

Coping
with
Difficult
People
workbook

**Facilitator Reproducible
Guided Self-Exploration
Activities**

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Using This Book

Difficult people are everywhere. Difficult people are those who frustrate us to no end. (In fact, others may view each of us as a difficult person.) We encounter difficult people at home, in the workplace, school, grocery market, anywhere. Often how much they affect us depends on our self-esteem, ability to recognize “hot buttons” and effectiveness of communication skills.

Although one meets many different varieties of difficult people, we have suggested six types that seem to be the most common. These difficult people will have some or all of the following traits:

WHINERS are people who find fault in others and everything they do, blame others for what happens in their lives, and know for certain what should be done but rarely work to improve or correct a situation. They whine in a high-pitched tone, cry and grumble to complain about problems rather than working to fix them or find solutions for them. They are often able to see problems that need solutions, but choose to complain the problems rather than working to solve them.

KNOW-IT-ALLS are people who think that they know more than everyone else. They believe they have more knowledge and expertise and have all of the answers, and they know they are always right. They do not like to be corrected and will often be impatient, defensive, defiant and sarcastic with people who disagree with them, or they shut down or argue without reason. They feel they are experts on all subjects, behave arrogantly and take exception to anything said to them.

AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE are often angry, impatient and explosive. They use strength, coercion, force and power to make their point. They often intimidate others into agreeing with them or giving up their point of view. They are critical of people who do not agree with them, and they use ridicule, belligerence, accusations, and verbal, emotional and/or physical abuse as a way of putting people down. People who interact with them feel a need to be cautious (as if they are *walking on eggshells*.)

PASSIVE PEOPLE are hard to understand and hard to get to know. They are usually shy, quiet and reserved; they simply want to blend in and not be noticed. They rarely share their opinions or assert themselves to get their views across. They do not talk or share a lot and do not feel the need to respond to questions, especially personal ones. They often appear aloof and detached.

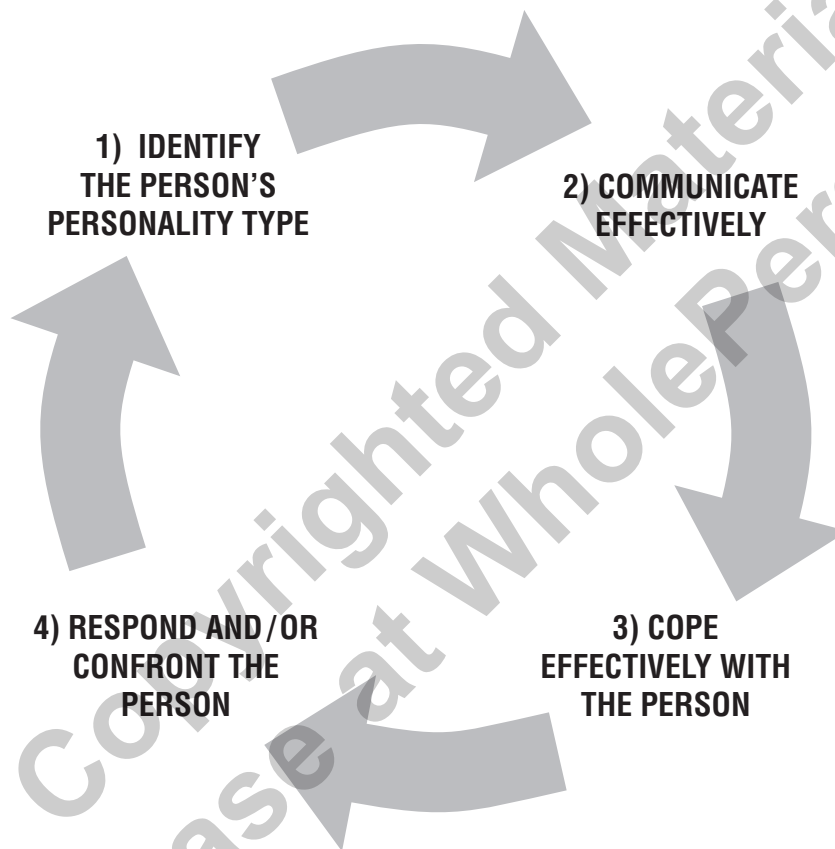
NEGATIVE PEOPLE are usually pessimistic people who will always say such things as “that will never work” and “we have tried that in the past.” They are skeptical that anything will turn out right or be right. They drag others down and make everyone’s environment as negative and as pessimistic as they are. They are unable to see the positive in anything and will always believe that things will not work out.

YES-PEOPLE are super pleasant and agreeable. They usually promise something that they cannot deliver. They seek approval and are afraid to say no to other people, especially the important people in their lives. They say what people want to hear and will agree with each person’s opposing views or opinions.

The next section provides a model for your participants to use when they find themselves dealing with difficult people. This model will provide structure for the four chapters that follow.

Information about Dealing with Difficult People

Because participants will encounter difficult people in all aspects of their lives, it is important for them to learn a way of dealing with them. In this book, *Coping with Difficult People Workbook*, we teach a specific model that participants can use to build positive relationships with difficult people.



In this model, participants can deal effectively with difficult people in their lives by following a few critical steps including:

- 1) Identify the person's personality type and what makes the person so difficult for others to handle.
- 2) Learn and utilize critical communication and listening skills to build a positive relationship.
- 3) Cope effectively with the person.
- 4) Learn skills to respond effectively and/or to confront the person.

Information for the Participants

Difficult people are all around you. They seem difficult to you because they possess a different personality type than yours. This does not make them bad people, simply different and difficult for you to handle. The personality style of one of your difficult people may bother other people too; or it may not bother other people. Often the problem is the person, and often the problem is not necessarily the person, but rather how one perceives the person or how the person behaves and responds. Perception is your understanding of how things *ought* to be. The *Coping with Difficult People Workbook* will help you to better understand people with whom you have difficulty, and give you tools and techniques for looking beyond the traits and characteristics that make the person difficult for you. You will also have the opportunity to look at what is being triggered in you that makes the person seem so difficult.

Facilitators can help their participants by reminding them of the following facts:

1. Encountering difficult people is a part of life. It is important to be able to cope with and manage or adapt to difficult people effectively.
2. When dealing with difficult people, there is a process for managing your interactions. The assessments, activities, and exercises contained in this workbook will help you to learn to deal effectively with difficult people.
3. If you ignore a difficult person, things will get worse. You will begin to experience stress and your emotions will eventually erupt. By completing the activities and exercises included in this workbook, you will be able to not only deal with a difficult person, but you will have developed a process that you can use in any situation with any type of person.
4. When you are able to face difficult people and resolve problems yourself, you will begin to feel more self-confident. You will feel more in control of your life. The secret is to have a plan of action that consists of tools and techniques for confronting and dealing effectively with difficult people.
5. Using the Tools in This Workbook:
You may be asking yourself: "*Why do I need to deal with difficult people?*"
Here are some reasons:
 - Difficult people will present themselves in all aspects of your life – at home, in the workplace, at school, in the neighborhood or community, etc.
 - Assertive confrontation is challenging, but it is a skill that can be learned and improved with practice.
 - The ability to deal effectively with difficult people will greatly improve the quality of your life.
 - Inability to cope with difficult people will lead to resentment, anger, frustration and misunderstanding.
 - Interacting with difficult people while you are angry will only make the situation worse.

Format of the Book

The *Coping with Difficult People Workbook* contains assessments and guided self-exploration activities that can be used with a variety of populations to help participants learn to cope more effectively with difficult people. Each chapter of this workbook begins with an annotated Table of Contents with notes and examples for the facilitator. Each chapter contains two primary elements: 1) A set of assessments to help participants gather information about themselves in a focused situation, and 2) a set of guided self-exploration activities to help participants process information and learn effective ways of coping with the difficult people they encounter.

Assessments

Each chapter begins an assessment that provides participants with valuable information about themselves. These assessments can teach recognition of effective and ineffective patterns of behavior, identify life skills which are productive and unproductive, and enrich your participant's understanding of how they interact with the world. Assessments provide a path to self-discovery through the exploration of personal unique traits and behaviors. The purpose of these assessments is not to "pigeon-hole" people, but to allow them to explore various elements that are critical for coping with difficult people. This book contains *self-assessments* and not *tests*. Traditional tests measure knowledge or right or wrong responses. For the assessments provided in this book, remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers. These assessments ask only for opinions or attitudes about topics related to a variety of coping skills and abilities.

The assessments in this book are based on self-reported data. In other words, the accuracy and usefulness of the information is dependent on the information that participants honestly provide about themselves. All of the assessments in this workbook are designed to be administered, scored, and interpreted by the participants as starting points for them to learn more about themselves and their coping skills. Remind participants that the assessments are exploratory exercises and not in any way a final determination of abilities. Lastly, the assessments are not substitutes for professional assistance. If you feel that any of your participants need more assistance than you can provide, please refer them to the appropriate professional.

As your participants begin the assessments in this workbook give these instructions:

- Take your time because there is no time limit for completing the assessments; work at your own pace. Allow yourself time to reflect on your results and how they compare to what you already know about yourself.
- Do not answer the assessments as you think others would like you to answer them or how you think others see you. Remember that these assessments are for you to reflect on your life and explore some of the barriers that are keeping you from living a calmer, more rational life.
- Assessments are powerful tools if you are honest with yourself. Take your time and be truthful in your responses so that your results are an honest reflection of you. Your level of commitment in completing the assessments honestly will determine how much you learn about yourself.
- Before completing each assessment, be sure to read the instructions. The assessments have similar formats, but they have different scales, responses, scoring instructions and methods for interpretation.
- Finally, remember that learning about yourself will be a path toward developing successful relationships. Don't stress about taking the assessments or finding out about your results. Just respond honestly and learn as much about yourself as you can.

(Continued on the next page)

Format of Book *(Continued)*

Guided Self-Exploration Activities

Guided self-exploration activities are any exercises that assist participants in self-reflection and enhance self-knowledge, identify potential ineffective behaviors, and teach more effective ways of coping. Guided self-exploration is designed to help participants make a series of discoveries that lead to increased social and emotional competencies, as well as to serve as energizing ways to help participants grow personally and professionally. The brief, easy-to-use self-reflection tools are designed to promote insight and personal growth. Many different types of guided self-exploration activities are provided for you to pick and choose the activities most needed by your participants and/or those that will be most appealing to them. The unique features of self-guided exploration activities make them usable and appropriate for a variety of individual sessions and group sessions.

Features of Guided Self-Exploration Activities

- **Quick, easy and rewarding to use** – These guided self-exploration activities are designed to be an efficient, appealing method to motivate participants to explore information about themselves - their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors - in a relatively short period of time.
- **Reproducible** – Because the guided self-exploration activities can be reproduced by the facilitator, no more than the one book needs to be purchased. You may photocopy as many items as you wish for your participants. If you want to add or delete words on a page, make one photocopy, delete and/or write your own words, and then make photocopies from your personalized master.
- **Participative** – Guided self-exploration activities help people to focus their attention quickly, aid in the self-reflection process, and define new and more effective ways of coping.
- **Motivating to complete** – Guided self-exploration activities are designed to be an energizing way for participants to engage in self-reflection and learn more about themselves. Various activities are included to enhance the learning process related to developing important social and emotional competency skills.
- **Low risk** – Guided self-exploration activities are designed to be less risky than formal assessments and structured exercises. They are user-friendly, and participants will generally feel rewarded and motivated after completing these activities.
- **Adaptable to a variety of populations** – Guided self-exploration activities can be used with many different populations, and they can be tailored to meet the needs of the specific population with whom you work.
- **Focused** – Each guided self-exploration activity is designed to focus on a single coping issue, thus deepening the experience for participants.
- **Flexible** – The guided self-exploration activities are flexible and can be used independently, or to supplement other types of interventions.

Chapter Elements

The *Coping with Difficult People Workbook* is designed to be used either independently or as part of an integrated curriculum. You may administer any of the assessments and the guided self-exploration activities to an individual or a group with whom you are working, or you may administer any of the activities over one or more days. Feel free to pick and choose assessments and activities that best fit the outcomes you desire.

The first page of each chapter begins with an annotated Table of Contents with notes and examples for the facilitator.

Assessments – Assessments with scoring directions and interpretation materials begin each chapter. The authors recommend that you begin presentation of each topic by asking participants to complete the assessment. Facilitators can choose one or more, or all of the activities relevant to their participants' specific needs and concerns.

Guided Self-Exploration Activities - Practical questions and activities to prompt self-reflection and promote self-understanding are included after each of the assessments. These questions and activities foster introspection, promote pro-social behaviors, and build coping skills. Activities in this workbook are tied to the assessments so that you can identify and select activities quickly and easily.

Activities are divided into four chapters to help you identify and select assessments easily and quickly:

- **Chapter 1: Types of Difficult People** – This chapter helps participants identify and learn about the various types of difficult people they may encounter.
- **Chapter 2: Communicating with Difficult People** – This chapter helps participants learn their strengths in communicating, and learn more effective ways of communicating with difficult people in their lives.
- **Chapter 3: Coping Skills** – This chapter helps participants explore how well they are coping with difficult people, and learn some alternative techniques for ways to cope.
- **Chapter 4: Assertive Confrontation Style** – This chapter helps participants explore their style in confronting difficult people, and learn effective confrontational tools and techniques.

Use Codes for Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a term for any action that preserves the privacy of other people. When completing the activities in this workbook participants might be asked to answer assessment items and journal about and explore relationships with other people, and you will need to discuss confidentiality before you begin using the materials in this workbook. Maintaining confidentiality is important as it shows respect for others and allows participants to explore their feelings without hurting anyone's feelings or fearing gossip, harm or retribution.

In order to maintain confidentiality, explain to the participants that they need to assign a code name for each person they write about as they complete the various activities in the workbook.

For example, a friend named Joey who enjoys going to hockey games might be titled LHG (Loves Hockey Games) for a particular exercise. In order to protect their friends' identities, do not use people's actual names or initials – just codes.

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Problem-Solving

All people solve problems in different ways. Think about how difficult people might act in a situation in which they were asked to solve a problem.

In this activity, pretend that a group of people were asked to solve the problem of creating a car that would run on a fuel other than gasoline. Describe how you think each of the following types of difficult people would approach this problem to solve. Then identify people (using code names) in your life that fit into each of these categories.

Which, if any, categories would you fit into?

Whiners



Know-It-Alls



Aggressive



Passives



Negatives



Yes People

