

Dealing with Difficult People

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Learning Objectives

- Describe two theories that help explain why “difficult” behaviors can be challenging
- Learn and practice different strategies for de-escalation
- Describe steps one can take to protect themselves

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What Makes Some People “Difficult?”

Turn to the person next to you.
Describe a specific situation where you had to deal with a person you found “difficult”.

What did they do?
How did it impact you?

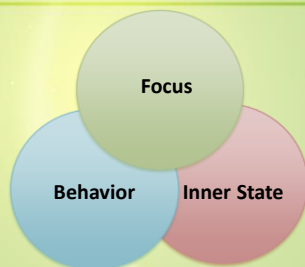
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3 Vital Questions

1. Where is your focus?
(Problems or outcomes?)
2. How are you relating?
(Self-focused or other-focused)
3. What actions are you taking?
(Reacting in the moment or future focused)

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Dealing with Difficult People

3 Vital Questions

1. Where should you shift your focus?
(Problems or outcomes?)
2. How would you now relate?
(Self-focused or other-focused)
3. What actions would you take?
(Reacting in the moment or future focused)

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Managing Your Inner State

Your inner state can impact your ability to handle difficult situations:

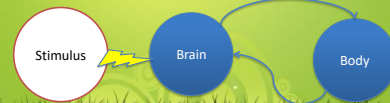
1. It can support or undermine your ability to choose the best behavior
2. It can cause a reaction in the other person. This is a biological response called "mirroring".

Our Neurophysiology

Having some familiarity with the structure and function of the human nervous system can help you understand how mirroring works, which can help you manage difficult situations.

Neurophysiology of difficult situations

- ✓ Nerves communicate throughout the body.
- ✓ Information being communicated can reflect the other person's state (e.g. pain, happiness)
- ✓ Our system can confuse which signals come from within, and which come from the environment.



Mirroring Neuron Effect

- ✓ Individuals in close interaction commonly, spontaneously, and unconsciously copy (mirror) each other's facial expressions and postures.
- ✓ When expressions associated with a particular emotion are copied, both people may experience the same feeling (inner state).
- ✓ Examples: Reflexive smiling; yawning; tightening of the face as a result of excruciating pain, escalating behaviors.

- How does your inner state affect the other person?
- What can you do to manage your inner state in difficult situations?

Dealing with Difficult Behavior Strategies



Strategies Road Map

- Put yourself in other person's shoes
- Demonstrate empathy
- Find common ground
- Practice mindfulness
- Use the LAST strategy
- Set appropriate boundaries

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Put Yourself in the Person's Shoes

- Remember what it is like to be scared, anxious, or fearful
- Anger is common, normal, frequently occurring emotion
- Anger often occurs after being hurt, insulted, or when a person is afraid
- Emotions intensify when someone strongly cares about the situation



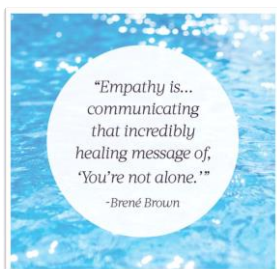
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Demonstrate Empathy

- Use positive non-verbal communication (90% of all emotional info. and 50% of spoken info.)
- Use a soft, warm, and caring tone of voice
- Maintain eye contact and nod
- Share your intention to help
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Do not interrupt



Empathy, not Sympathy



Change Your Words, Change Your World



Find Common Ground

“To Understand what another person is saying, you must assume that it is true and try to imagine what it could be true of.”
 – George Miller

- Everyone has their own truth
- Instead of trying to bring someone from *theirs* to *yours*, look for a place where those truths overlap, or touch up against each other
- This is a space you can work from

Practice the Art of Mindfulness



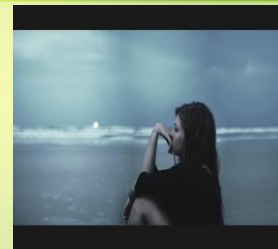
- Pause, take a deep breath
- Be attentive and aware of the present experience in non-judgmental and accepting way
- A non-judgmental approach = ability to observe stressful events more objectively and refrain from attaching a meaning or evaluation to it
- Mindfulness allows one to witness their thoughts and feelings more objectively without being immersed in them

Use L.A.S.T. Strategy



LISTEN

- To understand versus waiting for your turn to speak
- People often need to vent before they can calmly explain their concern



APOLOGIZE



SOLVE

- What are your expectations?
- What would make this right for you?
- What can we do to resolve this concern?

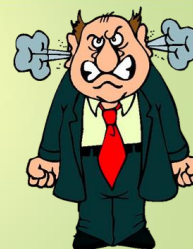


THANK

- Thank you for taking the time to share your concern.
- Thank you for giving us an opportunity to learn and improve from your experience.



Is it ok
to set
boundaries?



De-escalation within Boundaries

- ALWAYS call for help when needed.
- Switch on your skills by first taking a few deep breaths.
- Remember, you are not going to react to this situation, but rather respond.

Focus

I. Environment (situational awareness):

- Maintain own safety
- Physical objects
- Physical space
 - Always have a clear pathway of exit
 - Watch for feeling of being trapped

II. Body skills:

- Physically step back
- Tune into your body language

Setting Boundaries

- **Clear and defined boundaries without being perceived as threats or as a "show of power"**
 - ✓ Aggressive behaviors towards staff or anyone else is unacceptable. We will have to end our conversation if these behaviors continue.
- **Limits must be presented with care**
 - ✓ Remember, often aggression is simply a response to feelings of fear, anxiety, or lost dignity – feeling respected will often help dissipate these feelings of anger
- **Authoritative approach**
 - ✓ When one has to ensure everyone's safety
 - ✓ Security

Remember

- Communicate clearly – use short simple statements or questions, be authentic, & repeat as necessary
- Maintain a helpful attitude and demeanor
- Most humans have a strong desire to be Heard, Seen, & Respected
- Not to become argumentative or defensive
- Not to react to the anxiety/anger but rather respond
- It is ok to set boundaries
- And.....the key is to manage your inner state

**“Life is not what it’s supposed to be.
It’s what it is.
The way you cope with it is what
makes the difference.”**

(Virginia Satir)

**Coping and caring for yourself means nurturing yourself
*the way you nurture others.***

**It means paying attention to your physical, emotional,
mental, and spiritual needs so you can be
healthy, balanced, and self-aware.**

❖ **AWARENESS – Body & Mind**

❖ **Increase the use of positive self-care plans**

Awareness Tools

- ✓ **Sensory anchors** – utilize visual imagery. An effective sensory anchor pulls the focus away from the distressing material or memories and brings pleasant and safe memories to the forefront where they can be used for support. (Rothschild, 2006)
- ✓ **Grounding techniques** – look at different objects in the room to bring their mind back to the here and now.
- ✓ **Pushing away with the eyes** – extreme openness with the eyes can also make the boundary between the client and helper a little hazy. This allows for an opportunity where the helper can take in too much or feel to vulnerable.

Awareness Tools, continued

- ✓ **Keeping one’s edges** – Good skin awareness can help facilitate optimal self-contact and help in separating the helper’s state from the patient’s state.
- ✓ **Controlling Empathic Imagery** – To picture or not to picture. Helper needs to be in charge of the imagery in their mind.

(Rothschild, 2006)

Self-Care Plan

- Nutrition, exercise, sleep, personal therapy, relaxation, play-time, and social support network
- Positive venting
- The role of community
- Utilize resources

General Resources

- Self forgiveness
- Awareness, implementing new tool, and/or self-care plan
- Talking with colleague
- Talking with supervisor
- Talking with social worker
- Talking with personal therapist
- Being proactive is important
- And remembering.....

“Whether you are new to your field or a long-time veteran, your energy, empathy and creativity are resources that must be nurtured, safeguarded and replenished”

(Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996)

