

Working with Difficult Behavior

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Learn about human behavior to understand your own behavior, others' behavior, and cope better with difficult behavior.

First, accept that you cannot change others' behavior. Instead of forcing a behavior change, you can influence others to want to change their behavior. Everyone is responsible for their own quality of life. Do not rely on others for happiness. Instead, take control of your own happiness.

This article presents characteristics of difficult behavior and techniques to stop or prevent it. It also explores ways to communicate in order to build better relationships.

There are many opinions on the definition of difficult behavior. Some examples of difficult behavior are: acting overly defensive, overly critical, aggressive, and passive aggressive. This article explores each category in more detail.

Overly Defensive Behavior

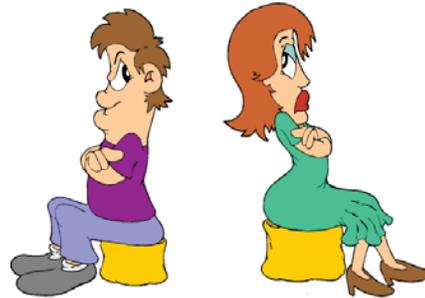
Defensive behavior is caused by a pattern of thinking. Instead of talking about the topic, the defensive person is preoccupied with thinking that others see them as ineffective or incompetent. The defense is to overly defend one's actions by talking excessively and aggressively about why their actions were correct. They try to avoid being seen as unworthy or incompetent.

The defensive person is often insecure and truly believes that everyone is out to "get them" or embarrass them in front of a group. Defensive behavior will occur when one feels vulnerable.

With time, defensive behavior causes people to lose credibility and respect. Eventually, others may refuse to work with this person. The defensive person will eventually not be regarded as part of the team (or crew).

Leadership & Hypercritical Behavior

Leadership is a positive behavior. A leader is often relaxed, effective, and charming. Others listen to leaders and learn how to act from their behavior.



Hypercritical behavior is a negative behavior. Hypercritical people are extremely "picky" and want the finished product just so. This behavior creates stress for co-workers and subordinates because projects are often rejected or asked to be redone.

The hypercritical person focuses on control. They will eventually lose this control because people will start refusing to work with them or discount their opinion.

Aggressive & Passive Aggressive Behavior

Aggression and assertiveness are different concepts. Aggression is intended to cause harm or pain. Assertiveness is stating opinions and feelings, and influencing others.

Aggressive people can be hostile and intimidating and can create an unsafe work environment. Do not argue with an aggressive person because they will become angry. Do not ignore aggressive behavior because it will continue and amplify. Instead, inform the aggressive person how their behavior affects others in a stern yet caring tone. Remain confident and in control. Stop the conversation completely if verbal abuse begins.

Change working partners if the situation does not improve. Talk to Human Resources when the aggressor is the supervisor. If the behavior continues, consider changing jobs.

Passive aggressive behavior is resistance to authoritative requests. Resistance may be resentment, stubbornness, procrastination, or intentional failure of assigned tasks.

Address the behavior by speaking with the person. Ask them why assignments are not being com-

pleted. Tell them how their actions affect others. Offer help and advice. Avoid being confrontational because they will act defensive and may not retain the information that is discussed. Be sensitive.

Values

Values are beliefs that people hold strong emotions for. They are created by experience, such as family or upbringing. In the work environment, you must cooperate with people who have different values than you. This can be challenging. People will defend their values and beliefs without even knowing it. Also, people are often unaware of what values they have.

Do some self-reflecting to try and understand your own values. Ask yourself what situation caused you to act a certain way. What emotions were you feeling? More importantly, why were you feeling that emotion? Try to understand others' values. Don't take things personally at work.

Tips to Avoid Being Difficult

Actively listen by repeating out loud what you heard. Ask the person to restate what they said if you are confused. Doing these two things will greatly improve communication.

Ask for time to respond when a question requires significant thought. Allowing time to think often helps to create a more appropriate response.

Consider attending workshops on communication, listening skills, and team-building. Everyone benefits from these classes. Gaining better communication skills helps in any environment.

Stress is a Contributing Factor

Stress is a physical response to a perceived threat. This threat could be fear, such as perceiving there is not enough time to complete a task, or fear of failure. Behaviors indicating stress are: exhaustion, change in appetite, headaches, or change in sleeping patterns.

Do not have important conversations when feeling stressed. Instead, cope with the stress in healthy ways, such as meditation, exercise, or spending time with family.

Tips for the Supervisor

There are other reasons why an employee may exhibit difficult behavior. Employees might believe that a task is beyond their ability, may not know what is expected of them, may believe an idea won't work, or may not feel comfortable talking to their supervisor.

Document when the behavior begins. Be aware of personal issues such as divorce or loss of a loved one. Inform employees of support services, such as human resources, when personal problems interfere with work. Do not fire an employee without extensive investigation. There are laws protecting employees undergoing personal problems.

Document employee behavior, conversations, and explained consequences for their behavior. Terminate an employee whose behavior does not improve after issuing appropriate warnings and if no personal problem is present.

Motivation and Happiness

Keep employees motivated and happy by assigning new tasks. Expect excellence and be clear on your expectations. Be proactive by informing all employees of the consequences of difficult behavior. Provide constant feedback. When confronting negative behavior, use specific, clear, and direct statements and provide examples. Be professional and not emotional.

Everyone has (and uses) defense mechanisms. However, people are usually unaware when they are using them. Think carefully before acting to recognize your own defense mechanisms and avoid using them.

Don't give up on this process. Be persistent and patient. Time and effort is needed to change thought patterns and behavior.

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