Volunteer Leader Training Guide

**Grace Under Pressure: Dealing with Difficult People**

Brittney Schrick, Ph.D., Assistant Professor—Family Life

**Target Audience**

* EHC Members
* Other groups of adults such as PTO, 4-H Volunteer leaders, etc.

**Objectives (Slide 2)**

At the conclusion of this session, participants will:

* Be able to identify different types of difficult or unreasonable people.
* Learn positive responses to difficult or unreasonable people.
* Be able to identify sexual harassment behaviors.
* Learn how to identify your own difficult behaviors.
* Learn ways to engage in self-care that will make dealing with difficult people easier.

**Advanced Preparation**

* **Materials Needed:** PowerPoint presentation (projector & screen), copies of ice-breaker BINGO game, writing implements, copies of handout.
* **Study content prior to teaching session; especially focus on considering questions your participants may ask about issues within their particular club; also, gaining comfort with the section on sexual harassment will make program delivery go more smoothly.**

**Optional Preparation**

* Meet with club president to ask about specific issues within the club that may need to be addressed during the session.

**Prior to Session**

Give each participant a copy of the BINGO game, a writing implement, and a handout.

**Introduction**

In this session, we will identify different types of difficult or unreasonable people, some ways to deal with each type, and even if we are difficult ourselves at times. We will also discuss sexual harassment as a type of difficult behavior and how to address each type of behavior in our clubs and in our lives.

**Ice-Breaker Activity: Describe Your Body (Slide 3; 5 - 7 minutes)**

Prompt the participants: “The object of this activity is to get to know your group a little better! We’re going to take 5 minutes, and your goal is to go around and get as many signatures as you can based on the qualities listed on the BINGO card. Get as many DIFFERENT people to sign as you can.”

**Facilitator Notes:**

* If you have a very small group, you may need to adjust to just getting as many spaces filled as possible or do it as an actual BINGO rather than as many as possible.
* If you have the opportunity to give a small prize that is always fun!
* After the 5 – 7 minutes (or when everyone seems to be finished), bring everyone back together and ask them to count how many DIFFERENT PEOPLE signed their card (unless you changed the rule to have another goal), and give prize or kudos to the winners.
* During the activity pay attention to which qualities they had difficulty finding, and ask who fit those qualities. You may also want to tell them which ones you could sign!

**AEHC Code of Ethics (Slide 4):**

One of the reasons this topic was chosen as a Leader Training Guide can be found in our AEHC code of ethics. It states that we are to “Advocate the highest standards of conduct and competence for all that serve or participate in state and county council programs.”

Treating each other well and with respect fits under that umbrella!

**Facilitator Notes:**

If you are presenting this information to a non-EHC audience, you will need to skip this slide or replace it with other rules (i.e., 4-H volunteer guidelines, etc.).

**Types of Difficult People (Slide 5):**

\*Click to picture.

There are many types of difficult people, but we will cover six types that are often encountered in meeting situations and in other areas of life.

* Floor Hogs
* Constant Commenters
* Yellers
* Nitpickers
* Negative Nancies
* Controllers

We will discuss each one in turn, including ways to identify others (or ourselves) and ways to address them.

**Floor Hogs (Slide 6):**

\*Click to picture: “When you see this picture, what do you think of?”

General response: A star.

\*Click first bullet: “Floor hogs like to be the star. They often take over the meeting and don’t let anyone else talk. Does that sort of thing sound familiar? You may even be thinking of an example of one now. As with many types of difficult behavior, floor hogs may do it on purpose or they may not even realize they’re doing it.”

“If you are in leadership, addressing a floor hog, may fall to you. So how can you do that?”

\*Click:

* Read the room. Are people engaged in what the floor hog is saying, or are they shutting down? Sometimes a floor hog is just a really great storyteller, and nobody minds that they’re taking time. Other times, they just keep talking and don’t notice that nobody is listening.
* Politely invite someone else to speak.
* Make eye-contact with the floor hog and thank them for their contribution. Generally this will shut them down without making them feel terrible.

“Did any of that sound familiar? Now we ask, are YOU a floor hog?”

* Again, read the room. Do people seem to be listening intently, or are they looking at their watches?
* Watch people’s facial expressions and for other non-verbal cues that you may be taking over the conversation. Are people squirming and ready to go? Are they looking around? Are they having side conversations?
* If you notice that you are hogging the floor, acknowledge it, and apologize. This can go a long way! Simply saying, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize how long I’d been talking!” can help your club member understand that it was not your intention to hog the floor.

**Constant Commenters (Slide 7):**

**\*Click to picture: “Does this make you think of anyone in your meeting?”**

\*Click to first bullet: “Constant commenters. They have an answer for every question. A comment for every answer. They like to have the last word. So much so that they may extend meetings because they keep asking questions or responding to something. Especially if you have an outside speaker, they may be the one who keeps asking questions even when everyone else is finished and ready to leave.”

\*Click: “What do you do with a constant commenter?”

* Thank them for their comments and ask if anyone else would like to contribute. Sometimes others may feel shut down because they know if they speak, the constant commenter will have a response.
* If they seem very interested in the outside speaker or need to talk with someone specific, suggest that they talk one-on-one after the meeting.
* If it is a consistent issue, especially if it is shutting down discussion with other members, politely talk to them one-on-one.

\*Click: “Are YOU a constant commenter?”

* Do you like to have the last word even when it doesn’t matter?
* Do people sigh or start to squirm when you start talking toward the end of a meeting?
* Do you find that you answer ALL or MOST of the questions posed to the group?
* Consider whether what you feel the need to say is necessary or could be addressed better in a one-on-one conversation.

**Yellers (Slide 8):**

**\*Click to picture: “How about yellers?”**

\*Click to first bullet: “Yellers use their tone of voice to control a discussion or other situation. They’re seeking to use intimidation. Sometimes, they may use body position to further intimidate by standing over someone who is sitting down, or standing very close to someone expecting them to back down.”

\*Click: “So what do we do with yellers?”

* There may be a tendency to do one of two things: apologize, or meet their anger with your own. Neither of those is helpful, and they can actually escalate the situation.
* Ideally, don’t show that you are intimidated (even if you are). Stand your ground. Don’t back away unless you are fearful for your safety. If someone stands over you while you are sitting, and you are able, stand to meet them at eye level.
* Typically, a yeller expects to shout others down. If you meet them without yelling back, they often back down because they are taken aback.
* Don’t meet their anger with anger.
* Assertively, not aggressively, respond if what they are saying needs a response.
  + For example, let’s say someone showed up at an event that required a registration or fee in order to eat lunch. They say “I know I was supposed to register, but I forgot. I really hope I can eat lunch.” Well, there are no extra lunches ordered, so there is no option for lunch unless someone doesn’t show up. Rather than apologizing (they messed up, not you!), simply say, “Well, we don’t have any extra lunches ordered, but I’ll put you on a waiting list in case someone doesn’t show up.” If they yell, restate what you said, simply, assertively…don’t apologize! Again, it’s not your fault.
* If what they are saying doesn’t need a response, don’t respond.
* If you have a consistent yeller in your club, politely confront them about it privately. It may be in your best interest to have a witness such as your county agent or another officer.

\*Click: “Now that we know what yellers are like, are YOU a yeller?”

* If you feel yourself about to yell (or you already did), take a second to breathe deeply.
* Apologize if you have hurt someone’s feelings or treated them badly. This can go a long way. A quick, “You know what, I didn’t mean to say it that way. Let me try again,” can make the person you raised your voice to feel much better and keep lines of communication open.
* Do a quick body scan to see how you feel in the moment. Do you feel tense? Breathless? Shaky? Breathe deeply and try to relax before responding to anyone.
* If you yell, reflect on how you could have responded differently and try to do so in the future.

**Nitpickers (Slide 9):**

**\*Click to picture**

\*Click to first bullet: “Nitpickers. They always have a better idea, a way something could be done differently, or find a flaw in a plan and seem to enjoy pointing it out.”

”Can you think of any nitpickers in your club or your family?”

\*Click: “What should be do about nitpickers?”

* If you have someone who continually shuts down or picks on others’ ideas or hurts others’ feelings, it’s important to address the behavior.
* Thank them for their comments but don’t dwell on the comments. Sometimes, it may be more helpful to acknowledge the comments but essentially ignore them.
* If they are especially picking on a task such as planning and event or completing a program, etc., invite them to complete the task themselves. “You seem to have a lot of thoughts on how this should be done, I’d be happy to let you do it!”
* Especially if they call others out in public meetings, offer to talk to them one-on-one about concerns they may have.

\*Click: Did any of those qualities sound like things you do yourself?

* Do you tend to comment on minor details in front of others?
* Do you focus on the flaws in a presentation or project and feel the need to call them out?
* If so, when you see a flaw or something that needs to be brought to the attention of a presenter or someone else, talk to the person one-on-one when you can. If it really is necessary to bring up the flaw or mistake in front of a large group (i.e., a mistake in meeting minutes), be kind and constructive.
* Always consider whether what you are saying is necessary to the conversation. If it isn’t, keep it to yourself.

**Negative Nancies (Slide 10):**

**“I apologize to any Nancies or Debbies in the room, but do you know anybody who fits this description?”**

\*Click to first bullet: “Focus on the negative and shut down positivity.”

“Maybe you have someone in your club or your life who always finds the cloud instead of the silver lining. Someone who remembers every failed event or thinks of every possible problem that could happen, and in doing so, they may shut down discussion or ideas.”

\*Click: What should you do about a Negative Nancy?

* Don’t let their negativity bring you down or shut down ideas.
* If you can, meet their comments with positivity instead of with defensiveness or anger.

\*Click: Are YOU a Negative Nancy?

* Count to 3 before responding to allow yourself a chance to assess:
  + Are you focusing on the negative?
  + Is your contribution helpful or necessary?
  + Can you frame your comment in a positive way?
* Consider staying out of the conversation if you can’t contribute positively.

**Controllers/Competitors (Slide 11):**

**“Another type of difficult behavior comes from people who are controlling or competitive.”**

\*Click to picture

\*Click to first bullet: “Controllers or competitors have to be right. There is always an excuse for negative behavior, and always a reason to blame others if something doesn’t go right. Everything is a competition.”

\*Click: “In leadership positions, they are often perfectionists and micromanagers as well as critical of others. They will not let up until they get their way or win…even if nobody else is competing.”

\*Click: “So what do you do with a controller:

* Much like with a yeller, act as though you are not intimidated even if you are. If their criticism or perfectionism makes you feel bad or like you didn’t do a good job, try to show them that you know you did a good job and that you are good enough. If you do that, they can’t make you feel insecure.
* If you did your task and they are asking you for constant changes or for more work than you agreed to, take credit for what you did and set firm boundaries to protect your time and feelings. Controllers, especially those in positions of authority, may be prone to taking credit for the work of others.
* If they try to pull you into a contest of who is right or wrong, avoid engaging. They will dig in until they win.

\*Click: “Did any of those qualities sound like things you do yourself?”

* Do you try to take over situations or prove you are right at any cost?
* Do people see you as unreasonable?
  + One quick test is to consider how often YOU think OTHERS are unreasonable. It is not uncommon for people who are difficult to get along with to see those around them as the problems.
* Think before you speak. Competing may not be worth the cost. Take a moment to breathe and think things through before you cause problems with those around you.

**How to Deal (Slide 12):**

**\*click to picture: “Dealing with difficult people can often feel like walking on eggshells. It is important to use healthy strategies for dealing with these situations in your club and in life. Here are a few things to consider.”**

**\***Click: “Breathe.”

\*Click: “Take a moment before responding. It may keep you from saying something you regret.”

\*Click: “Avoid power struggles, especially with controlling or aggressive people.”

\*Click: “Confront damaging behaviors one-on-one instead of in front of everyone else. It may be worthwhile to include one other person if addressing something that needs a witness or you are concerned that the person may respond very negatively.”

\*Click: “Meet negativity with positivity. You’ll protect yourself and maybe influence the difficult person or situation for the better.”

\*Click: “Set appropriate limits and boundaries. This is especially important if you are dealing with someone who has a tendency to take advantage of you.”

\*Click: “Look for specific solutions to the situation. If they have a real problem that can be addressed, do that. If not, try to find a long-term solution to dealing with them if possible.”

\*Click: “Engage in self-care to replenish your energy that may be depleted by a difficult person.”

**Self-Care (Slide 13):**

**\*Click to picture: “Do you have any types of self-care that you like to do to stay healthy?”**

“Some options include:

\*Click: “Deep breathing and mindfulness exercises”

\*Click: “Physical exercise such as walking, yoga, or strength training”

\*Click: “Journaling may offer an outlet for your thoughts as well as a way to catalogue things you are grateful for, places you would like to go, etc.”

\*Click: “Avoid inflammatory situations when possible. It will save you the stress of a difficult interaction that isn’t necessary.”

\*Click: “Be proactive in dealing with recurring issues instead of reacting each time. Sometimes difficult people don’t know they are being difficult.”

\*Click: “Ask for help if you need it. Ask your agent, club president, or other person to help you address an issue if you need it.”

**Pause for questions (Slide 14)**

**Say: “We’re going to switch gears into a specific type of difficult behavior/person that may make your club an uncomfortable place if not addressed.”**

**Sexual Harassment (Slide 15):**

**“Sexual harassment can be a very difficult topic to discuss, but it is necessary that we all understand what is and is not acceptable for our own safety and the safety of others.”**

\*Click to picture #1: “We generally think of sexual harassment in terms of a female victim and male perpetrator. This is the most common form statistically and historically has been more commonly excused or ignored.”

\*Click to picture #2: “Although that form is more common, women as perpetrators also happens.” \*click picture #3

\*Click bullet: “so we are on the same page regarding what sexual harassment is, let’s discuss the legal definition and how it may be most common in club interactions an in life.”

**Read the definition of harassment: “Unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors (even in jest”, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:**

* **Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment (or membership).**
* **Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment (or membership) decisions affecting the individual.**
* **Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.**

**Generally, must be severe OR pervasive to meet legal definition, but does not need to be both.**

**Leader: “Generally, the most common type in a club setting would likely be hostile or uncomfortable environment. This may be an instance where a member treats a repair or service person, another member, a member’s spouse or family member, or a visitor in appropriately.”**

**“It is important to keep in mind ways that sexual harassment may be shown by a member’s family member such as a spouse, child, grandchild, etc. who may be around for events or to help with club meetings. Speaking in an inappropriate manner to anyone, pursuing someone who has asked to be left alone, blocking or interfering with someone physically by standing in their way, brushing them, or otherwise touching inappropriately, making crude or uncomfortable jokes, etc.”**

**Leader: If you need an example, try this:**

**“Let’s say you’re having a meeting and a young, fit man comes in to repair the sink in the bathroom. A couple of ladies stare and say, ‘Mmmmm mmmm. He sure is wearing those jeans!’ He may feel very uncomfortable, and all he is trying to do is fix the sink. It’s not appropriate. A step further would be if one of the ladies walks over to where the repair-man is working and stands in the doorway blocking his exit. Even further would be if she came onto him directly, he declined, and she told him ‘If you want to keep working here, you won’t say that.’ Although this may seem dramatic or unlikely, these situations do happen. Sometimes, when the perpetrator is a woman, it may be dismissed as funny or cute, but it is sexual harassment.”**

**Sexual Harassment (Slide 16):**

**\*Click:** For a quick review of what constitutes sexual harassment:

* Offering benefits for a sexual favor
* Unwanted sexual advances (Key here is unwanted. So for example, if someone makes an advance, they are shut down and then leave the person alone, that is not harassment. Or if the advances are welcomed by the person being pursued and it isn’t a relationship based on threats or offer of benefits, it is not harassment.)
* Threats of, or following through on, retaliation to a “no” or rejection of advances or propositions.
* Inappropriate visual conduct such as such as suggestive or threatening gestures
* Inappropriate verbal conduct such as derogatory comments or crude jokes
* Inappropriate or threatening physical conduct such as body positioning to inhibit exit or movement or inappropriate touching such as “accidental” bumping or unwelcome hugs, shoulder rubs, etc.

**What to Do (Slide 17):**

**“Now that we are clear on what constitute sexual harassment, it’s important to have a plan to deal with the behavior. This information is useful for your own experiences, but also keep it in mind if you have someone in your life who is experiencing harassment.”**

\*Click: CLEARLY tell the person to stop. Often, it is more comfortable to laugh it off or ignore it. Doing that can empower the harasser to continue and makes it more difficult to stop them. They may say “I didn’t know it bothered you!”

\*Click: Report the person to club leadership and/or your county agent. Especially if you observe inappropriate behavior that isn’t directed at you.

\*Click: In cases of illegal activity such as stalking or assault, report (or encourage the victim to report) to the police.

\*Click: Keep a record of incidences in a journal, document on your computer or phone, or through email. This starts a paper trail that can be helpful even if law enforcement becomes involved.

\*Click: Stand your ground. Sometimes reporting harassment is met with victim blaming or defense of the harasser. Stand up for yourself (or encourage the victim to stand strong) and don’t back down.

**Pause for questions.**

**Not Me! (Slide 18): With all of this discussion of difficult behaviors, you may be thinking “NOT ME! I would never do any of these things!” The odds are good that you do one or several of these behaviors, and you likely know someone who else who does too! Hopefully you have gained some tools to help you deal with these and other difficult behaviors in your club and in your life.**

**Final (Slide 19): Working together in your clubs, you can insure that all are heard and comfortable and can contribute to their highest potential.**