

15 Ways To Deal with Difficult People Without Losing Your Cool

Story by Emma McMillan • 10mo 5-8-2025

1. Breathe deeply and maintain your composure. © iStock/recep-bg

Taking deep breaths and staying calm can help when dealing with difficult people. For instance, if a colleague is challenging or confrontational, pause to breathe deeply and keep your cool. This enables you to manage your emotions and avoid reacting impulsively. Staying calm allows you to listen better, respond thoughtfully, and control the situation. This approach helps you handle the difficult person more effectively and sets a positive tone for resolving the conflict without making things worse.

2. Set boundaries ©Provided by Bolde

It's essential to set boundaries when dealing with tough folks so you can stay calm. Let's say you have a coworker who keeps interrupting your work with small stuff. By politely telling them you need time alone to concentrate, you're clarifying what you need. Setting boundaries like this enables you to handle challenging people better, keeps you feeling peaceful, and makes your relationships healthier in the long run.

3. Practice Patience ©Provided by Bolde

Practicing patience is very effective when dealing with difficult people because it helps you stay calm and composed. For example, if a coworker complains about a project, let them finish speaking instead of interrupting or getting defensive. This shows you respect their viewpoint and want to understand their concerns. Patience can reduce tension and lead to a more open and productive conversation. It helps you find common ground and solutions more quickly without letting emotions control the situation. *

4. Try to Empathize © Shutterstock

Understanding difficult people means putting yourself in their position and seeing things from their point of view, including their feelings and reasons. For example, think about a colleague who constantly criticizes your ideas during meetings. Instead of getting defensive or angry, try to understand why they act that way—maybe they're feeling unsure or unappreciated. By recognizing their emotions and worries, you can react with kindness and understanding, which can help improve communication and trust. This approach can also calm down disagreements and make interactions more positive.

5. Offer solutions, not just complaints. © Shutterstock

When dealing with difficult people, staying positive and focusing on fixing the problem rather than just complaining about it is essential. For example, if someone keeps interrupting meetings, instead of getting upset, suggest a solution, like having a rule where people raise their hands to speak or giving each person a specific time to talk. This helps set boundaries and makes the situation better for everyone. By coming up with solutions, you show that you're good at communicating and willing to work together, which can make things smoother and less tense.

6. Practice active listening ©Provided by Bolde

Difficult people often want someone to listen to them. When you practice active listening, you show that you care about understanding what they're saying. This can help ease any tension and make the conversation more positive. For instance, if your friend always talks about their problems, try to listen without interrupting and ask questions to show you're interested. This makes them feel important and appreciated. It can make your talks more helpful and less complicated in the future!

7. Stay Positive ©Provided by Bolde

Staying positive is helpful when dealing with difficult people because it keeps you focused on finding solutions. For example, if a team member is always critical and negative about a project, try not to get discouraged or defensive. Instead, point out the good parts and suggest solutions. By responding with optimism and encouragement, you can steer the conversation toward what is going well and how you'll fix any problems. This positive attitude reduces negativity and encourages teamwork, making it easier to handle the situation calmly.

8. Reflect and learn from the experience. ©Provided by Bolde

When dealing with difficult people, reflecting and learning from it is essential. For example, if a coworker keeps putting down your ideas in team meetings, instead of getting upset right away, take a moment to think about it calmly. Ask yourself why their behavior bothers you and if there might be reasons behind what they're doing. Then, use this understanding to develop ways to handle similar situations in the future. You could talk to the coworker privately about the problem or get help from a manager or someone you trust. By thinking about and learning from what happened, you can better deal with challenging situations and stay calm.

9. Choose your battles wisely. ©Provided by Bolde

Sometimes, it's best to avoid arguing with someone, especially if they're stubborn and you know you won't change their mind. For example, if a coworker always finds fault with your work, it's not worth arguing about every little thing. Instead, look at the main issues they're concerned about. By doing this, you can avoid unnecessary arguments and maintain a happier atmosphere at work.

10. Find common ground ©Provided by Bolde

Even if you don't see eye-to-eye, try finding things you both like or care about. For instance, if you're debating with someone who thinks differently, look for things you believe in. By focusing on these common grounds, you can make conversations more friendly and open, making it easier to handle the situation in a positive way.

11. Know when to walk away. ©Provided by Bolde

Recognizing when it's time to step away from a tough person is essential for keeping yourself calm and happy. For example, if someone keeps being mean or unfair to you, even after you've tried talking to them nicely, take a break from them. Walking away doesn't mean you're giving up; it just means you realize that sticking around isn't helping. It's all about ensuring you're taking care of yourself by setting limits and focusing on your well-being so tricky people don't bring you down.

12. Seek support from others. ©Provided by Bolde

If your boss keeps criticizing your work or asking for too much, chatting with a coworker who's been through similar stuff can calm you down. They might share tricks they've used to handle the same problems or explain why your boss acts that way. Plus, having someone on your side can make you feel more confident. Then, you can talk to your boss calmly and work things out instead of getting upset. Help from others can encourage you to handle challenging situations confidently and professionally.

13. Be assertive, not aggressive. © iStock/FG Trade

It's important to handle difficult people with assertiveness rather than aggression. For example, if a colleague keeps interrupting you in meetings, instead of getting mad right away, you can calmly address the issue. You might say, "I value your input, but I'd like to finish my point first." By staying calm and speaking up assertively, you show you're not okay with being disrespected while also keeping things peaceful.

14. Use humor when appropriate. © Provided by Bolde Media

Using humor can help calm tense moments, ease stress, and help you see things differently. So, when dealing with someone tricky, try to find something funny about the situation. It leads to a better outcome! But remember, it's crucial to think about how the other person might feel and what's happening around you. Sometimes, jokes can come across as rude or like you're not taking things seriously. If you're unsure, it's safer to skip the jokes.

15. Keep your emotions in check. © Provided by Bolde

When dealing with challenging people, it's essential to control your feelings. If you get too emotional, it can mess up your thinking and make fixing things that much harder. For example, if a family member always annoys you, try not to take it personally. Sure, it's easier said than done but one way to control your emotions is to practice mindfulness. Focus on your breathing and stay in the moment. This helps you not get carried away. Also, remember that the difficult person might be struggling themselves, not intentionally trying to hurt you.

