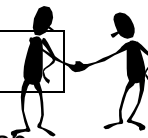




# Dealing With Difficult People: The Art of Getting Along



Mindy Turner, Curry County FCS Agent

Have you ever heard the saying, "Can't we all just get along?" The answer is **YES**, we can. It may be hard, but it can be done. We encounter difficult people all the time. It may be at work, home, or a 4-H meeting. Therefore, it is important that we are prepared. First of all, let's define conflict.

### **Conflict is:**

- A behavior or threat by one person or group directed at the territory, rights, interests, or privileges of another party.
- Normal, natural and inevitable in everyday life.

### **There are 3 types of conflict:**

- Physical
- Social
- Psychological

### **How do you handle conflict?**

#### **Do you:**

- Reduce it
- Avoid it
- Maintain it at the current level
- Escalate it

**Can conflict be resolved?** Have you ever been in a difficult situation and thought, "there is no solution or we will never get this resolved?" Everyone has been faced with this challenge and believe it or not, conflict can be resolved. There are 8 steps that can be used when dealing with any type of difficult person.

**Step 1:** Be as calm as possible. "Blowing up" in an already "heated" situation is not going to solve the problem. Staying calm is contagious. If you appear to be at ease and calm, it will put other people at ease.

**Step 2:** Define your needs. Make certain you know what you will need to get the job done.

**Step 3:** Communicate your needs. Nobody is a mind reader. Sharing the bigger picture may make a difference in attitudes.

**Step 4:** Listen. I mean really listen and not just pretend you are listening when you are really just thinking of what to say next. Make sure you understand what the person is saying.

**Step 5:** Brainstorm. Involve the group in a brainstorming session, where no ideas are too ridiculous or impossible to consider. Make sure ideas generated that could cause conflict are not discounted.

**Step 6:** Evaluate your alternatives. Look at all of the possibilities as they are presented.

**Step 7:** Try your solution.

**Step 8:** Re-evaluate and revise when appropriate.

***Difficult people learn to be difficult because that kind of behavior works for them. It keeps other people off balance, and to some extent, controlled by the difficult person.***

Let's face it, we are not all the same and it would be a boring world if we were. People have different characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. There are people who create difficult situations that cause conflict by their behaviors. It may be intentional and it may be unintentional. Nevertheless, it happens. There are 7 categories of behavior and coping strategies to deal with those behaviors.

<b>BEHAVIOR TYPE &amp; CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>COPING STRATEGIES</b>
<b>Complainer</b> * Feel powerless in the management of their own lives. * Have ideas of how things ought to be and a sense of injustice that they are not that way. * Persistent complaints about others and situations make them appear blameless...at least to themselves.	* Listen attentively. * Be prepared to interrupt and take control of the situation. Complainers love to ramble. Switch to problem solving. * Change the complainer's train of thought to something productive. They then become part of the solution instead of part of the problem.



BEHAVIOR TYPE & CHARACTERISTICS	COPING STRATEGIES (cont.)
<p><b>Super Agreeable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Have an unusually strong need to be liked by others.</li> <li>* Try to avoid open conflict (by always agreeing) because of fear of losing approval or acceptance.</li> <li>* Difficulty arises when they are less than candid. You believe that they are in agreement with you, but they let you down.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Make honesty non-threatening. They are afraid you don't want to hear truth.</li> <li>* Don't allow them to make unrealistic commitments when you know they couldn't possibly fulfill them.</li> <li>* Listen to their humor. They often hide their truth there.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Negativist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Object to everything.</li> <li>* Assert that whatever you propose wont work or is impossible.</li> <li>* May completely deflate any optimism you might have for a project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Avoid getting into their attitude.</li> <li>* Don't hurry to propose solutions.</li> <li>* Use the approach of being devil's advocate. Try saying "what if we..."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Silent Unresponsive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* React by not responding when asked a question or need a commitment.</li> <li>* Some use this approach to avoid unpleasant interpersonal situations.</li> <li>* Others use it as a type of aggression in refusing to talk to others who want to communicate with them.</li> <li>* Some quiet people are simply good listeners and should not be considered non-responsive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Ask open-ended questions, not yes/no.</li> <li>* You can sometimes get them to participate by commenting on what is happening in the discussion, for example, "Sharon, you haven't said too much today. What are your ideas on this topic?" Then implementing using the "friendly, silent stare."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Indecisive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Can ruin a program because they put you off until it is too late to do anything about it.</li> <li>* They put off making a decision until the decision is made for them.</li> <li>* They also wont let go of anything until it is perfect, which is never.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Place all the alternatives in rank of importance.</li> <li>* Give them lots of support after they have finally made a decision.</li> <li>* They need to experience a success in what they attempt to do.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hostile and/or Aggressive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Need to demonstrate that they are always correct.</li> <li>* Are impatient with others who don't share their beliefs.</li> <li>* They are irritated when others resist their ideas.</li> <li>* Have a strong sense of what is best for others.</li> <li>* They "put down" (demean) others to demonstrate strength and/or confidence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* It is very important to not surprise this person. This action could get you hurt or injured. If you take him or her by surprise, he may just spin around and hit you.</li> <li>* Give them time to run down. If at all possible, get them to sit down. This will make them less aggressive.</li> <li>* Lower your voice and both of you sit down. This puts you both at the same level. When they are calm, discuss the problem and express your opinion; don't attack them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Know-It-All Expert</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* They believe and want you to believe that they know all there is to know about anything worth knowing.</li> <li>* They are usually condescending, imposing or pompous.</li> <li>* They may work at defeating your self esteem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Do your homework on the subject. If information is written somewhere, find the source in advance and show it to them in writing.</li> <li>* Listen to and acknowledge what they say, but you don't have to agree.</li> <li>* Avoid being a counter-expert and let them be the expert they think they are.</li> </ul>

**Coping with Difficult People:**

1. Appraise the behavior and decide in which category or combination of categories they person fits.
2. Stop wishing they were different. You can not change the behavior of another person, but what you can do is change the way you deal with that behavior.
3. Achieve distance between yourself and the difficult person. Do this either in a mental or physical way until you can decide what to do.
4. Decide how to interrupt the interaction where the behavior pattern is being demonstrated.
5. Execute your strategy.
6. Monitor the effects of your plan.
7. Assess your own behavior as it relates to the difficult person. Could you be acting in a difficult manner and creating the uncomfortable situation?
8. If your plans don't work, abandon them.



***"We can each be difficult people in the right situation."***