



OptumHealth<sup>SM</sup>  
Behavioral Solutions

# Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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## Take the High Road Dealing with Difficult People

It would be great if we saw eye to eye with every person we encounter each day. But, let's face it, that's just not realistic. In fact, it's perfectly normal to have disagreements once in a while. When conflicts arise, or happen again and again, it's good to have some techniques ready for dealing with difficult behavior. These tips can help.

### Customize Your Response

Before you address the issue, try to understand the person behind the difficult behavior. Take a closer look at what you feel is causing the problem. If you can spot some patterns in what the person says or does, it may be easier to adjust your response to fit the person.

- **When people are repeatedly overpowering and critical, consider their motives.** They may feel a need to exercise power over others in order to attain a sense of self-worth. When you must interact with them, be friendly but firm. If you stand up to them, they'll often back down.

- **Be engaging.** Sometimes, unresponsive people avoid conversation altogether in order to avoid conflict. Try asking open-ended questions. Wait for a response. If they don't respond, be

direct and ask why. When silent types do open up, be a good listener. Don't criticize their ideas.

- **Do your homework and be prepared.** If you know someone who acts like an expert on everything, he or she might be seeking admiration. If you disagree with this person, be prepared to find out the facts and back up your argument. You could try to present your view as an alternative, so the person can save face and protect his or her image.

## Tips for Confronting the Problem

- Work out what you plan to say in advance. And, be prepared to respond to possible reactions from the other person.
- Stay calm and focus on the issue at hand. Make direct eye contact.
- If the other person becomes hostile, resist the urge to become hostile yourself. The goal is to confront the problem rationally, not to start a fight.
- Describe the problem behavior rather than judging it. For example, you could say, "You laughed at my ideas and rolled your eyes" — NOT "That was a cruel way to treat me at the meeting."
- Admit how the person makes you feel. For example, you could say, "When people ignore what I say, it makes me feel unappreciated."
- Give the person an opportunity to repeat what you say.

### Upcoming Articles

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Depression and Chronic Conditions

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Families Touched by Autism

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- **Try to acknowledge and listen to complaints.**

Sometimes, people who complain excessively just want to be heard. Offer to work with them to solve their problems, but don't accept or assume responsibility for it.

- **Get what you need.**

When people repeatedly over-promise and under-deliver, it may

be because they have a strong desire to be well-liked. Be honest and straightforward, but reassuring, when working with this type of behavior. Try to stay focused on the solution, and ask for specific information and feedback.

Addressing difficult behavior isn't easy. Sometimes, there's no avoiding the

dreaded "c" words: conflict and confrontation. But, the other "c" word — communication — is essential to working through problems. OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.



## Putting It into Perspective

When you're struggling with difficult people, it can be frustrating to see their side of the story.

- **Take a step back** and ask yourself whether their behavior is deliberate or not. Most often, it isn't.

- **Try to separate the behavior from the person.** It's possible that the person's intentions are good — in which case, they might not realize how their actions affect others.

- **Distance yourself** and see if you can find out what's motivating the behavior. Perhaps the person is just having a



bad day. So whatever issue they have will eventually pass.

- **Turn the microscope in your direction.** Have you done anything to contribute to the problem? Even though you didn't mean to upset him or her, is the difficult person reacting to you? It might help to apologize and

explain your actions, and make an effort to change your own behavior moving forward.

Intentional or not, if the difficult behavior persists over time, it may be time to confront the issue. Addressing the problem now will help reduce or eliminate it in the future.

## Resources

OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

Use the search phrase "difficult co-workers" to learn more about surviving — and thriving — through difficult behavior, and tips for dealing with different personalities and confronting the problem.

Use the search phrase "managing conflict" to learn more about dealing with conflict and confrontation, and being assertive.

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.