

How to handle 'difficult' people

Ever been on the receiving end of a 'difficult' person? It can be very...difficult! It's like having a rain cloud permanently hanging over your head, giving you a feeling of unease and dread, or even making your life a misery, so you feel stressed and ill. Being able to choose and minimise the interaction with a 'difficult' person is a lot easier than dealing with them regularly e.g. a boss, key client or mother-in-law!

You can get to the point where you either avoid the 'difficult' person or give as good as you get back or spend time talking about them all the time to others. This is because they seem to have this uncanny knack of pressing your 'buttons' i.e. your sensitive spots. Often this is because they remind you of someone or a previous situation, but it is your unconscious mind that notices not your conscious mind. Your imagination can work itself into a frenzy, working overtime, and you can get stressed just by thinking about them, less than ideal, with them taking away even more of your power than they already have.

Difficult behaviour by others pushes you out of your comfort zone and the cause is often someone with different values and beliefs to your own. Behaviour that you perceive as 'difficult' can simply be a behaviour different to how you would do something e.g. frank and direct communication. Less mild difficult behaviour can be more overt e.g. manipulative and undermining; two faced and cutting; condescending and sarcastic; aggressive, or even silent and non-communicative so you don't know where you stand.

So how can you deal with a 'difficult' person? Firstly, remember that often they are experiencing emotion that they don't know how deal with and hence give it to you as an unwilling recipient. This is called projection or transference. In other words, it's not personal to you, you just happen to be on the receiving end. Neither Schools nor families teach people



how to deal with difficult or uncomfortable emotions, so we do what is easiest and project them onto someone else so they're not burdening us any more!

Secondly, it is key to separate the behaviour from the person, because people do the best they can in life. Often underneath a 'difficult' person's behaviour is insecurity and low self-esteem.

Thirdly, remember that people always do things for a reason, so even if a behaviour feels widely irrational or inappropriate to you, there will be some positive intention behind how they are behaving, e.g. seeking attention, protecting themselves to stay safe, etc.

How does coaching help you handle 'difficult' people?

- Coaching provides a safe and confidential space to express yourself without fear nor judgement
- The focus is on insights, clarity then actions that will positively address the situation, rather than just venting your frustration as you do with friends, family and colleagues, when you can go around in circles
- Coaching helps you to be your most resourceful self, so that you are well-equipped to deal with 'difficult' people
- Role play is a tool used in coaching that can help prepare you for difficult conversations
- Coaching helps you find your own answers – the coach asks you incisive questions to help you to think things through and work out simple steps forward
- Coaching reminds you that every behaviour has a positive intention and how to get the learning, even from very difficult and challenging situations and people
- NLP coaches provide tools so that you understand the differences between how people communicate and what to do about it



10 simple tips to help you handle 'difficult' people

Here's 10 simple tips that will help you deal with 'difficult' people

1. Identify what it is that makes someone's behaviour 'difficult' for you. Ask yourself "*What is frustrating me about this person's behaviour?*"
2. Identify and build on the common ground that you share with them
3. Seek to understand where they are coming from by asking clarifying questions e.g. "*What do you mean by that, please can you explain so I understand you better?*"
4. Try using the NLP tool; the 'meta-mirror', it's very effective to help see the situation through their eyes and identify what to do about it (e mail us and we'll send it to you)
5. Notice your internal 'state' and dialogue and what effect these have on you. Jotting down notes and observations can help, especially to prevent yourself making assumptions and jumping to conclusions which can only fuel your flame of frustration even more
6. Take time out to relax and recharge yourself, even if it's just listening to music or having a relaxing bath
7. Imagine that your dialogue with a 'difficult' person is a mirror. Try matching them exactly; body language, similar words and tone & energy to build rapport and then lead them in the direction that you want to go, e.g. speaking calmer and less aggressively



8. Use the time that you would have wasted venting your frustration about a 'difficult' person on asking the advice of people who have been in a similar situation or get coaching to identify actions that will lead to positive change
9. When you can't avoid being with a 'difficult' person, disassociate from the situation, e.g. when speaking with them, imagine that you are observing yourself and your emotions and them from a distance
10. Remember that you ALWAYS have choice; what you do, how and when you respond, even if you feel that your power is being taken away by them

Handling 'difficult' people can be challenging, but even small breakthroughs can be one of the most empowering things that you experience. Standing your ground and achieving a 'win win' takes courage but you feel fantastic!

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