

# Handling difficult people



- Listen
- Separate the issue from the person
- Keep your cool, be respectful
- Ask questions rather than make statements
- Be assertive rather than obnoxious
- Don't blame the person or the Department
- Try to solve the problem, or get someone who can
- Don't take it personally
- Incident reporting
- Training

## Listen

People want to be listened to; often they just need to 'get it all out' and then they're satisfied. When listening, ensure your body language and facial expressions show that you are listening. Face them, maintain eye contact, sit/stand up straight and don't close yourself off to them by, for example, folding your arms. Demonstrate that you are actively listening by repeating in your own words what they have said. This will also ensure that you understand their problem.

## Separate the issue from the person

Address the problem not the person by depersonalising the issue. Using 'I' in place of 'you' is a helpful tool as nobody can dispute what you think or feel. For example 'You did not send that email' can make the person defensive instead try 'I did not receive the email'. Make it clear that you are not questioning their actions, but trying to resolve the issue.

## Keep your cool - be respectful

Remain calm and composed; think through how you are going to respond carefully before you say anything. Look at the situation from their point of view. Everybody you interact with deserves your respect. When responding to an issue be sincere and show you are interested by maintain eye contact, giving them your full attention and having open body language (e.g. no folded arms/crossed legs).

## Ask questions rather than make statements

Asking questions is a great tool for getting people to solve their own problems. It can allow them to realise the answer to the problem themselves without embarrassing them or offending them by pointing it out.

## Be assertive rather than obnoxious

You are not to be taken for granted and abused. You can assert yourself without being rude. Remain professional and stick to your facts.

## A common sense approach

Because circumstances can vary so widely, it is impossible to cover every scenario or provide advice on every practicable step you could take to avoid, prevent or deal with incidents involving difficult people. Take a common sense approach to your own health and safety and treat others in the same manner you wish to be treated. Be alert, and act in a healthy and safe way to yourself, your colleagues, your clients, and all others you meet during your working day.

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## Don't blame the person or the Department

Don't blame the person with the issue for any problems that arise. Also don't blame the Department or accept blame on behalf of the Department.

## Try to solve the problem, or get someone who can

If you can't solve the problem, get someone who can. If it is an issue that cannot be resolved and they are not accepting that as an answer, find someone (e.g. a manager) who they may better accept an answer from. It is okay to say you don't know the answer, it is better to be upfront and find someone who does know. You can also take the person's contact information and get someone to call them back with an answer if the issue cannot be resolved then and there.

## Don't take it personally

Most of the time the problem or issue is not of your making, however when someone is standing directly in front of you it is hard not to take it personally. Remember you are there to help and you can only do your best.

## Incident Reporting

If you do feel you were treated inappropriately/in danger then report the incident to your manager and ensure it is recorded in Risk Manager. This will allow a process of ensuring the incident is appropriately managed, any learning's are shared, and gives senior management an overall view of these sort of incidents in the Department.

## Training

Managers should consider what formal personal safety training is appropriate for front line staff, depending on the risk their work presents to them.

### Active Listening

Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others. It focuses attention on the speaker. Suspending your own judgment is important. People are often not listening attentively to one another in negotiations. They may be distracted, thinking about other things, or thinking about what they are going to say next.

There are a number of techniques to create better communication:

- Remove the listening barriers (e.g. noise from an open window; side talk from within your team)
- Use appropriate body language to show you are listening
- Be quiet and letting others outline what they want to say
- Ask questions to clarify and understand what is being said
- Paraphrase what the other person has said

The benefits of active listening include getting people to open up, avoiding misunderstandings, resolving conflict and building trust. Creating an atmosphere of cooperation supports effective problem resolution.

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## Acknowledgements ([click link to see full article](#))

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