

Working with Difficult Clients: Who, Why and How

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Learning Objectives

- **The participant will be able to....**
 - List 3 reasons clients may be difficult to deal with.
 - List 4 generational learning styles.
 - List 5 effective tactics that can be used when interacting with a difficult person.

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Definition of a Difficult Client

- Many different perspectives.....
- Many different sources of conflict.....

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Definition

- “The cushion is good enough for your daughter”
Said the therapist to an overly concerned parent.



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Definition

- “I won’t give up my dream of my son driving a power chair”



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Definition

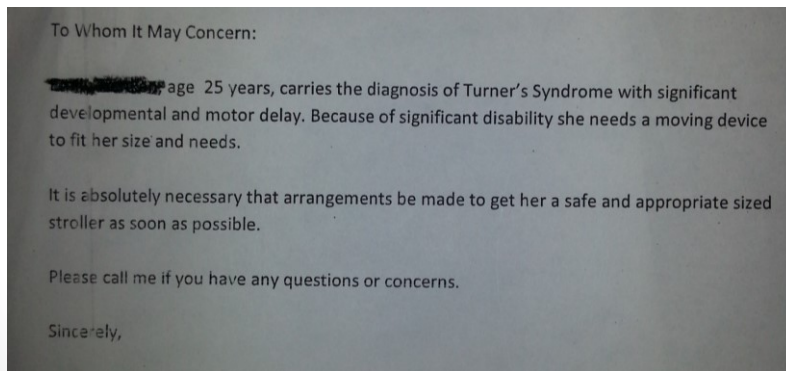


- Self-explanatory!

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Definition

- “But my doctor wrote a letter!”



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Definition

- “But they are adding \$280 in labor for a job that will only take an hour!”
 - Said the attorney parent who bills significantly more than that per hour yet does not understand all of the labor involved in the repair.

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From the Team Perspective:

- “I have no choice who I have to work with and my job with them never ends.”

Said the rehab technology supplier in our clinic one day.

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Client Perspective

- What are the unresolved issues that they are dealing with?
 - Reason why they might need a wheelchair
 - Unrealistic expectations in terms of funding, equipment options
 - Psychosocial factors
 - Mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, etc.)
 - Interpersonal relationships
 - Current life situations
- How do these issues influence their behavior?

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Concept of Difficult

- Varies from one person to another
- Person specific perspective based on how that person is able to cope with a variety of triggers.

- Many different types of difficult
- What annoys one may not annoy another!

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Definition of Difficult

- Adjective [**dif-i-kuhlt**]
- Not easy
- Not easily or readily done; requiring much skill, labor or planning to be performed successfully
- **Hard to understand** or solve
- **Hard to please or satisfy**
- Hard to persuade or induce; stubborn
- Full of hardships or trials

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Definition of Conflict

- A serious disagreement or argument
- Be incompatible or at variance; clash
- Can begin as tension, misunderstanding or disagreement

- Resolution includes prevention, minimizing, containing
 - Gain emotional control
 - Listen more than talk
 - Use “why” instead of blaming

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Point of Crisis

- Moment in time when a fact is faced with reality.
 - Realization that child won't walk
 - Realization that disease process won't get better

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Types of “Difficult”

- These tendencies are a result of life experiences
 - Life long process that is further exaggerated by the situation at hand.
 - These changes do not happen overnight, nor do they improve when additional stress is placed on them (acquisition of a life altering disability)

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Types of “Difficult”

- If we need to categorize types of “difficult”:
 - Perfectionist: over-analysis of every single detail
 - Control freak: needs to complete the task in their preferred method, even when not the best option
 - Creative soul: great idea generators but difficult to guide them into a final resolution

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Types of “Difficult”

- Shapers: Those who take charge without the knowledge and skills to do so; hyperfocused on a solution without addressing all the issues or the process to get there
- Aggressive or defensive person
- Submissive person

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Types of “Difficult”

- Dependent Clingers
 - Initially offer praise for everything that you do!
 - Offers over the top gratitude while looking for special privileges
 - Gratitude becomes replaced with ever-increasing demands
 - Client’s feelings often a result of their lack of power and fears of abandonment

• Per Debra Beaulieu, Nov 2, 2010 Neurology: Clinical Practice

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Types of Difficult

- Entitled Demander
 - Client or caregiver tells you what to do and how to progress
 - Tends to be aggressive from the start
 - Usually feel helpless and powerless under “tough guy” exterior
 - Try...in order to solve the problem, we need to work together!

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Types of Difficult

- Manipulative Help Rejecting Complainer
 - Nothing is ever right nor enough
 - Once initial problem is resolved, comes back with new requests
 - Passively aggressive
- Offer environment of support and collaboration
- Offer only what is needed and what is mutually agreed upon.

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Types of Difficult

- Self Destructive Deny-er
 - Knowingly continues with behaviors that are detrimental
 - Often a result of feelings of depression or hopelessness
- No matter what you recommend, will continue to sabotage situation
- Often times best to refer to mental health professional.

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What to do once defused?

- Need to provide education in a manner that the “difficult” person can understand
 - Identify needs, identify possible solutions
 - Ability to educate depends on their....
 - Education level, cognitive ability
 - Current and prior life experiences
 - Generational learning styles – need to be aware of best methods for individual to learn
 - Cultural issues – traditions

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Generational Learning Styles

- Traditionalists:
 - Born before 1945
 - Strong work ethic, loyal, submissive, dedicated, willing to sacrifice, respects authority, avoids conflict, tech challenged, slow to change habits
 - Prefer structured learning situations; new info is taught
 - Prefer silent learning for introduction to new concept prior to having it “taught”

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Generational Learning Styles

- Baby Boomers
 - Born between 1945 and 1964
 - Hard working, achievement oriented, independent, self reliant, questions authority, values face time vs working remotely
 - Expectation of a more personally focused learning structure
 - Prefer instruction to be more of a friendly approach instead of an authoritative provider
 - Prefer to be guided through the learning process

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Generational Learning Styles

- Generation X
 - Born between 1965 and 1980
 - Instant gratification, independent, resourceful, problem solvers, wants to accomplish on own terms
 - Prefer self directed learning opportunities on their own schedule and as needed
 - Open to education through technology

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Generational Learning Styles

- Millennials
 - Born after 1980
 - Tech savvy, prefers email, text messages, wants high feedback, flexibility
 - Tend to be hard working on their terms
 - Seek out experiences instead of things
 - Learning styles combine baby boomer and gen X; looking for highly personalized training that is self directed.
 - Prefer education through technology and on-demand
 - Also prefer learning through a problem solving approach

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Generational Learning Styles

- Post-millennials
 - Those born after 1997
 - Group has been separated from millennials because of access to different life experiences
 - Limited exposure to life with landlines
 - Have never experienced life without instant communication, access to information
.....Smart phone

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Learning Styles

- Sequential Learners
- Global Learners
- Active Learners
- Reflective Learners

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What Limits Learning?

- Cognitive abilities
 - Consumer, caregivers
- Personality disorders
 - Anti-social personality disorder
 - Histrionic personality (center of attention)
 - Narcissistic personality disorder (inflated self importance), hypersensitive to criticism, sense of entitlement
 - Routine quirks that we all notice in others...
 - OCD
 - Hyperactivity; inability to focus

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Critical Learning Components

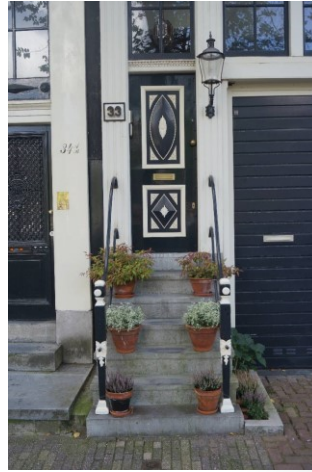
1. Must practice/use it.....old adage of “use it or lose it”
2. Must be meaningful
3. Feedback: regular and specific
4. Must experience success
5. Learning is enhanced by multi-sensory approach
 1. Practice it
 2. Think about it
 3. Speak about it
 4. Write about it
 5. Manipulate it

• Vicki Wilkins, PT, DPT, OCS, FAAOMPT, Cert NDT

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Causes of Difficulty – Environmental Issues

- Desired equipment does not match environment but consumer is adamant that it will work.



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Causes of Difficulty – Caregiver Issues

- Ulterior motives
 - If piece of equipment results in greater independence, may jeopardize caregiver's job
 - Use of equipment might create more work for caregiver while encouraging greater independence for consumer
 - Caregivers' ideas conflict with consumer's

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Causes of Difficulty – Cultural Issues

- Options for optimal independence are unacceptable for use due to religious and or cultural beliefs.
 - For example...
 - Provision of a power system to an Amish family



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What Can We Do?

- Cannot be easily changed
- Professionals need to modify their approach!
- First step: Why is the person difficult?
- Best solution involves looking within ourselves, modifying our behavior based on the difficult person



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“Difficult” Solutions

- **Keep your cool:** count to 10
- **Reduce the risk of friction:** avoidance of conflict is the responsibility of the professional, not the client.
- **Proactive vs. Reactive:** minimizes misinterpretation and misunderstandings.
- **Pick your battles:** avoid unnecessary problems or complications; focus on the bigger picture.

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“Difficult” Solutions

- **Separate the “difficult” person from the issue:** sets up the professional as the problem solver while moving the situation forward.
- **Use of a united team:** strength in numbers; attain team consensus
- **Use of appropriate humor:** the power of laughter; ends negativity, disarms some difficult behaviors
- **Confront bullies:** intimidating; remember that bullies often lack confidence and strength

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5 Don'ts

#1



- **Don't argue!**
- Unproductive but can lead to
 - Release of emotions
- 2 Ways –
 - Loud and yelling
 - Quiet, refusing to interact

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5 Don'ts

#2

- **Don't tell a consumer he/she is wrong**
- Often leads to #1!
- Triggers flight or fight reaction



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5 Don'ts #3

- Don't speak with an authoritative tone (like you are trying to prove the client wrong)



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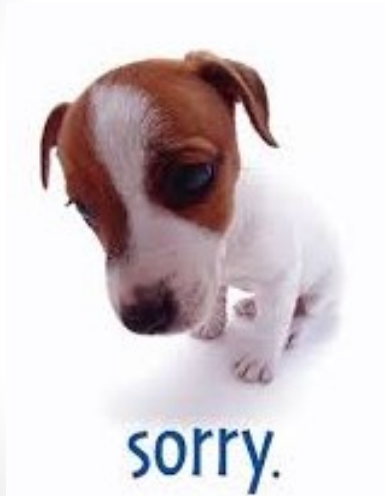
5 Don'ts #4

- Don't say "we would never do that"
 - Patronizing: treat condescendingly; look down on; talk down on; treat like a child
 - Infers superiority

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5 Don'ts

#5



- **Don't be afraid to apologize** – an apology is not admission of fault
- Often facilitates improved communication

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Solutions!

- “Everything starts by stopping”

- Renee Taylor, PhD.
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- College of Applied Health Sciences,
- Dept. of Occupational Therapy
- 2005



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Solutions

- Shut up and listen!
- Set boundaries up front
- Stay cool and calm



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Solutions

- Validate; empathize
- Remember.....their behavior makes sense to them
- "I can't agree with you more"

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Solutions

- What do you really want?
- Don't react or take the bait
- Adjust your mindset



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Solutions

- Listen actively.....be neutral
 - Notice body language
 - Summarize
 - Paraphrase
 - Check for understanding



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Solutions



- Swap shoes
- Keep it simple!



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Solutions

- Always remember.....



Everything starts by stopping!

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Remember.....

.....Most of your stress comes from the way you respond, not the way life is.

Adjust your attitude and all that extra stress is gone!

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Or.....

Handle every stressful situation like a dog.

If you can't eat it or play with it, just pee on it and walk away.



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Questions?

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