

# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

'Difficult people' are those that stress you out whenever you have to deal with them. It could be a boss, a spouse, a co-worker or even a teen!

Here are some tips to reduce your stress level:

- Picture a label on them which reads: "*It's not just you I upset, it's everyone!*"
- Tell yourself their unpleasant behaviour comes from their own problems coping with life.
- Think of them as having a disability, maybe a disease like a green fungus growing on their brain
- Accept them the way they are, don't waste time trying to make them reasonable. It won't work.
- Ask yourself:  
*"Is this a difficult person who is always difficult?" Or:  
"Is this a good person having temporary problems. Are they ill, or going through a rough time?"*
- Don't hope that the difficult person will change
- Keep looking for new ways to react to them, while staying in charge of your own responses.
- Look for the humour in each situation
- Learn to avoid saying and doing things that bring out stressful behaviour
- Encourage people's positive responses
- Keep in mind that really difficult people often have a personality disorder. They may be 'borderline' narcissistic, sociopathic/psychopathic.
- Not sure? Keep a record of the behaviour, then describe it to your doctor or a counsellor. Get a handle on the diagnosis, and hints on what to do.

## HOW TO BE ASSERTIVE

If another person is causing you stress and you want them to change or stop doing something, you have **THREE** choices. You can be: **Passive, Aggressive or Assertive.**

- *Passive:* You let people dump on you because you're not sure what to do
- *Aggressive:* Raise your voice. You may feel better but you create conflict and usually don't solve the problem
- *Assertive:* You say exactly what's wrong, what you feel, what needs to change and what happens if it doesn't

**Only assertive works to reduce stress.**

Think:

- Who is the *person*? • When does it happen? • What exactly bothers you about what goes on?
- How have you dealt with it so far? • What do you fear might happen if you try to take charge?
- What exact result do you want? Be as specific as possible, for example: "*My teenager never puts the dishes away after supper. I end up doing it. I'm afraid if I ask him to do it, he will get angry. I would like him to help with this chore.*"

The **D.E.S.C.** system: easy to remember:

D—Describe the situation,

E—Express your feelings,

S—Specify what you need changed,

C—Consequences—list them. Here's an example:

1. **I Observe**—Describe the other person’s behaviour: *"John, you’re leaving all the cleanup for me to do."*  
Make a firm, simple statement of fact, no judging, blaming or criticizing
  2. **I Think/feel**—Use non-threatening, factual words, and express feelings with 'I' statements: *"I feel upset and angry when you don't clear your dishes."* (Focus on the *action*, not the *person* as the problem).
  3. **I want**—Specify what you want changed, when and why. Instead of saying: *"You haven't cleaned up in weeks. Why don't you ever do it?"* make a specific request and attach a time. Say: *"I would like you to clear the dishes tonight."* Or: *"Life will be a lot more fun if you would help to clear up now."* Request, don't order.
  4. **If you don't—then**— Outline clearly and calmly what will happen. *"If you don't help, then I will scream at you/poison your coffee."* But seriously, don't make the consequence too unpleasant, this increases people's resistance to changing. Try consequences which match the problem, something like: *"If you don't help clear up, I will no longer cook"*. It's often best to give people *their own reasons* why the situation should be changed, and say why it can help them too..  
Afterwards, check to see if they have really understood.
- Rehearse these ideas in your mind or in front of a mirror, or write your own script in advance. It helps if you develop your self-esteem, and can relax yourself in tense situations.
  - Body language is important. Stand close but not too close, look the person in the eye or at a place on the bridge of their nose. Speak softly

*"One of the greatest victories you can gain over people is to beat them at politeness"* - Samuel Johnson