



# Dealing with Difficult Behaviors

ILS Training Academy

# Purpose

Everyone works with individuals that can be difficult at times. You may encounter someone at a retail store, a co-worker, a client you work with, a family member of someone you work with, or someone you just randomly met.

This interaction may be in person face-to-face or even over the telephone. At times dealing with difficult people can be extremely frustrating.

This training will help to assist you on ways and techniques that you can use when dealing with everyday people with difficult behaviors.



# Payoff...



- You will develop ways to have control of situations that are not always so favorable in nature
- Be an ambassador for the organization as you market the organization no matter who you come in contact with
- Improve on your communication skills when it comes to listening and speaking
- Learn the foundations of working with others

# Dealing With Difficult People

- Who has dealt with someone who is difficult or had an encounter with someone that may have been angry?
- Tell me about it?
- And how you handled it?

# What we know...

- We all encounter someone who can be difficult
- Take the “high road”
- Feelings of anger, frustrations, lack of patience can set in

# Principle Foundations of Working with Someone



- Kindness
- Dignity
- Respect
- Cooperation
- Harmony

\*Talent w/ Tenure, Experience, and Advice

## Dealing With Someone Who Is Upset or Angry...

- Someone may be upset for a number of reasons that either are disclosed, or not disclosed
- Change or alter the situation – may or may not work – Still try
- In fact, sometimes working in a health care situation, although we try, it can be extremely difficult to accept since it's in our nature to help others

# “Difficult Behavior” according to Webster...

*“Hard to be pleased or satisfied;  
not readily yielding; not compliant;  
unaccommodating; rigid;  
not easily managed or persuaded.”*

At times, difficult behavior can distract us  
from our mission of the organization.



# Differences With People



- Generational
- Values
- Tolerance
- Work Ethic
- Philosophy
- Outside Influences--work events, personal issues, financial state, social conditions, and family concerns that people may be experiencing.

# Our Own Minds...

- Questioning Things
- Being Spiteful
- Complaining
- Being Belligerent
- Introverted
- Extroverted
- Being Uncooperative

# Reasons Why Someone is Difficult to Deal with...

- They may view themselves one way, and want others to view them the same way
- Impacts to their lives, things they have little or no control over
- People's personal situations have an impact on how they treat others or maybe how others have treated them in the past that gets displayed
- People's own personal philosophy may make them angry

# Different Types of People



## “Mirror, Mirror....”

Present similar attributes as you, which can make it difficult to be around them.

## “Negative”

Do not become a team member to work together to help each other.  
Example: If you say, “up”, they say, “down”, if you say “left” they say “right.”

## “Gossiper”

Can bring people down by slandering individuals or an entire group.

# Different Types of People...

## “Me-Me”

- Likes to receive credit and maybe sway the ultimate goal away so that it is completely on them.
- They tend not to compromise or give anyone credit for work that has been done.
- Caregivers with a big heart

## “Time Thief”

- Engage others in some distracting conversations so that they have difficulty getting their work done.

# Different Types of People...

## “External Victim”

- Not their fault, everyone else is to blame
- Others are out to “get them”
- Refuse to accept responsibility for their actions

## “Bullies”

- Work by intimidation.
- Combative – could be physical or verbal
- May not even speak, or let you in when speaking to them

# Different Types of People



## “Situational Difficulty”

- Due to someone’s home life, medical problems, or other problems that may cause a distraction.
- Because of these distractions it will cause a lot of difficulty with cooperation.

\*Worked w/ people who show all or some of these traits?  
Difficult when trying to get task done for a limited time.

# Try the Best We Can...

*It's Important to...*

- **Correct** the Problem
- **Transfer** the Problem
- **Get Rid** of the Problem
- **Leave** the Problem if Necessary

# Steps to Take to Understand the Situation...

It's important to understand the situation.

No need to get stressed out by another's behavior until you know what the true situation is.

Is it due to their regular behavior or something out of field for their normal behavior?

There can be a lot of impacts that manifest on top of one another.

# Analyze the Reason



- Might be you who may trigger something in the other person.
- This would be something that you would need to determine.
- Or is it something else affecting their attitude.

# Try to Connect with the Person...

- Have a one-on-one and try to talk it out
- Indicate the problem and ask how you may be able to change the relationship
- Don't be negative when doing this, as your goal is to develop a rapport with that person

# Talk it out...

There are times when you may need to assume some of the burden

Try to construct what you want to say, make notes, and focus on the main issues at hand

Acknowledge the tension that exist, and try to acknowledge the tension forming behavior

Provide examples

Good technique to practice active listening skills when working or dealing with someone with difficult behaviors

# Active Listening Skills



- Requires the listener to thoroughly absorb, understand, respond, and retain what is being said
- There are different phrases of active listening
  1. Pay Attention
  2. Withhold Judgement
  3. Reflect
  4. Clarify
  5. Summarize
  6. Share

# Active Listening Skills

## Pay Attention

- Set a comfortable tone that gives the other person an opportunity to think and speak
- Allow “wait time” before responding
- Don’t cut them off, finish their sentences, or start formulating your answer before they’ve finished
- Pay attention to your body language as well as your frame of mind
- Be focused on the moment, and operate from a place of respect as the listener.

# Withhold Judgement

Requires an open mind

Be open to new ideas, new perspectives, and new possibilities when practicing active listening

Suspend judgment, hold any criticisms, and avoid arguing or selling their point right away

# Reflect



- Don't assume that you understand what the other person is saying — or that they know you've heard them
- Mirror their information and emotions by periodically paraphrasing key points
- Reflecting is an active listening technique that indicates that you and your counterpart are on the same page

# Examples of Reflection

## Example #1

- They might TELL YOU,

*“Emma is so loyal and supportive of her clients —she would do anything for them, but doesn’t always get the needed task done.”*

- To PARAPHRASE, you could say,

*“So Emma is a very caring person, but when multi-tasking it can be hard for her to prioritize your needs.”*

# Examples of Reflection

## Example #2

They may say,

*“I don’t know what else to do!”*

Or

*“I need these other tasks done.”*

You may RESPOND,

*“Sounds like you’re feeling pretty frustrated.”*

Or

*“I hear you are saying that you are frustrated....”*

# Clarify



Don't be shy to ask questions about any issue that is unclear

As the listener, if you have doubt or confusion about what is being said, say something like:

*“Let me see if I’m clear. Are you talking about ...?”*

*- Or -*

*“Wait a minute. I didn’t follow you.”*

Ask open-ended, clarifying, and probing questions to encourage the person to do the work of self-reflection and problem solving, rather than trying to guess the “right answer”

# Example of Clarifying

- *What do you think about ...?”*
- *“Tell me about ...?”*
- *“Will you further explain/describe ...?”*
- EMPHASIS is on asking rather than telling
- It invites a thoughtful response and maintains a spirit of collaboration

# Summarize

Restating key themes as the conversation proceeds confirms and solidifies your grasp of the other person's point of view

Helps both parties to be clear on mutual responsibilities and follow-up

Briefly summarize what you have understood while practicing active listening, and ask the other person to do the same

# Share



As you gain a clearer understanding of the other person's perspective, you can begin to introduce your ideas, feelings, and suggestions

You might talk about a similar experience you had or share an idea that was triggered by a comment made previously in the conversation

Both you and the person you are talking to, have a good picture of where things stand

From this point, the conversation can shift into problem solving.

- *What hasn't been tried?*
- *What don't we know?*
- *What new approaches could be taken?*

# How to Boost Your Active Listening Skills

## Limit Distractions

- Silence any technology
- Move away from distractions so that you can pay full attention to the other person
- Take note of the person's tone of voice and body language as well

# Pay attention to what is being said, not what you want to say

- Set a goal of being able to repeat the last sentence the other person says
- This keeps your attention on each statement

# Boosting Your Active Listening Skills



## Be okay with silence.

You don't have to always reply or have a comment

A break in dialogue can give you a chance to collect your thoughts

## Encourage the other person to offer ideas and solutions before you give yours.

Aim to do 80% of the listening and 20% of the talking

# Boosting Your Active Listening Skills

**Restate the key points you heard and ask whether they are accurate.**

“Let me see whether I heard you correctly...”  
is an easy way to clarify any confusion

# Did you Know?

55% of communication is body language

38% of communication is in the tone of voice

7% of communication is in the actual words spoken

I It's all about the "approach, the finesse, etc."

# Obstacles Caregiver's Encounter



- Resistance to showers and hygiene
- Refusal for help
- Constant complaining—about everything, maybe even including yourself no matter how hard you try
- Forgetting, losing things, confusions
- Extreme disorganization or chaos
- Unruly family members
- Fabrication or pretending

# The Statistics

In the United States, more than 50% of persons over age 85 suffer from some form of Dementia, the most common form is Alzheimer's

More cases may go undiagnosed because the symptoms are not recognized

Most people associate memory loss with Alzheimer's/Dementia

Few people understand that behavior issues can be a very common indicator of developing Dementia



# Difficult Behaviors Could Be Contributed To...

Underlying medical reason such as a thyroid condition

Difficult emotional event (loss of a spouse or loved one)

Irritant in the physical or social environment

Early signs or mid stage symptoms of Alzheimer's or another dementia



# How to React to the Behavior



Don't argue with your individual or loved one; this will only make it worse

It is just not important to convince him or her that they are wrong

Attempt to distract the person from hostile communication or behavior by changing the subject and re-directing their attention to something positive

Don't take the aggression or complaining behavior personally

It is not about you, but rather could be about fear, emotion, or cognitive issues the person has and may not be able to express in other ways

# How to React to the Behavior

- At times we need to try to focus on understanding and meeting someone's emotional and physical needs by validating their feelings
- Sometimes people cannot help their difficult behavior despite how it may seem
- To address issues of noncompliance with required hygiene (showers) or other scheduled requirements of daily living, don't push and order the individual
  - Give the person a sense that they still have some control over their life
  - Suggest two alternative times or other choices he/she could make
  - Speak clearly and simply, suggesting one small step at a time, so that the chore does not seem overwhelming

# How to React to the Behavior

Keep a record--learn what triggers the problem behaviors

Everyone is unique -- dealing with day to day issues at times often requires creativity

No “one size fits all formulas” -- learn on the job what works for that person and/or learning from your peers

The key is how you behave and react to the behaviors

# Scenario 1



- Mrs. Smith is an 89 year old Caucasian, widowed female whose family recently hired a caregiver in the home to provide assistance with ADL's.
- Mrs. Smith has not had any behavioral problems.
- The family member selected this caregiver because of her years of experience and came recommended by the agency.
- The caregiver, Jane, introduces herself and Mrs. Smith refuses to shake her hand.
- She responds very loudly, "I am not using her, she is a foreigner. She is probably not even a citizen and is here to take all of my money because she has twelve people in her family living with her."

# Let's Discuss... Scenario 1

**Mrs. Smith grew up in a time when...**

- There wasn't much ethnic diversity or cultural awareness
- Segregation was still a common practice
- This comment may come out of fear

# What to do in this situation...

**Stay present in the moment**— take 10 seconds to breathe before reacting

**Validation of feelings**— a new caregiver can be scary

**Provide a brief explanation to calm some anxiety**— a family member chose her or maybe she worked with another person Mr. Smith knew

**Redirection and distraction**—Music



# What to do in the Situation--Scenario 1



- **Give it some time**—usually by the third or fourth time the person comes in, the client comes to recognize the routine
- **Talk to your supervisor for suggestions**

## Scenario 2

- Mr. Wonderful is a 72 year old, divorced male with dementia and Parkinson's disease.
- His family placed him in a care home because it was more than what they could handle
- he has a personal care aide that comes in to give him a sponge bath
- Mr. Wonderful grabbed a private part of the PCA
- When he was asked about the incident later, he did not remember it.

*How would this make you feel?*

# What to do in this situation...

**Do not overreact**, respond calmly and firmly

When someone is inappropriate during ADL's, **distract** while performing personal care and bathing - use comments like, "I am going to step out and return in five minutes to resume care"

**Go in with another staff/family member** if that is an option

Meet basic needs for touch and warmth and **model appropriate touch** outside of that setting

# Other Steps to Follow for a Better Response



**REASSURE** the person

**REVIEW** the possible causes

**REMOVE** any triggers

**REDIRECT** behavior or attention

**RESTORE** yourself

**REVIEW** what happened

**REACH OUT** for more help

# Reassure the Person

- **He/She can't change**
  - You have to change
  - Change the immediate environment
- **Collect yourself**—no matter how irritated you are
  - Individuals with dementia are sensitive to others' moods
  - Pick up your mood and mirror it

# Reassure the Person...

**DO:**

**Approach slowly and from the front of the person**—less to startle them

**Play back the person's emotions and ask questions:**

“you sound upset”... “you look sad”... “Can I help?”  
...“I know this bothers you. Let's see what I can do.”

**Develop a go-to mantra for soothing...**“I'm here”, “Everything's ok”

**Make your body language match your words.** Avoid sighing or rolling your eyes. Smile, nod, use a friendly tone, relax your posture

Unspoken factors convey more than half of any message



# Other Steps to Follow for a Better Response



## **Don't:**

**Don't say things like “calm down”** — it actually raises anxiety

Ask, “what's wrong?” — when someone doesn't know or can't answer

**Trying to reason with the person** — logic and argument will not work

# Review the Possible Causes

- **Search for clues** on why the behavior is occurring.
- **Consider the Timing** — is this a change that comes on over recent hours or perhaps days? Change in medications?
- Ask yourself **if there is a pattern** when or where the problem seems to happen? Could be noise, people present, changes in light, fatigue, etc.
- Make a mental sweep of **anything new or different** that might set the stage — change in routine, houseguest, new prescription, different aide, is it a hot day

# Possible Causes...

Consider possible unmet needs

A **basic physical need**—A late or forgotten meal make someone “hangry”  
Poor sleep.

**Pain**—fever, sores, constipation, mild dehydration

**Under stimulation/Boredom**—person not enough to do, lack of fresh air or exercise

**Frustration**—Has an activity become too difficult? Do you see building struggles

**Feeling Unsafe**—something about the situation causing uneasiness, anxiety, or fear

# Possible Causes



## Questions to ask—The “W” questions

- **Who** are you looking for?
- **What** can I help you find?
- **Where** do you need to go?
- **What** will you do there?
- 
- **Tell me about it?**

# Remove any Triggers

Eliminate what could be setting off a behavior, as you may be able to end it:

- **Visual Triggers**—ex. A clock may lead to a repeat question about time... Move the trigger
- **Activity Triggers**—bathing or the sound of water running (maybe play music to mask the sound)
- **Misperception Triggers**—if shadows, look like “robbers”, close the curtains
- **Discomfort Triggers**—address the source—a fan if you’re hot; food for hunger; a different seat if there is a glare
- **Frustration Triggers**—if an activity is beyond ability, offer support or casually end it. “Therapeutic fibbing”

# Redirect Behavior or Attention...

**Use your words or actions to shift a person's energy or focus away from the stressful thing and towards something calm**

**Introduce a diversion without belaboring the reason for it:**

“I have an idea, let's...look at the funny birds at the birdfeeder”

“I need your help with....”

**Offer a choice of two things a person likes to do:**

“Would you like to have your ice cream now or go outside with me?”



# Redirect Behavior



## Lead the person to a change in scenery—

- Maybe it's a different chair, another room, from inside to outdoors
- **You can offer your hand**, and the person may ask “where are we going?” You can tell them, “it's a surprise.” This can be as simple as a snack, looking at the clouds, etc.
- **Bridge phrases to change the topic of conversations**—such as, “I'm sorry your glasses are missing, that reminds me of the time when you told me about when you went swimming at the beach....”

# Restore Yourself

- **Take time for you**
- **Release some stress by:**
  - taking a few deep breaths
  - Write in a journal
  - Get some fresh air, etc.
  - Remind yourself that you are “only human” and you can’t control other people’s behaviors

# Review What Happened...

**Track what worked for you when working with that person**

**Engage in the power of routine—**

The more patterned the day, the less off kilter someone will be



# Reach Out for Help When Dealing with Difficult Behaviors



- **You're not in this alone**
- **Reach out to your peers, your staffing supervisors, etc.**

# Let's Summarize....

- At times, the way we carry ourselves with our physical body language and response is actually more important than what we verbally say
- Practice active listening skills when speaking with someone and use clarifying questions if necessary
- Some behaviors may be caused by underlying conditions, moods, personal environment, etc.
- You can't control people's behaviors, so don't take it personally; What you can do is be creative to come up with solutions to dealing with the behaviors or any clues of how they arise
- Your positions are the heart of the organization. With that being said, reach out if you need guidance on behaviors and thank you for your hard work and dedication

**QUESTIONS?**

