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How to Deal with a Difficult Roommate in College: A Workshop Write Up

Leisl Seigler

Department of Communication Studies

lseigler@samford.edu

Abstract

This paper is a write up of a workshop given at Samford University about dealing with a difficult roommate in college. It covers existing literature on dealing with difficult people, the method, the results, and a discussion of the workshop. The materials provided during the workshop are also given in Appendix A through G.

How to Deal with a Difficult Roommate in College: A Workshop Write Up

College students are at greater risk to encounter difficult people because of where they are developmentally (Hardy et al, 1984). College presents a rapid environmental, social, and physical change in young people's lives. They are learning to be independent of their parents and trying to find new friends. They are learning to balance class loads many of them have not experienced yet (Hardy et al, 1984). This new environment places new people in these students' paths and many do not know how to handle the difficult ones well because they fear escalating the situation, they are uncertain about how to handle the situation, or they are uncomfortable with conflict (Tiffan, 2009)

Likely one of the most trying experiences for college students is finding and adjusting to a roommate. Living with another person, often a stranger at first, can be stressful and present its own problems. Thus, it is important to teach high school seniors and college freshmen how to cope with difficult roommate situations (Marek et al, 2004). The conducted workshop endeavored to teach students effective strategies for living with difficult people. The workshop can also be expanded to apply to workplaces or other interpersonal relationships, as much of the research was cross-referenced among these areas.

Review of Literature

This paper will first review existing literature on dealing with difficult people that was directly relevant to this workshop.

Description of a Difficult Person

There are 5 characteristics that difficult people generally tend to possess: arrogance, argumentativeness, passive aggression, negativity, and incompetence in an area of importance to the other person (Tiffan, 2009). Although there are different types of people, these characteristics are common among them. These people cause problems in all areas of life, but especially in

those where people cannot escape them, such as the workplace or a living situation (Tiffan, 2009).

Unhealthy vs. Healthy Roommate Expectations

Often, roommate conflict is caused by unhealthy expectations upon entering the living situation (Fee, 2009). This increases the awareness of another person's level of difficulty and can cause serious problems and stress between roommates. Fee (2009) identifies five unhealthy expectations and their healthy alternatives.

One unhealthy expectation is "My roommate and I will always get along." This is not true because conflicts will arise and they must be dealt with. Thus, a healthier expectation is: "Some conflict will happen sometimes between me and my roommate" (Fee, 2009). Another unhealthy expectation is: "My roommate is responsible for keeping me company/happy." Although this may initially be true as roommates adjust to college life and do not have other friends, both need to find friends outside of each other. A healthier expectation is: "There will be times I'll be alone and will need other friends outside of my roommate" (Fee, 2009).

Another unhealthy expectation is: "My roommate will change their behavior as long as I ask them to politely." Personality and behavior changes take time and requires a desire to change in the other person (Bramson, 1981). This will not likely occur in temporary living situations. Thus, it is healthier to think: "I will have to compromise with my roommate to live harmoniously with him/her."

"My roommate will let me borrow/use their belongings/space because we live together" is the next unhealthy expectation (Fee, 2009). Some people do not want others to use their belongings at all, others do not mind if people borrow a few items, and others do not mind their belongings being used at all. Regardless of how the roommate feels, a healthier expectation is: "We will respect each other's personal space and property, even if that means not sharing some

things” (Fee, 2009).

The last unhealthy expectation is: “My roommate will always make me feel completely welcome and at home in my room, regardless of his/her mood” (Fee, 2009). Everyone has bad days, so this expectation is impossible. However, a person’s safety should never be compromised in his/her room. Thus, a healthier expectation is: “My roommate should always make me feel safe in the room, even if he/she is not in the best mood” (Fee, 2009).

First Impressions

One factor that often contributes to these expectations is first impressions. Roommates future interactions and expectations are heavily influenced by the first time they meet each other. Thus, Dovico (2016) suggests seven tips for making a good first impression using the acronym “S.P.E.C.I.A.L.” For this workshop, the acronym was adapted to be “P.L.A.I.C.E.S.” The “P” stands for “posture.” Standing up straight, shoulders back demonstrates confidence and awareness of surroundings. “L” is for “listen and lean in.” This is not an uncomfortable lean, but a slight lean in the other person’s direction demonstrates focus on and interest in the conversation.

The “A” stands for “ask questions.” Asking more personal questions, such as “How are you?” demonstrates the desire to get to know the other person more deeply. “I” is for “introduce yourself.” This is obvious, however and important part of this is introducing others in the room to each other. For example, on move-in day at college, students often bring their families to help. Roommates should insure that everyone in the room is introduced.

The “C” stands for charm (Dovico, 2016), but was adapted to mean “chat” in this workshop. Small talk is important because it makes or breaks the first impression. Similar to asking questions, simple chatting demonstrates a desire for getting to know each other and also eases awkward tension often experienced during first encounters with new people. “E” is for

“eye contact.” Shifty eyes make people seem uncomfortable and nervous. It can also connote dishonesty and a lack of interest. Last, the “S” stands for “shake hands.” In general, this means making physical contact of some kind, which can also include a hug (Dovico, 2016).

Types of Difficult People

There are several types of difficult people that exhibit the general difficult traits and more specific traits. First, are Hostile-Aggressors (Bramson, 1981). These people are bullies. They attack other people with hateful language and generally try to bring others down to build themselves up. Some ways to cope with these types of people are: standing up for yourself, giving the bully time to calm down before responding, getting them to sit down, being careful, not polite, not engaging in a fight or competition, and speaking from your own point of view (Bramson, 1981). Hostile-Aggressors are the most dangerous type of difficult person and are difficult in rooming situations because they can be violent.

A second type of difficult person is the Complainer (Bramson, 1981). Complainers gripe incessantly, but never actively try to fix problems. They often do not believe that they are whining at all. Some ways to cope with Complainers is to listen to their complaints and state facts without commenting. It is also important to attempt to move them into the problem-solving stage of problems (Bramson, 1981). Complainers can be difficult to live with because their constant griping will affect the other person’s sanity and ability to focus while studying or trying to sleep.

A third difficult person is the Unresponsive (Bramson, 1981). Unresponsives respond to sincere attempts at communication with disinterested sounds or silence. Another way Unresponsives respond is briefly acknowledging what was said and then completely changing the subject. Coping with an Unresponsive is difficult, but asking open-ended questions and not talking too much can help open them up (Bramson, 1981). It is difficult to live with an

Unresponsive person because they do not acknowledge conversations about room management, maintenance, rules, etc. Thus, change is halted or stalled.

The fourth type of difficult person is the Super Agreeables (Bramson, 1981). These types of people are kind and consistently agree with another person to their face, but never follow through with their promises. For example, if their roommate asks them to clean, they will happily agree to do so, but then never clean. Coping with a Super-Agreeable can be tricky. Most important is to not allow them to make unrealistic promises and make honesty non-threatening (Bramson, 1981). Super-Agreeables are hard to live with because it is difficult to recognize sincerity from superficiality.

A fifth difficult person is the Negativist (Bramson, 1981). Negativists object to everything without reason. Coping with a Negativist is important. In a living situation, the roommate must be alert to negativity that will bring him/her down. It is also advised to make realistic optimistic statements and to avoid arguing with the Negativist (Bramson, 1981). Living with a Negativist is the most mentally perilous type of difficult person because often their negativity slowly seeps into the other person's mind, ultimately bringing them down into a pit of negativity as well.

Know-it-Alls are the sixth type of difficult person (Bramson, 1981). These people consistently spout off how much they know about everything, even about subjects they know little about. Coping with one of these people is frustrating. The roommate should know what he/she is talking about before the two engage in an argument and should avoid falling into the same habits as their Know-it-All roommate (Bramson, 1981). It is frustrating to live with someone like this because the Know-it-All will likely express his/her "knowledge" about the roommate's major, area of work or study, etc. The roommate is likely to become defensive when this occurs, and arguments often ensue.

The last type of difficult person is the Indecisive (Bramson, 1981). Indecisives stall major decisions until the decision is made by someone else or it is no longer relevant. To cope with an Indecisive, people should support decisions when they are made and refrain from pressuring the Indecisive too much (Bramson, 1981). These are difficult roommates because they will often stall decisions that affect both people until the roommate is forced to make all the decisions.

It is also important for people to know if they themselves are difficult (Lundin et al, 2009). Most people believe others are to blame for problems (Sillars, 1980) because most people are unwilling to admit blame (Carnegie, 1981). Thus, Lundin et al (2009) provide a worksheet for people to fill out that helps them identify their own difficult behavior. An adapted form of this worksheet is provided in Appendix 4.

Dealing with Conflict when it Happens

Positive communication patterns are critical in dealing with conflict when it inevitably occurs.

Verbal Communication Strategies

There are several ways to have a better conversation with difficult people from the start that can help ease potential conflict. Evenson (2014) explains that people should avoid using absolute words, such as “never” or “always” because humans are unpredictable and inconsistent. Thus, saying that someone “always” does something, is likely not true. Furthermore, it is important to begin sentences with “I” instead of “you” to avoid sounding accusatory (Evenson, 2014).

Next, offer an apology. People should not apologize for something they did not do, but statements such as “I am sorry my actions hurt you. I did not mean to do so” demonstrates that they are taking responsibility for their faults, while encouraging the other person to do so as well. Last, use compromising statements, such as “let’s find a solution together” to demonstrate

willingness to fix the problem (Evenson, 2014).

The most important fact to remember when dealing with difficult people is to criticize the issue, not the person's personality (Carnegie, 1981). Personality traits are personal and attacking them will only make the other person defensive. Keeping the argument away from personal attacks on each other is the best way to immediately have better conversations with people. This is because most conflicts are not personal (Lundin et al, 2009). It is critical to remember these two related concepts because when ignored, conversations rapidly deteriorate.

Active Listening

Another positive communication skill to use when dealing with others is active listening. Active listening boils down to three essential elements: body language, facial expression, and verbal responses (Tiffan, 2009). Body language and facial expression are non-verbal responses which people tend to trust more than verbal responses because they are difficult to control and typically demonstrate a person's true feelings. Sitting with arms open and facing the person who is speaking demonstrates warmth and willingness to compromise (Tiffan, 2009).

Keeping a pleasant facial expression during confrontation is key (Tiffan, 2009). Some people have a resting face that naturally looks angry or displeased. It is important to maintain a pleasant smile if this is the case. A person's face should react appropriately to what is said by the other person to insure there are no non-verbal miscommunications (Tiffan, 2009).

Last, verbal expressions should be inserted frequently (Tiffan, 2009). This not only includes answering and asking questions, but also simple sounds that shows the speaker that the audience is tracking with them and listening attentively (Tiffan, 2009).

5 Step Engagement Model

Tiffan (2009) further outlines a Five-Step Model for engaging another person in a positive conversation. For the sake of time in this workshop, the model was condensed to three

steps. The first step is to State the Problem (Tiffan, 2009). This should be clear, brief, and honest. It should not be rude or too blunt, however. Again, it is important to criticize the issue and not the person's personality (Carnegie, 1981) during this step of talking with someone.

The second step combines two steps from the original model: Analyze and Explore Options Together (Tiffan, 2009). Both parties should discuss different ways to fix the problem at hand. It is important to recognize that both will have to compromise on somethings to reach an agreement. The third and last step is Reach an Agreement (Tiffan, 2009). The discussion should be summarized and the final plan for progress reviewed. It is important to note that the discussion cannot be left without a reached agreement; if a person chooses to engage another in conversation, he/she should complete this full process.

There are pros and cons to using this model. Bringing up issues to another person is a channel for change and helps relieve under-the-surface resentment or anger. However, if a person uses this model too often, he/she can appear overbearing and whiny

5 Step Coping Model

Sometimes, however, it is unnecessary to engage another person in conversation about an issue. If the issue is not important, is simply annoying, or is the fault of one party, then the Coping Model is better option. It is also advised to go through this process before entering the Engagement Model. Bramson (1981) provides five tips for coping with a difficult person that were adapted into the 3 Step Coping Model for this workshop.

The first step is to Describe the Behavior (Bramson, 1981), trying to be as objective as possible. The best way to stay objective is to realize that the issue is likely not personal (Lundin et al, 2009) and to criticize the issue, not the other person (Carnegie, 1981). The second step is to Write It Down (Bramson, 1981). This process delves into possible motives or reasons for the behavior: the offended party's understanding of the deeper issue. To stay objective in this step,

the person should avoid wishing the other person was different and analyze his/her behavior as it currently exists.

The third step is to Decide (Bramson, 1981). The person should decide at this point if the issue is salient enough to discuss or if there are personal behavior changes that can fix the behavior without ever mentioning it. There are pros and cons to this model, as well. It is helpful to think before speaking and it helps the offended party recognize his/her own behaviors that could be attributing to the problem. However, it is a personal process and does not engage the other person. Thus, compromised change is not possible. If done incorrectly and the person does not stay objective in the process, it can also cause feelings of resentment and martyrdom in the offended person.

Terminating a Roommate Relationship

There are many good ways to have a better living experience with another person, but sometimes it simply will not work.

When to Terminate

There are three situations in which a person should terminate a living situation: 1.) threats to a person's safety 2.) theft or damage to personal belongings 3.) broken housing agreements (Fee, 2009).

Fee (2009) draws these three situations from the healthy expectations in a rooming situation (see *Unhealthy vs. Healthy Expectations*). A person's physical safety should never be compromised in his/her living space (Fee, 2009). Roommates should respect each other's property, even if that means not sharing some items (Fee, 2009). Breaking a housing agreement can range from on-campus housing rules, such as no alcohol, to breaking a legal contract, like missing rent (Fee, 2009).

How to Terminate

There are also good and bad ways to terminate a relationship. First, a person should be honest about why he/she is moving out (Fee, 2009). If a person lies to his/her roommate, but tells someone else the truth, it is likely that the truth will make it back to the roommate eventually. Especially on small campuses, it is critical to kindly explain to the roommate the reasons for moving out. Again, it is critical to avoid criticizing the person's personality (Carnegie, 1981) because the issue is likely not personal (Lundin et al, 2009); the two simply cannot live well together. An example of honesty that is too blunt and is an attack on the person's personality is "I'm moving out bc you break my stuff I told you not to touch because you are a mean and irresponsible person." A better way to say this is "I'm moving out bc I think we have different expectations about what it means to respect each other's property."

Next, people should tell their roommates they are moving out before they do so. Skipping this step causes resentment, unnecessary hurt to the other person, and hinder future attempts at reconciliation (Fee, 2009). The last step of terminating a relationship is to try and reconcile differences (Fee, 2009). Living with another person is an intimate experience; roommates see the best and worst of each other all the time. It is possible that living with someone will not work, but being friends will. It is important to attempt to reconcile differences and forgive each other, even if the two do not plan to be friends in the future. Skipping this step can cause stress on people who need closure and, again, cause anger and hurt.

Method

Participants

In total, 20 participants signed up for the workshop; 12 participated. All 12 participants were females. The participants of this workshop were primarily recruited from the Delta Delta Delta, Epsilon Xi Chapter at Samford University. One was recruited from a Communication

Studies class. Of the participants, 11 were currently enrolled in college at Samford University and one was a recent graduate of The University of South Florida. Participants' ages ranged from 18 years to 22 years. The class distribution of participants is as follows: 8 freshmen, 1 sophomore, 3 juniors, 0 seniors, 1 recent graduate with a Bachelor's Degree.

Procedure

This workshop was presented on Wednesday November 8, 2017 at Samford University, Brooks Hall, Room 118, from 5pm-7:15pm. The workshop covered methods of dealing with a difficult roommate in college. Dinner was provided for the participants. Upon arrival, participants chose where to sit. At each seat was a folder with the participant packet (Appendix A); the pre-test/post-test (Appendix B); the pre-reflection prompt (Appendix C); a blank sheet of paper for an activity; the How Difficult are You Inventory (Appendix D); a situation card for an activity (Appendix E); the post-reflection prompt (Appendix F); and the workshop evaluation (Appendix G). Pens and markers were also provided. A power point was used for participants to follow along and fill in blanks in their packets.

Participants first took the pre-test and wrote the number of the folder on the top. Once completed, we collected the tests and began the workshop. We, Leisl Seigler and Laura Blankley, introduced ourselves and explained that we are roommates and have been for 2 years to establish credibility. The goal of the workshop was discussed and explained: "to equip participants with the necessary tools and knowledge to deal with the difficult roommates you potentially encounter." Next, the first three learning objectives were covered: How to make a good first impression, how to identify types of difficult people, and how to recognize difficult behavior in the self.

Three basic expectations about behavior were explained, including confidentiality of shared personal information, promise of a 10-minute break, and a request for participation. We

then lead an icebreaker game in which participants tossed a beach ball with questions written on it around the room. When they caught the ball, they had to answer whichever question their right thumb landed on and say their name. After this, we began the content of the workshop, starting with the description of a difficult person. There are many opinions of what makes a difficult person, thus, we chose the description discussed in the Review of Literature above (see *Description of a Difficult Person*).

Next, Laura told participants about her bad roommate experience and how she handled the situation. Following the story, participants reflected on their own experiences with a difficult person using the prompt provided for them (Appendix C). A few participants chose to share their experiences with the group. We then moved this discussion to healthy vs. unhealthy expectations of new living situations. To follow up with this, we explained that first impressions contribute to expectations of the living situation. Participants were first asked to say what they believed made a good first impression while we wrote them on a white board. We presented the acronym “P.L.A.I.C.E.S,” a type of Flat Fish we thought the audience would find amusing and memorable. The acronym was positively received. We then lead an activity to reinforce the acronym. Participants taped the blank sheet of paper to their backs and mingled around the room meeting new people. After a few minutes of talking, participants wrote on the paper what the other person did well form the acronym. After the activity, the group discussed their strengths and weaknesses of making first impressions.

After this, we used movie and TV show clips to present the 6 types of difficult people. The Hostile-Aggressor clip was of Allison from *Pretty Little Liars*; the Complainer clip of Fred from *I Love Lucy*; the Unresponsive clip of Kimmy Jin from *Pitch Perfect*; the Super-Agreeable clip of Jim Carry from *Liar Liar*; the negativist of Eeyore from *Winnie the Pooh*; the Know-it-All of the annoying kid from *The Polar Express*; the Indecisive clip of Miley Cyrus from

Hannah Montana. After each clip was played, participants discussed the character's traits and tried to guess what type of difficult person each was. The correct name and description was then read by us.

From here, we moved to prompting the participants to complete the How Difficult are You Inventory (Appendix D) to identify difficult behaviors in the self. This led into the 10-minute break. At the end of the break, participants returned and discussed what they discovered about themselves through the Inventory. This began the second half of the workshop which had 3 learning objectives: positive communication patterns, coping with a difficult roommate, and terminating a roommate situation.

To present positive communication patterns, we first role-played an example of what not to do and say when discussing problems with a roommate. The participants then discussed what was bad about the conversation. We then explained the better patterns of communication and re-enacted the same scenario using those techniques. The participants again identified what went well. After this, we facilitated a role-playing activity among the participants. They each paired with someone else and, using the scenario cards in their folder (Appendix E), took turns being a difficult person and using the positive communication techniques to mediate the conversation.

We then introduced two of the key concepts of the workshop: that conflicts are usually not personal and they should criticize the issue and not the other person's personality. This was repeated several times throughout this portion of the workshop. Next, we covered active listening, emphasizing non-verbal communication. Then, Leisl introduced the 3 Step Engagement Model because she tends to use it more. Laura presented the 3 Step Coping Model.

After this section, we moved to how and when to terminate a roommate relationship by playing "Roommate Bachelor." We created 6 roommates with 4 bullet point descriptions. Leisl read the descriptions and asked the group if they thought the rooming situation should be

terminated based on the description; Laura read the correct answer and the explanation. The participants seemed to enjoy this activity and it prompted much discussion. We then explained the 3 rooming situations which should be terminated.

Next, we discussed how to terminate a relationship. Laura told another bad roommate story, exemplifying how not to terminate. Leisl told a story of 2 friends who terminated their situation well. This concluded the content of the workshop. Participants then reflected on their personal experience from the beginning of the workshop, explaining how they would have handled it differently with this information. Some shared what they would change. After this, participants completed the post-test, again labelled with their folder number so the tests could be matched, and the workshop evaluation. They were then dismissed.

Measures

The pre-test and post-test (Appendix B) was designed to demonstrate that the participants learned from the workshop because participants are given the exact same test both times. It consisted of 7 multiple choice and true/false questions.

The How Difficult are You Inventory (Appendix D) was adapted from Lundin et al (2009) to be more applicable to college-aged participants. Last, they were given a workshop evaluation (Appendix G) about the effectiveness of the workshop, allowing them to provide feedback. The evaluation consisted of 10 Semantic-Differential questions, 7 Likert-Type Scales, and 7 open-ended questions.

Results

There was an average increase of 57% correct answers between the pre-test and post-test. On the Semantic Differential Scale, we scored an 8.4 out of a possible 9. On the Likert Scale, we scored a 6.79 out of a possible 7.

The open-ended questions provided more rich feedback about the effectiveness of the

workshop. We identified the 5 weakest areas of the workshop: the first impression activity, the beach-ball icebreaker, the partnered role playing activity, the use of candy, and lack of interaction with their personal stories.

The 5 strongest parts of the workshop were: real life examples, the level of interaction, the presenters' role playing, relevant information, and the How Difficult are You Inventory. Overall, the workshop was very well received. The participants unanimously agreed that the information was useful and relevant. They further agreed that the participant packet was detailed and organized. All the participants planned to use the tools taught in the workshop in the future. Several planned to use it in situations they had previously been avoiding.

Discussion

Positive Aspects

Overall, the workshop went well. We had adequate time to allow through discussions and question and answer periods. We were also able to provide a full 10-minute break. The participants were overwhelmingly pleased with our presentation and congratulated us thoroughly.

I believe the workshop was so well received because the topic was relevant, but not overly discussed. Several participants expressed that they believe there is a greater need for this information to be taught to students as they enter college, and were grateful that they'd had the opportunity to learn it. I was pleased to see an increase in correct answers between the pre and posttests. I was especially pleased because the test was not based on any pre-written or tested measure; it was created by the presenters. Additionally, the participants were responsive and engaged.

Negative Aspects

There were some things that could have gone better, however. First, the pre-test and post-

test was worded poorly in some areas. Since I wrote it, I have some insights into what went wrong. The first question said: “select all that apply.” Although this was not confusing to me, it was to participants because most of them applied the statement to all the multiple-choice questions. Additionally, question 6 was a true/false question with a negative slant, making it incredibly confusing. I realized this when I struggled to grade the question correctly. Last, it is possible that the participants’ opinions got in the way of answering questions correctly. For example, question 6 said “you should not touch someone when you first meet him/her.” Many people do not agree that you should at all because they are uncomfortable. Question 7 also included lists of people that could be considered difficult to some people, regardless of what was actually taught in the workshop.

Another potential problem with the workshop was the audience. First, this was not our first-choice audience. Initially, we tried to have an audience of high school seniors from a local high school. We believed this would have been a better audience because it would have equipped them before entering college. Furthermore, the 12 participants we had were close to us. This hindered our ability to be completely professional, as a few of them did not treat it as a professional event. We had some trouble getting 3 girls in particular to remain quiet. We believe this harmed our professionalism scores on the Semantic Differential Scales.

The first impressions activity was controversial in its usefulness. Three participants agreed that it was not useful, while two thought it was. I believe it did not go well because, again, many of the participants already knew each other. Thus, they did not focus on making a first impression and instead, spent the time talking about other topics not related to the workshop.

The beach ball icebreaker might have been an activity the participants had done several times before at other events. It might have been too common. The partnered role playing

probably did not go well because I poorly explained it initially. I also think that the same situation that happened with the first impression activity may have happened with this one, too. We agreed that there could have been more interaction with their personal stories, and if we did this workshop again, that would be one of the changes made. Last, we believe participants did not like that we tossed candy to people when they spoke because they felt like they were being treated like children.

Future Suggestions

There are several future suggestions for this workshop. As previously discussed, more interaction with participants' personal stories is certainly needed. Additionally, this workshop would look much different if the participants were part or all male. Males learn and interact differently than females, and it would be interesting to see how the workshop would be different with a male audience.

Furthermore, participants expressed that they would have liked some more discussion on how and when to involve third parties, such as Resident Assistants or the police. They also would have liked some information on how to handle difficult people who are close friends, family, or people in authority. Last, a few participants explained that they would have liked to know how to handle a gossip as an additional type of difficult person.

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How to Deal with a Difficult Roommate in College

Goal of the Workshop

to equip you with the necessary tools and knowledge to deal with the difficult roommates you potentially encounter

Learning Objectives

1. How to make a good first impression
2. Identifying different types of difficult people
3. Recognizing difficult behavior in the self
4. Positive communication patterns
5. How to cope well with a difficult roommate
6. When and how to best terminate a bad roommate situation

What is a Difficult Person?

We tend to see people as difficult if they possess one or several of the following characteristics:

- arrogance
- argumentativeness
- passive aggression
- negativity about themselves, others, or the world as a whole
- incompetence in an area of importance to us

Preventing Conflict from the Start

Good communication from the start can mitigate future problems in a roommate situation

*Unhealthy vs. Healthy Expectations****

Unhealthy Expectations	Healthy Expectations
My roommate and I will always get along	
My roommate is responsible for keeping me company/happy	
My roommate will change their behavior as long as I ask them to politely	
My roommate will let me borrow/use their belongings/space because we live together	
My roommate will always make me feel completely welcome and at home in my room, regardless of his/her mood	

First Impressions Matter- A Lot

How do you make a good first impression?

P.L.A.I.C.E.S.



*Note that these are not sequential actions

P

-stand up straight- exudes confidence and awareness

L

-don't be creepy, but a slight lean will demonstrate that you are actively listening and engaged in the conversation

A

-asking personal questions about your roommate shows that you are interested in them as a person

I

-remember their name and introduce others who are with you, otherwise you may seem rude and as if you don't want them to know your other friends or family

C

-small talk is important because it can make or break a first impression

E

-shifty eyes can make people uncomfortable, indicate lying or nervousness, and create a general feeling of distrust

S

-making physical contact makes people trust you more

Types of difficult people

1.

-bullies; use hateful language and act hatefully towards you

- Strong need to prove themselves
- Coping:
 - stand up for yourself
 - Give them time to calm down before responding, get them to sit down
 - Be careful, not polite
 - Speak from your own point of view
 - Don't fight to win

2.

- gripe incessantly, but will never fix the problem
- Don't feel that they are whining
- Coping:
 - Listen to their complaints
 - Paraphrase it back to them and gauge how they feel about it
 - Don't agree or apologize
 - State facts without comment
 - Try to move on to problem-solving
 - Ask the complainer: 'how do you want this to end?'

3.

- respond to sincere attempts at communication with silence or disinterested sounds
- Coping:
 - get them to talk
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - Wait calmly for response
 - Do not take up the whole conversation

4.

- kind & reasonable to your face, but don't follow through with promises
- Coping
 - Make honesty non-threatening

- Be personal
- Dont allow them to make unrealistic commitments
- Listen to their humor

5.

-object to everything for no apparent or good reason

-Coping:

-Be alert that the negativity can get you down

-Make realistic optimistic statements

-Don't argue with them

-Don't offer solutions until the problem has been thoroughly discussed

6.

-excessively share how much they know about everything

Coping:

-Make sure you know what you are talking about

-Listen and paraphrase back

-Avoid dogmatic statements

-Watch your own know-it-all tendencies

-Question but do not confront

7.

-they can never make decisions and will stall until some things just never get done

-Coping:

-Keep yourself in control of the decision

-Support decisions once they are made

-Don't pressure them too much

-Difficult people try to control and manipulate the actions of others
And when you encounter one of these people...

Dealing with Conflict when it Happens

Ways to Immediately have a Better Conversation***

-avoid absolute words, such as "never" or "always"

-try to start sentences with "I" or "we" and avoid "you"

-offer an apology, such as “I’m sorry you feel that way”
 -this is not apologizing for what happened; don’t apologize for something you didn’t do

-use compromising statements, such as “let’s find a solution together”

***Address the _____, don’t attack the _____

Mitigating the problem- leave this stuff in

***don’t take it personally- most conflicts are _____ personal

-Active Listening***

-3 Components of Active Listening: (take the bullets out)

1.

2.

3.

3 Step Engagement Model- recommended for the Engaged Person:

1. the problem- be clear, brief, and honest (not rude or blunt)

-criticize the issue, not the person’s personality even if it’s influencing the issue

2. options together- discuss various ways in which

you can work together to fix the issue

3. an agreement- summarize what you discussed and finalize how the two of you will move from there

3 Step Coping Model- recommended for the Coexisting Person

1. the behavior in as much detail as possible

-assess the situation

2. down your understanding of the behavior

-stop wishing the person was different and be objective

3. what you will do and when

-This plan is more individual and does not require you to confront your roommate

-Coping is an alternative to acceptance and costly efforts to fix the behavior.

-Acceptance avoids conflict, but creates a feeling of martyrdom in the

-Personality change rarely occurs without extensive effort, time, and willingness

When and How to Terminate an Unhealthy Relationship with a Roommate

-always remember that your personal success in college should be your first priority

-in many cases, you will not be able to end the relationship because the university has nowhere to move you or your roommate, and you will need to utilize effective coping and engagement strategies often

-BUT there are times when you must end the situation

1.

-their behavior could get you in trouble with the law or the university

2.

3.

-missing rent

When you move out (take out main points)

-be honest about why you're moving out

-why can't I just avoid that?

=> news travels fast: especially in smaller schools, the odds of the truth getting back to them is high

*-again, don't criticize the person's personality****

-Example:

Bad: "I'm moving out bc you break my stuff I told you not to touch because you're a mean and irresponsible person"

Better: "I'm moving out bc I think we have different expectations about what it means to respect each other's property."

-Tell your roommate that you are moving out _____ you start to move out

- don't put off the conversation because it's awkward
- => moving out without telling your roommate can cause hurt and anger that can hinder future reconciliation
- try to reconcile your differences now that you are no longer roommates
- recognize that maybe as roommates you were not compatible, but as friends or classmates, you can be
- because again, *the issue is likely not personal****

Appendix B- Pre-Test/Post-Test

1. Which of the following make a better confrontation from the start? Select all that apply.

- a. Start sentences with “you” to keep the subject focused
- b. Offer an apology
- c. Use compromising statements
- d. Address the other person’s personality traits that cause problems

2. Which of the following is a healthy expectation to have of a roommate situation?

- a. My roommate and I will always get along
- b. My roommate will let me borrow his/her belongings
- c. My roommate will always make me feel welcome in my room
- d. My roommate and I will fight sometimes

3. Active listening involves what?

- a. Just listening
- b. Listening, eye contact, undivided attention
- c. Body language, facial expression, verbal responses
- d. Listening and responding to each idea as it comes up

4. True or False: It is more important to point out your roommate’s personality flaws so he/she can fix them than it is to fix one specific issue.

True

False

5. True or False: Conflict is usually caused by a personal problem.

True

False

6. True or False: You shouldn't touch someone when you first meet them.

True

False

7. Which of the following lists describe a difficult person?

a. passive aggressive, objects to everything, negative

b. dirty, loud, oblivious

c. dimwitted, gullible, rude

d. talks too much, gossips, bails on plans

Appendix C- Pre-Reflection Activity

Briefly describe a conflict you have had with a friend, classmate, teammate, etc. that you can reference throughout the workshop.

Appendix D- How Difficult Are You Inventory

How Difficult are You Inventory

The following questions are designed to prompt a self-reflection on how difficult you are as a person. Be honest in your answers to get the most out of the inventory. You may use the back or another sheet of paper to continue your answers if you need to.

1. Do you see yourself as being difficult to work with? If so, in what way?

2. Do other people tell you that you are difficult? If so, in what way? Have your teachers or parents mentioned your difficult behavior?

3. Has the difficult behavior been noted on report cards, in parent-teacher conferences, etc.? Have you received warnings, been to the principal, or been given detention?

4. Do you agree with the assessment of your difficult behavior? If not, why do you think others have assessed you in that way?

5. If you agree that you exhibit difficult behavior (or if you understand what people are seeing even if you don't believe it's inappropriate), why do you think you are being difficult?

6. What steps could you take in order to reduce the difficult behavior, or at least reduce the negative reactions you've identified?

7. Are there any ways in which your personal characteristics, temperament, style, or approach attracts difficult behavior from other people? If so, are there any ways to adapt the behavior while staying true to your values and beliefs?

8. Do you have friends and colleagues you can trust to be honest and objective in assessing your behavior? If so, what do they say when asked these same questions?

9. Have these same problems occurred in other worker school situations? (If not, there's a greater chance the current workplace or individuals are the core problem. If so, there's a greater chance that you are making a substantial contribution to your own problems.)

10. After evaluating your answers (and those of friends and colleagues whose opinions you value and trust), what action strategies will you use to improve the situation? What immediate steps do you have to take? How will you assess the effectiveness of those steps?

Adapted from Lundin, W., Dobson, M. S., & Lundin, K. (2009). *Working with Difficult People*. New York: AMACOM.

***Note: the cards were prepped for 20 people. Only 12 were used.**

Situation 1

You are a hostile-aggressive.
You think your partner is messy.

Situation 2

You are a complainer.
You are making bad grades because your partner keeps you up.

Situation 3

You are an unresponsive.
Do not engage in conversation.

Situation 4

You are a super-agreeable.
Your partner wants you to clean the room.

Situation 5

You are a negativist.
Your grades are poor.

Situation 6

You are a know-it-all.
Your partner is going through a breakup.

Situation 7

You are a hostile-aggressive.
You think your partner isn't smart

Situation 8

You are an indecisive.
Your partner wants you to give them a ride this weekend.

Situation 9

You are a know-it-all.
Your partner is failing biology.

Situation 10

You are a super-agreeable.
Your partner wants you to give her a ride somewhere this weekend.

Situation 11

You are an unresponsive.
Do not engage in conversation.

Situation 12

You are a complainer.
Your partner keeps the room too cold.

Situation 13

You are a negativist.
You fight with your significant other a lot.

Situation 14

You are an indecisive.
You need to pick a major.

Situation 15

You are a know-it-all.
Your partner doesn't know how to do laundry.

Situation 16

You are a super-agreeable.
Your partner wants to wear your clothes but you do not want them to.

Situation 17

You are a complainer.
Your partner is just the WORST.

Situation 18

You are an indecisive.
Your partner needs you to pick a color theme for your room.

Situation 19

You are a negativist.
You are having a hard time making friends.

Situation 20

You are a hostile-aggressive.
You think your partner is lazy.

Appendix F- Post-Reflection Prompt

Briefly explain what you would have done differently during the conflict you described at the beginning of the workshop. Try to use terms and/or descriptions of what you have learned in this workshop. You may refer to your notes if necessary.

Appendix G- Workshop Evaluation**Workshop Evaluation Form**

Thank you for attending today's workshop. By completing the evaluation form, you will assist us in identifying what areas needed improvement and what areas were addressed well. All evaluations are strictly confidential and will only be used by the Department of Communication Studies to determine future educational needs. PLEASE ANSWER EACH QUESTION HONESTLY.

Section One

Please evaluate the workshop you attended today by circling the number that most closely represents your opinion:

I thought the workshop was:

Dull	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Interesting
Confusing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Clear
Bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Good
Unpolished	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Polished
Waste of time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Worth my time
Unexceptional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Exceptional
Uninformative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Informative
Unprofessional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Professional
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Stimulating
Not very useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Useful

Section Two

1. If a friend asked you whether they should attend this workshop, what would you tell them?

For this section, please read each of the statements and circle the choice that you feel is best.

7. The presenters knew the subject well.

Strongly DISagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

8. The presenters let us have some fun while we learned.

Strongly DISagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

9. The presenters maintained our interest.

Strongly DISagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

10. The presenters encouraged us to talk and ask questions

Strongly DISagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Section Four

If you have any additional comments or suggestions, please feel free to write them in the space below or on the other side of this page. We encourage you to give us as much feedback as possible about the workshop so that we may refine and polish it.