

# TECHNIQUES FOR OUR TRIGGERS

## Dealing with Difficult People

Trigger	Possible strategies
<p><b>Hostile or aggressive</b></p> <p>Examples of this behavior include insults, belittling for mistakes, unwelcome teasing, spreading rumors, or bullying. Body language can convey aggression, such as crossing arms, pointing fingers, or ignoring someone when they speak. Purposely keep a coworker from doing their job properly is a form of hostile behavior. Aggressive and hostile behaviors can easily cross the line. If you feel uncomfortable or fearful, end the interaction politely and talk with your manager or HR.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Listen. Aggressive people may calm down if they feel that someone is really hearing what they have to say.</li> <li>› Call out the behavior. You can say, “This is bullying,” and ask them to stop the behavior.</li> <li>› Don’t engage. End the conversation in a diplomatic way. Don’t get pulled into an argument.</li> <li>› Have assertive (not aggressive) posture and body language. Keep some distance between the two of you. Use a firm voice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Negative or Pessimistic</b></p> <p>Examples of this behavior include a tendency to disagree with the group or criticizing decisions. It may also appear as regularly voicing negative opinions that go beyond constructive criticism or looking for reasons why things will fail. Chronic complaining without a desire to find a solution is common.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Make them part of the solution. Have them get involved in problem solving.</li> <li>› Try to see their negative perspective as a good tool for troubleshooting.</li> <li>› Avoid defensiveness and arguing.</li> <li>› Ask questions if they make statements that aren’t true. If a statement is true, have them explain their rationale.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Withdrawn or passive</b></p> <p>Examples of this behavior include letting others take the lead and being reluctant to make decisions. Passive behavior can be the result of shyness, fear of revealing a lack of competency, or a desire to avoid competition. It also can be used to avoid responsibility or a reprimand. It can be a way to play the victim role, blame others, or sulk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› If you believe the person is shy or lacks confidence, ask for their input in a way that’s comfortable for them.</li> <li>› Ask open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. Give them time to answer. Don’t fill the silence with conversation.</li> <li>› Ask them to describe what role they will play.</li> <li>› Encourage them to take the lead in areas where they have expertise.</li> <li>› Support decision-making by pointing out that mistakes are okay and can be used to their advantage.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Unmotivated or won't take initiative</b></p> <p>Behavior may be seen as being overly cautious and playing it safe. Or it may seem more like apathy and disinterest in investing more than the minimum. Examples include not carrying one's share of the work and never volunteering to do more than the basics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Present requests as a set of choices not a way to opt in or out.</li> <li>› Tie rewards to accountability.</li> <li>› Point it out and give credit when they do take initiative, even if it is in a small way.</li> <li>› Consider that not stepping up might be due to a lack of knowledge or training.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Overly agreeable but doesn't deliver</b></p> <p>Examples of this behavior include agreeing to take on projects, but not following through, being undependable, possibly, being unorganized, and tending to blame others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Make sure they are clear on expectations for their follow through. Ask if they understand what is needed and when it is needed.</li> <li>› Follow-up in writing. A short informal email can prevent misunderstandings and hold the individual accountable for what they have promised to do.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Arrogant or condescending</b></p> <p>Examples of this behavior are always being the expert, a need to be right, criticizing others, talking down to others in front of a group, using demeaning words, a harsh tone, or sarcasm. It's not so much about what they say but how they say it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by condescending behavior. Ask the person questions confidently; point out your knowledge.</li> <li>› Be prepared with all your facts when meeting someone who always knows best or is always right.</li> <li>› Avoid challenging their ideas, just add yours; "That's a good idea. Here's what I am thinking."</li> </ul>

Interactions with a difficult person are all unique. If these strategies do not seem to work and the situation is worsening, it may be best to end the interaction politely and talk with your manager.



# TIPS FOR INTERACTIONS

## Dealing with Difficult People

The key to successfully dealing with people who display difficult behaviors is in changing the one thing you have control over—yourself. These tips are strategies that you can apply in communication and interactions to help you with a difficult person. They may not change the situation, but they might make it easier on you.

### Active listening

- › **Focus your attention:** Focus on the content of what the person is saying and seek to understand their perspective. Be aware of your own concerns, but commit to keeping an open mind and listen without judging, arguing or evaluating.
- › **Ask open-ended questions:** Ask questions to make sure you understand clearly. Avoid yes-or-no questions – they don't give a person a chance to explain themselves. Asking open-ended questions permits more dialogue and an open exchange of ideas.
- › **Pay attention to non-verbal cues:** Do their facial expressions and body language tell you something different than what you're hearing? If the content of what they're saying doesn't match their non-verbal cues, it's good to clarify their true meaning rather than making assumptions.
- › **Paraphrase the issue from their point of view and ask for clarification:** Repeat what you heard back to them in your own words to ensure understanding. If not, ask for further clarification or explanation.

### Face-to-face communication

- › **Use "I" statements:** Start a sentence with the word "I" and express something about yourself – what you believe, prefer, want to avoid, etc. (*"I work better in a quiet environment."*) "You" statements (*"You talk so loud; it's hard for me to think."*) are more likely to make people defensive. An "I" statement phrases your perspective in a direct way that avoids blaming.
- › **Facts, not judgments:** Speak with facts, not judgments. When you separate your personal judgment from your message, you can more easily solve the problem without putting people on the defensive.
- › **Body language:** Show that you are engaged in what's being said by making eye contact and having an open but professional posture when speaking. Avoid aggressive body language (crossing your arms, frowning, or rolling your eyes), and mind your facial expressions.
- › **Be clear and direct:** Say exactly what you mean instead of making vague suggestions, which leaves room for misunderstanding and resentment when the person doesn't know what you need.

## Virtual communication

- › **Temper your tone:** Before you hit send, read your email out loud – if it sounds sarcastic to you, it probably is. Try not to write emails when you're angry – take a few deep breaths or step away so you can respond clearly and professionally. Always assume that someone else will see your email. If your boss or colleague saw this email, how would they interpret it?
- › **Be mindful of your audience:** Make note of who is on the email exchange before you confront or criticize someone over email. Is this something everyone needs to read, or is it best to send to the person individually? Consider your audience before you “reply all”.
- › **Be straightforward, but respectful:** Extend the assertive communication skills to your written communication, too. You can communicate clearly and directly without being rude. Instead of, “If you had read my last email, you would know what to do”, try, “I’ve attached the instructions. Shoot me an email if you have questions.”
- › **Offer to discuss directly:** Use a different communication method, if needed. For virtual teams, try a phone call or video chat. In the office, offer to schedule a meeting face-to-face to discuss in more detail.

## Conflict resolution

- › **Give up the need to be right:** You don't need to be right to find a workable solution. If you feel like you have a point of view that can't be negotiated, take some time to evaluate yourself before meeting. Do you really need to hold tightly to all aspects of your position? Would it be OK to let some things go? Try for flexibility.
- › **Look for common ground:** Look for what you have in common or shared goals. It could be that you both want to do well on your project. You both may want to have a comfortable work environment. Once you identify the things you agree on, you may be able to work together to find a solution that works for both of you. If not, you may just be able to better understand and appreciate where they are coming from.
- › **Find workable, realistic compromises:** Discuss the options that are on the table and brainstorm new ones. Not all options may be satisfying for both parties, so you may have to compromise. Be willing to let go of some of your preferences to make an effort to solve the bigger problem. You don't have to give in to all of their demands, but you don't have to insist that they give in to yours either. Try to fight the problem, not the person.
- › **Table the subject if necessary:** Since you're dealing with someone who can be challenging for you, interacting with them may not be as simple as these points suggest. If emotions run high and the discussion is no longer productive, you can suggest taking a break. Keep your tone and body language respectful as you make this suggestion. Make sure to set a definite time to come back to it so they know you are not just being evasive.