

# How to Deal with Difficult People

Naval Services  
FamilyLine  
CORE Library

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*There are people who  
take the heart out of  
you and people who  
put it back in.*

*Elizabeth David*

## Thoughts to Ponder

What is my definition of a difficult person?

Who are the difficult people?

1. Normal people in a difficult situation
2. Difficult people in every situation
3. Mentally ill

Who is responsible for dealing with the difficult person in the Family Readiness Group?

What is my goal in dealing with the difficult person?

Why is it important to handle difficult people?

# Prevention

*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.  
Benjamin Franklin*

## **Body Language Tips**

Look at the person's face.

Use their names.

Have the appropriate look on your face for what you want to convey. Not what you feel.

## **Phone Tips**

Have caller ID, call waiting, a headset, an answering machine, a cell phone and a relative who lives far away. (Disable the keypad sounds on your cell phone.)

Screen your calls but try not to avoid them. Just take a deep breath and answer it.

Always return calls.

Make it obvious this is a meeting with rules and expectations.

If you're a big enough group to have bylaws – write them. Make them easily changeable. And if they are not helping you, change them.

Use a classroom style layout; don't sit in a circle. Don't use a head table.

Use nametags every meeting. Have a welcome table with a greeter. Introduce all newcomers.

Use a written agenda for every meeting no matter how small. Make it minimal so people have to pay attention to take notes. Save new business until last.

Tell board members to sit scattered among the group and give their reports standing at their places.

All leadership spouses should always say something during a meeting. Always thank anyone who volunteered to do anything. Mention them by name.

Keep board and committee meeting work out of general meetings and keep committee meeting work out of board meetings.

Don't say “Any questions?” after every announcement.

Make it known that ending on time is an important goal. Set aside social time for after the meeting.

Remember that this is a FRG meeting, not a therapy session or a town hall meeting.

*The welfare of each of us  
bound up in the welfare  
of all.*

***Helen Keller***

# Types of Difficult People

## **Sherman Tank**

Makes decision based on facts of the moment and then needs to defend decisions against all “attackers.” Uses physical intimidation, unleashes overwhelming force to attack you.

## **Snipers**

Have a strong sense of how people should act. Hides behind the victim. Uses laughter/humor to criticize.

## **Exploders**

Actions stem from frustration at being forced to make a decision. Adult tantrum. Yell, scream and denigrate other.

## **Complainer**

Sentences filled with “and” or “but.” Feel has little control over life. Thinks that anything good that happens is because of good luck or favors from someone. They are blameless and morally perfect because they pointed out the problem, but it is up to you to solve it.

## **Clam**

Withholding information gives them the freedom to sabotage decisions at a later date. Silent, unresponsive, and confused.

## **Super Agreeable**

Needs to be liked and works hard at it. Very nice. Lets you decide. Volunteers to do everything, but fails to follow through.

## **Negativist**

Have little control of their lives. Don't trust anyone who has power. “I just want everyone to be as miserable as I am.” Tears down morale with their pessimism. “That won't work; it's not a good idea.”

## **Bulldozer**

Powerful; feel they don't need others. Knowledgeable. Always has the right answer. Patronizing. Takes disagreement as a personal insult. Rolls over facts to reach the conclusion they know is right.

## **Balloons**

Instant experts. Phony experts. Feel they know the truth.

## **Indecisives**

Pleasantly helpful. Shows concern about others feelings. Can't make a decision out of concern for how it will affect other. Feel that if you ignore a problem it will go away. Stallers.

# Problem People

*Hold your friends close and your enemies closer.  
Sun Tzu, 6th Century Chinese General*

## **Snipers**

Usually sit in the back row. Sit some board members there.

## **Gossipers or Constant Talkers**

Ask them to be your greeter.

## **Discussers**

Want to discuss every minute detail of a project or do committee work during the meeting. Say, "This is sounding pretty complicated. Let's come back to it after the meeting."

## **Critics**

Want to change something that has already been planned. "You should've done it this way." Say, "That's a great idea. Too bad it's too late for us to do that. We'd love to have you help out with the next event." Use NO sarcasm. Be totally innocent and sincere.

## **Flatterers**

Just say thank you and PUT THEM TO WORK. But don't ever give them any special treatment.

## **Tactless**

Ask them to do a job that requires no social interaction, like keeping the email roster.

## **Whiners**

Be blank, no nodding your head or making sympathetic noises. Shift the focus to someone else or change the subject as nicely as you can.

## **Angry**

Say, "I'm sorry that happened to you." Don't become defensive or it will become a two-sided argument.

## **Needy**

Describes the problem they want help with in front of the whole group, sometimes in great detail. Say, "That sounds complicated. Come see me after the meeting." A subset of the Needy is the Perpetually Needy. As soon as you solve one crisis for them they have another. Say, "What have you decided to do?"

## **The Truly Upset**

Listen.

If they are more than difficult – get advice from a professional.

*To often we underestimate the power of a touch, smile, a kind word,  
or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.  
**Leo Buscaglia***

## More Tips

Avoid criticizing by saying, “I feel...” not “You are...”

Make a memory. Doesn't mean it always has to be a good one. Bad times often can draw people together better than good times. The goal is to draw us together. “We'll never forget this.”

### ALWAYS

- Smile
- Be upbeat and encouraging
- Appear interested
- Appear to be having fun
- Keep your perspective
- Keep your sense of humor
- Thank anyone who does anything
- Listen

### NEVER

- Be sarcastic
- Be condescending
- Be bossy
- Be defensive
- Be argumentative
- Appear to be bored or uninterested
- Roll your eyes or make faces
- Be negative

## Words of Wisdom

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*  
– **Mother Teresa**

*We are all special cases.* – **Albert Comus**

*It's easier for people to see it your way if you first see it their way.* – **Jack Kaine**

*You can work miracles by having faith in others. To inspire the best in people, choose to think and believe the best about them.* – **Bob Moawad**

*People need your love the most when they appear to deserve it least.* – **John Harrigan**

*Never give up on anybody.* – **Hubert Humphrey**

*Believe that there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Believe that you might be that light for someone else.* – **Kobi Yamoda**

*Make one person happy each day and in forty years you will have made 14,600 human beings happy for a little time at least.* – **Charley Willey**

*Think of other people. Service other people sincerely. No cheating.* – **Dalai Lama**

*The test of thankfulness is not what you have to be thankful for, but whether anyone else has reason to be thankful that you are here.* – **Unknown**