhead projector.
- e.. Say: "Would you summarize your main point please?" or "Are you asking...?"

2.. BEHAVIOR:

Shyness or Silence -- lack of participation.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Change teaching strategies from group discussion to individual written exercises or a videotape
- b.. Give strong positive reinforcement for any contribution.
- c.. Involve by directly asking him/her a question.
- d.. Make eye contact.
- e.. Appoint to be small group leader.

3.. BEHAVIOR:

Talkativeness -- knowing everything, manipulation, chronic whining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Acknowledge comments made.
- b.. Give limited time to express viewpoint or feelings, and then move on.
- c.. Make eye contact with another participant and move toward that person.
- d.. Give the person individual attention during breaks.
- e.. Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."

4.. BEHAVIOR:

Sharpshooting -- trying to shoot you down or trip you up.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Admit that you do not know the answer and redirect the question the group or the individual who asked it.
- b.. Acknowledge that this is a joint learning experience.
- c.. Ignore the behavior.

5.. BEHAVIOR:

Heckling/Arguing -- disagreeing with everything you say; making personal attacks.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Redirect question to group or supportive individuals.
- b.. Recognize participant's feelings and move one.
- c.. Acknowledge positive points.
- d.. Say: "I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to hear from others," or "It looks like we disagree."

6.. BEHAVIOR:

Grandstanding -- getting caught up in one's own agenda or thoughts to the detriment of other learners.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Say: "You are entitled to your opinion, belief or feelings, but now it's time we moved on to the next subject," or "Can you restate that as a question?" or "We'd like to hear more about that if there is time after the presentation."

7.. BEHAVIOR:

Overt Hostility/Resistance -- angry, belligerent, combative behavior.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Hostility can be a mask for fear. Reframe hostility as fear to depersonalize it.
- b.. Respond to fear, not hostility.
- c.. Remain calm and polite. Keep your temper in check.
- d.. Don't disagree, but build on or around what has been said.
- e.. Move closer to the hostile person, maintain eye contact.
- f.. Always allow him or her a way to gracefully retreat from the confrontation.

- g.. Say: "You seem really angry. Does anyone else feel this way?" Solicit peer pressure.
- h.. Do not accept the premise or underlying assumption, if it is false or prejudicial, e.g., "If by "queer" you mean homosexual..."
- i.. Allow individual to solve the problem being addressed. He or she may not be able to offer solutions and will sometimes undermine his or her own position.
- j.. Ignore behavior.
- k.. Talk to him or her privately during a break.
- l.. As a last resort, privately ask the individual to leave class for the good of the group.

8.. BEHAVIOR:

Griping -- maybe legitimate complaining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Point out that we can't change policy here.
- b.. Validate his/her point.
- c.. Indicate you'll discuss the problem with the participant privately.
- d.. Indicate time pressure.

9.. BEHAVIOR:

Side Conversations -- may be related to subject or personal. Distracts group members and you.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a.. Don't embarrass talkers.
- b.. Ask their opinion on topic being discussed.
- c.. Ask talkers if they would like to share their ideas.
- d.. Casually move toward those talking.
- e.. Make eye contact with them.
- f.. Comment on the group (but don't look at them "one-at-a-time").
- g.. Standing near the talkers, ask a near-by participant a question so that the new discussion is near the talkers.
- h.. As a last resort, stop and wait.