

## How to Deal with Difficult Personality Traits

Sooner or later, we are all bound to come across certain personality traits that pose a challenge to us, whether it's frequent gossiping, constant complaining, aggression or hostility, or outright selfishness. These personality traits could be displayed by people we hardly know, or more unfortunately by people we know very well and/or have to see on a daily basis. While it is possible for someone with a difficult personality to change, the chances of them deciding to do so are unlikely. The best approach that you can take is to learn how to best deal with those traits that pose a



significant challenge to you in ways that won't cause you unnecessary stress or hurt. The following are some suggestions for how you can cope with others' difficult personality traits:

- ◆ **Remain calm.** When emotions are high, that's when your ability to think clearly and assess the situation rationally is at its lowest. Take a few moments to step away, do some deep breathing, imagine a peaceful scene, take a walk, whatever helps you get your heart rate and blood pressure back to a normal level. Revisit the situation when you feel you are prepared to approach things with an open mind.
- ◆ **Don't take it personally.** People act the way that they do as a result of their past experiences. Behaviors that have worked for them in the past to control a situation tend to continue because they have learned that these behaviors are effective in getting them what they want. Regardless of how hurtful or frustrating someone may seem to you, remind yourself that their behavior has less to do with you and much more to do with their lack of knowledge about and understanding of healthy social skills.
- ◆ **Use empathy.** As difficult as it may be during a heated or uncomfortable exchange with someone, try to understand where the other person is coming from. For instance, someone who is always trying to show off their knowledge or belittle your ideas may really be doing so because they feel insecure about their own self-worth. Someone who is constantly expressing negativity may have had some very difficult or traumatic life experiences that led them to believe that the world is cruel and unforgiving. Chances are, if you are finding it difficult to get along with this person, plenty of other people are too. Imagine how sad it must be for this individual to go through life forming such poor interpersonal relationships with others.



♦ **Find areas of agreement.** Look at your exchange with this person as an opportunity to learn more about what you can do to get him or her to respond favorably. Allow the other person to vent his or her frustrations (to a certain extent) and keep a calm and steady demeanor to defuse the situation. Ask questions to get more information and practice active listening skills (healthy eye contact, non-threatening body language, etc.). Don't accuse, threaten, insult, or argue—this will only make the situation worse. Find out what each of you wants to achieve and talk about how you can best work together (or separately) to reach your goals.

- ♦ **Use "I"-Statements.** Beginning a statement with "I" instead of "You" is more likely to be received by the other person as an expression of your feelings rather than a personal attack on them. Talk to the challenging person about how you feel when they say or do certain thing (Ex: "I feel frustrated/hurt/confused when you criticize my ideas without even hearing them out."). Do so in a calm and non-threatening manner and with the intent to clear up possible miscommunication (even if you're quite certain the other person knows exactly how he or she is coming across to you). People with challenging personality traits may not be used to people calling them out for their behavior, which may be why they've been able to get away with it for so long.
- ♦ **Know when to let it go.** Sometimes, it's best to pick your battles and know when to laugh something off. For example, trying to convince someone that he or she is too negative, too aggressive, or too much of a know-it-all may be a lost cause since most of the time, people with these personality traits lack the self-awareness it takes to recognize how hurtful, harmful, or unhealthy these behaviors are. Keep a confident, non-judgmental, solution-oriented attitude and accept the fact that even though you can't make anyone change, you can change how you respond to them.
- ♦ **Get help.** People with challenging personality traits can sometimes tap into unresolved issues we may still have from our past. If you find that you are having a particularly hard time dealing with a challenging individual or group of individuals, it may be helpful to talk to a mental health professional about your difficulties. In doing so, you may be able to identify some personal issues that you weren't even aware were affecting you.