



Dealing with Difficult People

Whether it's a coworker, person in the community or even a family member, most people have encountered individuals who can be quick to anger and hard to please. Consider the following steps – you may be surprised at how quickly a person can change from being angry and demanding to calm and cooperative.

What You Can Do

Paraphrase. When the person finishes talking, say the following (or something similar to the following):

"Let me make sure I understand what you said. You are feeling _____ (state a feeling you observed) because _____."

Describe the situation as told by the other person in your own words. Keep the first series of things you say short and clearly share what emotions you are seeing or hearing. If the exchange is happening in a place where lots of people are around, offer to go to a private place to talk about the situation.

Seek a solution. If the person agrees that you have the right idea, discuss how the issue may be resolved. If the person remains angry, acknowledge their anger and restate that you would like to help resolve the situation. Offer to talk with them after you both have had time to think about possible solutions. You could say something like the following:

"I can see that you are very angry about _____. It almost seems like you don't see that there is anything that can be done right now to help you. How about if I call you tomorrow afternoon after we've had time to think about how to resolve this?"

Be sure to follow through with the return phone call!

Forgive. After dealing with the difficult person, it is important for you to forgive them for their part of the problem and to forgive yourself for your part of the problem. When you do not do this step, each time you interact with this person, old feelings may resurface that will affect your ability to interact positively around them.

Know when to step away. Sometimes, a resolution is not always possible. If you notice the person becoming increasingly upset or remains difficult, consider stepping away to let them cool off, or reach out to a third party to intervene. If the situation is happening in your workplace, consult with Human Resources or your Supervisor.

For more information about conflict resolution or dealing with difficult people, contact your Employee Assistance Program.

