

How to Deal With Difficult People and Avoid Conflict

By [Elizabeth Scott, MS](#)

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Research shows that [supportive relationships](#) are good for our mental and physical health. However, dealing with chronically "difficult" people and maintaining ongoing negative relationships can actually be detrimental to our health. The toll of the stress can affect us emotionally and physically. Because of this, it's a good idea to diminish or eliminate relationships that are filled with [conflict](#) whenever possible. But what do you do if the person in question is a family member, co-worker, or someone you otherwise can't easily eliminate from your life?

The following are tips for dealing with difficult people who are in your life, for better or for worse.

Keep Conversations Neutral

Avoid discussing divisive and personal issues, like religion and politics, or other issues that tend to cause conflict. If the other person tries to engage you in a discussion that will probably become an argument, change the subject or leave the room. If you're unsure of whether your conversation style is too assertive or not assertive enough, [this quiz can help](#).

Accept The Reality of Who They Are

In dealing with difficult people, don't try to change the other person; you will only get into a power struggle, cause defensiveness, invite criticism, or otherwise make things worse. It also makes *you* a more difficult person to deal with.

Know What's Under Your Control

Change *your response* to the other person; this is all you have the power to change. For example, don't feel you need to accept abusive behavior. You can use [assertive communication](#) to draw boundaries when the other person chooses to treat you in an unacceptable way.

Create Healthier Patterns

Remember that most relationship difficulties are due to a *dynamic* between two people rather than one person being unilaterally "bad." Chances are good that you're repeating the same patterns of interaction over and over; changing your response could get you out of this rut, and responding in a healthy way can improve your chances of a healthier pattern forming. Here's a list of [things to avoid in dealing with conflict](#). Do you do any of them? Also, here are some [healthy communication skills](#) to remember.

See The Best In People

Try to look for the positive aspects of others, especially when dealing with family, and focus on them. (Developing your [optimism](#) and [reframing skills](#) can help here!) The other person will feel more appreciated, and you will likely enjoy your time together more.

Remember Who You're Dealing With

Seeing the best in someone is important; however, don't pretend the other person's negative traits don't exist. Don't tell your secrets to a gossip, rely on a flake, or look for affection from someone who isn't able to give it. This is part of accepting them for who they are.

Get Support Where You Can Find It

Get your needs met from others who are able to meet your needs. Tell your secrets to a trustworthy friend who's a [good listener](#), or process your feelings through [journaling](#), for example. Rely on people who have proven themselves to be trustworthy and supportive, or [find a good therapist](#) if you need one. This will help you *and* the other person by taking pressure off the relationship and removing a source of conflict.

Let Go Or Get Space If You Need It

Know when it's time to distance yourself, and do so. If the other person can't be around you without antagonizing you, minimizing contact may be key. If they're continually abusive, it's best to [cut ties](#) and let them know why. Explain what needs to happen if there ever is to be a relationship, and let it go. (If the offending party is a boss or co-worker, you may consider switching jobs.)

Tips:

1. Try not to place blame on yourself or the other person for the negative interactions. It may just be a case of your two personalities fitting poorly.
2. Remember that you don't have to be close with everyone; just being polite goes a long way toward creating harmony.

3. Work to maintain a sense of humor -- difficulties will roll off your back much more easily. Shows like "The Office," "Modern Family" and books like David Sedaris' *Naked* can help you see the humor in the dealing with difficult people, especially if they're people you love.
4. Be sure to cultivate other more positive relationships in your life to offset the negativity that these challenging relationships can bring.