

## **Tips for Managing Challenging Behaviors In The Classroom**

When you notice unproductive behavior, nip it in the bud. Otherwise, you send a clear message to the students that it's OK for them to talk while you are talking, etc.

Use classroom management techniques before you become irritated, impatient or upset. We are much more powerful when we are centered, when we like our students and when we view our students with fondness rather than impatience.

Allow students to save face. When we put students down in front of others, the entire class of students will turn against us.

Do all you can to feel good about yourself and others on a daily basis. Your attitude will come across to your students, so it is important to be in good mental and physical shape.

- The most "difficult" students are often likely to be the most intellectually capable. It is probable that their high intelligence is what enables them to succeed at being devious, deceitful and manipulative.
- "Difficult" students are quick to learn. They are quick to "take charge". They are quick to take advantage of situations. They are good leaders. They are good listeners and anxious to be listened to.
- Many "difficult" students have deficiencies in basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. They are likely to be ashamed and sensitive about their deficiencies. They are desirous of overcoming their deficiencies, but they don't want to be embarrassed, in the process. They appreciate teacher who can and will teach them without making them feel more ashamed than they already are.
- These "difficult" students become less and less "difficult" as more and more of their ideas and suggestions are incorporated into the management of their classrooms. Students who help to establish the standards of operation for their classrooms are the best ones to help in the orientation of new students.
- The majority of "difficult" students are avid learners. They are curious and creative. They do not hesitate to accept intellectual challenges and are proud of their ability to solve problems. They are also proud of their academic achievements.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

PHYSICS 551

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LECTURE 2

LECTURE 3

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## Who Are You and How Well Do You Know Yourself?

- What's your style? Are you laid-back, high-strung, or somewhere in-between?
- Are you critical or are you generous with praise?
- Is the idea of "conflict" okay with you or does it make you want to run in the other direction?
- How do you language yourself - for example, does life present you with problems OR with challenges?
- Are you Introverted, extroverted, flexible, or is it that it's "your way or the highway"?
- How willing are you to change aspects of yourself? of your teaching style? Are you mixing up how you present materials to your students, knowing that there are likely to be both different learning and different processing styles? Kinesthetic, auditory, visual, experiential? Deliberate versus quick thinkers? Are there responders and reactors?
- How aware of your communication patterns are you? Do you notice the patterns of others. One way to increase your awareness about your communication effectiveness is to examine how others respond to you.
- Do you find yourself utilizing the silent treatment? reactions or considered responses?
- anger? people pleasing? judgment? acceptance? consistency? inconsistency? defensive?
- "Not my job."
- Boundaries - are yours rigid, permeable, flexible, wishy-washy, non-existent? .....
- Do you sell yourself short? Do you give yourself kudos? Do you give kudos to your students?
- Are your experiences with one or a few difficult students coloring your overall experiences with students - keeping perspective and not taking things personally: Teflon versus Velcro!
- Do you work towards win-win solutions? Anything other than a win-win is about a fear of losing something we have or not getting something that we want. Win-wins don't mean that you always get your way, nor does the other person get their way. A win-win is about making communication learning moments, about each person saving face, and people being heard and fully understood.
- How well do you take care of yourself? Are you headed towards burnout? Does your work still invigorate you?
- How well do you know your audience ~ today's college students? you're dealing with a collection of individuals, not a mass of one person AND they each have their own particular brand of personal baggage. YOU ARE A PERSON OF INFLUENCE: Students have ideas about your role – authoritarian, pseudo-parent. You have about their role – intellectual curiosity, critical thinker, "kid", "adult", "pains in the rear," a means to keeping my paycheck? future leaders?

All these questions indicate that interactions are not as simple as learning communication skills and techniques. There's some groundwork that you could do to improve how you interact with your students AND with the other people in your life ~ even before you put the communication skills into action.

# Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are simply ways that our mind convinces of something that isn't really true.

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking. You look at things in absolute, always/never, right/wrong, black/white categories.
2. Overgeneralization. You view a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. Mental Filter. You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives. This is like the drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.
4. Discounting Positives. You insist your positive qualities don't count.
5. Jumping to Conclusions. You jump to conclusions not warranted by the facts.
  - Mind-Reading. You assume that people are reacting negatively to you.
  - Fortune-Telling. You predict that things will turn out badly.
6. Magnification or Minimization. You blow things way out of proportion or shrink them.
7. Emotional Reasoning. You reason from your feelings: "I *feel* like an idiot, so I must *be* one." Or "I *feel* hopeless. This means I'll *never* get better."
8. Should Statements. You criticize yourself or other people with "shoulds," "shouldn'ts," "musts," "oughts," and "have tos."
  - Self-Directed Shoulds lead to feelings of guilt and inferiority.
  - Other-Directed Shoulds lead to feelings of bitterness, anger and frustration.
  - Hidden Shoulds are rules and should statements that are implied by your negative thoughts.
9. Labeling. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you tell yourself (or others), "I'm a jerk" or "She's a loser."
10. Self-Blame and Other-Blame. You find fault instead of solving the problem.
  - Self-Blame. You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for.
  - Other-Blame. You blame others and overlook ways you contributed to the problem.

## **Assertiveness, Aggressiveness, and Passivity – 3 General Approaches to Communicating**

Assertive people tend to have fewer conflicts in their dealings with others, which translates into much less stress in their lives. They get their needs met (which also means less stressing over unmet needs), and help others get their needs met, too. Having stronger, more supportive relationships virtually guarantees that, in a bind, they have people they can count on, which also helps with stress management, and even leads to a healthier body.

Contrasting with this, aggressiveness tends to alienate others and create unnecessary stress. Those on the receiving end of aggressive behavior tend to feel attacked and often avoid the aggressive individual, understandably. Over time, people who behave aggressively tend to have a string of failed relationships and little social support, and they don't always understand that this is related to their own behavior. Ironically, they often feel like victims, too.

Passive people aim to avoid conflict by avoiding communication about their needs and feelings, but this behavior damages relationships in the long run. They may feel like victims, but continue to avoid confrontation, becoming increasingly angry until, when they finally do say something, it comes out aggressively. The other party doesn't even know there's a problem until the formerly passive individual virtually explodes! This leads to hard feelings, weaker relationships, and more passivity.

### **How Does One Become More Assertive?:**

The first step in becoming more assertive is to take an honest look at yourself and your responses, to see where you currently stand. The answers to the following questions will help clue you in:

1. Do you have difficulty accepting constructive criticism?
2. Do you find yourself saying 'yes' to requests when you really say 'no'?
3. Do you have trouble voicing a difference of opinion with others?
4. Do people tend to feel alienated by your communication style when you do disagree with them?
5. Do you feel attacked when someone has an opinion different from your own?

If you answered yes to several of these, you may benefit from learning assertiveness skills. Knowing where you stand on the assertiveness spectrum, and knowing where you want to be, you can read more on assertiveness training, develop a win-win mentality, and begin becoming more assertive today!

How you answered these questions will indicate the skills you might want to work on!!!

## **Dealing w/ Difficult People**

We all have to deal with difficult people, some of us more than others. We have to work with people who are grumpy and antagonistic, with people who react emotionally or intellectually, with people who are hard to motivate, people who we feel just are unwilling to listen to us, people who are disrespectful to us people who NEED to be the center of attention.

However, there are some tips that you can learn to use to deal with any of these different types of difficult people in a way that makes the situation easier for yourself.

Here is a look at some tips for dealing with difficult people that I hope you will find helpful.

1. Get in touch with yourself. The better that you know yourself, the less likely it is that you're going to react to negative people. Grounding yourself will come in handy no matter what difficult person you're dealing with or what the situation is like.
2. Learn to spot the problems in advance. Anytime that you're dealing with the same difficult people again and again, you can begin to notice signs and patterns that indicate that a difficult time is coming. This will allow you to prepare for the best way to deal with the situation.
3. Refuse to engage in arguments. It takes two people to argue so learning how to disengage from an argumentative situation will be a great tool for many of the difficult times that you encounter with others.
4. Pick your battles. You may need to engage in disagreements with difficult people from time to time but be smart about picking your battles so that you're only getting into heated situations when it's actually worth it to you.
5. Recognize and honor the differences between the two of you. Many of our issues with difficult people come from the fact that they have very different beliefs from us or very different ways of communicating. Look for what those differences are and then honor them in your mind.
6. Respect others in spite of your differences and problems. A key thing to remember in dealing with all negative people is that it's important to try to respect everyone's right too be who they are. Treat them in a respectful manner even when you don't feel like it. Eventually they will likely return this respect.
7. Learn to set boundaries. Although you should respect others, you should also demand that they respect you. You don't do this by asking them to but instead by creating healthy boundaries in all situations so that they can't infringe upon you unfairly. *Remember: We teach people how to treat us.*
8. Create more positive interactions. The more positive times that you can share with difficult people, the less difficult that they will be. For example, is your teaching style being well-received by your students.

9. Ask yourself why these people are being difficult. Having insight into the emotions behind the difficulty will make you more tolerant of others. Put yourself into their shoes and see what's causing them to act so difficult.
10. Neutralize - Refuse to be defensive. Many of the things that come across as someone being difficult are really more neutral than we imagine. We just tend to take things personally and blow things out of proportion. Refuse to assume that their issue has anything to do with you unless you're told otherwise.
11. Ask how you can help. When someone does blame you or attack you for something, ask what you can do to change the situation. Their request may be fair or they may find that they don't even have a request. Either way, you've put the ball in their court and asked them to come up with a solution to their own problems. Remember that many communication difficulties are due to the dynamic between the involved parties rather than one's person being unilaterally "bad."
12. Check your own emotions. Check in with yourself and find out what's going on for you as you deal with difficult people. Don't react to them. Instead, take some time to journal or process what's going on with you so that you can respond appropriately.
13. Don't assume that your way is the right way. Even if you come up with great solutions, remain open to the possibility that you don't know everything and consider the input of the other person as well.
14. 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.
15. Walk away – a.k.a.: a "time-out". In many cases, there may not be an easy solution to an immediate situation with a difficult person but if you're in a position to take a "time-out: then you can get a break from the intensity of the situation in the moment, get grounded again, and re-visit the conversation..
16. Let go of grudges. Many of us hang on to grudges towards the people that have been difficult in the past. This makes it hard to move on to a better relationship with them in the future. Learn to forgive and let go and work from this point forward. Letting go reduces the chances of assuming that future students, for example, will also be difficult.
17. Work to maintain a sense of humor ~ it helps you keep perspective on what's important versus "the small stuff."

## **Conflict Resolution Skills**

Conflict arises from differences. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, intentions, ideas, or desires. Sometimes these differences look trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal and relational need is at the core of the problem—a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy. There is a fear of losing something that we have or not getting something that we want.

### **Unhealthy responses to conflict are characterized by:**

1. An inability to recognize and respond to matters of great importance to the other person
2. Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions
3. The withdrawal of love, affirmation or acceptance ~ resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment
4. The expectation of bad outcomes
5. The fear and avoidance of conflict

### **Healthy responses to conflict are characterized by:**

1. The capacity to recognize and respond to important matters
2. A readiness to forgive and forget
3. The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
4. A belief that resolution can support the interests and needs of both parties

## **Key Conflict Resolution Skills**

The ability to successfully manage and resolve conflict depends on a number of key skills. *Together, skills create something that is greater than the sum of its parts: the ability to take conflict in stride and resolve differences in ways that build trust and confidence.*

### **Conflict Resolution Skill 1: Quickly relieve stress**

The capacity to remain relaxed and focused in tense situations is a vital aspect of conflict resolution. If you don't know how to stay centered and in control of yourself, you may become emotionally overwhelmed in challenging situations. Deep breathing or a formal time-out can be useful for re-focusing.

### **Conflict Resolution Skill 2: Recognize and manage your emotions.**

Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others. If you don't know how you feel or why you feel that way, you won't be able to communicate effectively or smooth over disagreements.

### **Conflict Resolution Skill 3: Improve your nonverbal communication skills**

The most important information exchanged during conflicts and arguments is often communicated non-verbally. When you're in the middle of a conflict, paying close attention to the other person's nonverbal



signals may help you figure out what the other person is really saying, respond in a way that builds trust, and get to the root of the problem.

#### **Conflict Resolution Skill 4: Use humor and play to deal with challenges**

You can avoid many confrontations and resolve arguments and disagreements by communicating in a playful or humorous way. Humor can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without creating a flap. However, it's important that you laugh *with the* other person, not *at them*. When humor and play are used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can actually become an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy.

#### **Conflict Resolution Skills 5: Effective Listening**

When people are upset, the words they use rarely convey the issues and needs at the heart of the problem. When we listen for what is felt as well as said, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us.

Tips for being a better listener:

- Listen to the reasons the other person gives for being upset.
- Make sure you understand what the other person is telling you—from his or her point of view.
- Paraphrase the other person's words to confirm that you've understood correctly.
- Ask if anything remains unspoken, giving the person time to think before answering.
- Resist the temptation to interject your own point of view until the other person has said everything he or she wants to say and feels that you have listened to and understood his or her message.
- The key is to understand the differences in communication signals and develop good communication techniques. Matching their system creates harmony - processing style (quick versus more deliberative thinker) as well as they type of learner the student is (auditory, kinesthetic, visual, etc.: "I see", "I feel", "I think", etc.)

#### **Inhibitors To Listening**

1. People don't always say what they mean.
2. People don't always understand their own feelings.
3. It's sometimes difficult to put into words.
4. The same words have different meanings for different people.
5. We sometimes hear only what we want to hear. P
6. People are thinking about what they are going to say next.

When listening to the other person's point of view, the following responses are often helpful:

1. Encourage the other person to share his or her issues as fully as possible.

"I want to understand what has upset you."

"I want to know what you are really hoping for."

2. Clarify the real issues, rather than making assumptions. Ask questions that allow you to gain this information, and which let the other person know you are trying to understand.

"Can you say more about that?"

"Is that the way it usually happens?"

3. Restate what you have heard, so you are both able to see what has been understood so far - it may be that the other person will then realize that additional information is needed.

"It sounds like you weren't expecting that to happen."

4. Reflect feelings - be as clear as possible.

"I can imagine how upsetting that must have been."

5. Validate the concerns of the other person, even if a solution is elusive at this time. Expressing appreciation can be a very powerful message if it is conveyed with integrity and respect.

"I really appreciate that we are talking about this issue."

"I am glad we are trying to figure this out."

**Mediating Conflict:**

1. Use the Conflict Resolution Covenant: "We agree to..."
2. Attack the problem not each other.
3. Focus on things we can do.
4. Do not place blame.
5. Collect the facts.
6. Own our problems.
7. Listen to understand.
8. Take the time we need.
9. Encourage and respect each other and our ideas.