

Dealing with Difficult Situations: Assertive Techniques for Conflict Resolution, Part I



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What factors influence success or failure?

- In RYE Florida studying Resiliency
- Resilience is the ability to adapt well and recover quickly after stress or adversity. If you have a resilient personality, you are better able to maintain poise and a healthy level of physical and psychological wellness in the face of life's challenges.

How do we prepare students?

- Cultural Awareness
- Area Studies
- Language
- Goals – of YE, personal goals
- Chain of Contacts/Support
- ?

Possible Conflicts

- Host Parents
- Host Siblings
- School – teachers/administration
- Classmates
- Criticism of your native country
- Peer Pressure

Possible Hot Topics

- Health care
- Environmental & energy policies
- Failure to support democratic movements
- World Debt
- Can allies trust US?
- Drugs
- Drone attacks
- Nuclear weapons
- American popular culture
- Social unrest movements
- Death penalty
- Sex and pregnancy
- World policeman
- Intolerance of other religious views
- Inept education system
- Capitalism
- Poverty
- Unfair use of world's resources
- NSA monitoring emails, social media, & phones
- Islamic terrorism

Dysfunctional Example 1

- Critic: You Americans seem to think that you can solve every problem in the world by throwing money at it.
- Student: Well at least we don't have people living in cardboard shacks.

Dysfunctional Example 2

- Critic: You Americans are only 4.5% of the world's population, but you consume 26% of the world's energy.
- Student: You're just jealous of what we have.

Dysfunctional Example 3

- Critic: Why does your government say it is on the side of democracy, but always seems to side with established dictatorships when an uprising happened?
- Student: Well, your government doesn't do much to protect religious minorities in your country.

Dysfunctional Example 4

- Host Parent Critic: We really didn't want to host an exchange student – but we were required to
- Student: Bursts into tears

Techniques from Assertiveness Training

- Active Listening
- Negative Assertion
- Fogging
- “I” Messages
- Broken Record
- Bonus – Asking Questions

Active Listening

- Active Listening is a technique that allows you to respond to the content and emotion of what the other person is saying, without agreeing or disagreeing. It puts the focus on acknowledging the point of view of the other person, which if done effectively, often neutralizes the criticism and creates a more meaningful dialogue.

Positive Approach—Active Listening

- Critic: You Americans seem to think that you can solve every problem in the world by throwing money at it.
- Student: You feel like we try to solve all the world's problems with money.

Negative Assertion

- Negative Assertion is a technique used when you are (or our country is) being criticized, AND YOU AGREE WITH THE CRITICISM. Instead of the frequent habit people have of offering explanations or excuses, even when they agree with the criticism, it is easier, faster, and requires much less energy to simply agree.

Positive Approach—Negative Assertion

- Critic: You Americans are only 4.5% of the world's population, but you consume 26% of the world's energy.
- Student: I agree. We use an awful lot of resources, and that really doesn't seem fair, does it?

Fogging

- Fogging is another assertiveness technique that allows you to acknowledge the possible truth, or opinion of the other person, while maintaining a separate position of your own. It is similar to active listening, and the first part of a fogging response is very close to active listening. But the second part, maintaining a separate opinion, is in addition to active listening.

Positive Approach--Fogging

- Critic: You Americans think every Muslim is a terrorist. You even have pilots who refuse to fly if Muslim clergy are aboard.
- Student: It may be that some Americans stereotype all Muslims as terrorists, but I know we are frightened of terrorism so much that sometimes we are irrational about it.

“I” Messages

- “I” Messages are very powerful statements of thoughts, feelings, opinions, likes and dislikes. When feelings are negative, “I” Messages evoke much less defensive reactions in the other person than typical “You” Messages. Examples are “I feel guilty intruding in your family when you don’t really want me here.” vs. “You make me feel guilty being here.”

Positive Approach “I” Message

- Host Parent Critic – “We really didn’t want to host an exchange student – but we were required to.”
- Student: (active listening) “It must be very frustrating having a stranger in your house that you didn’t really want”.
- (“I” message) “I feel really bad about that. I want to be the best exchange student I can in your house.”

Broken Record

Broken Record is the calm, but firm repetition of a simple message, usually “No” or “No thank you”.

It is very effective when refusing a request or pressure to do something one doesn’t want to do

Bonus Positive Approach— Ask questions!

- Critic: How can you criticize France’s immigration policy on the Roma when you arrest and deport peaceful Mexican whose only crime is to cross the border to get jobs in the US?
- Student: I don’t know about the Roma. Can you tell me more about them?
- Student: What is France’s immigration policy?

Role Playing

- Role playing is an experiential learning technique that can help people practice real-life situations without the risks of real-life consequences if things don't go well.
- In role playing there can be no mistakes – just re-takes. The role players can stop any time, rewind, and “do over”. Role players can pause, re-group, ask for suggestions or try several different versions of what they want to say. The goal is to find comfortable, assertive, effective ways to communicate in difficult situations.

Role Playing Preparation

1. How do I feel about the situation and/or what is my opinion?
2. What is (or are) my goal (s) in this situation?
3. What can I say or do to bring about the goal (s)?

Can be done in a variety of practice methods

Respond in way that encourages dialog and discussion rather than debate

Not all conflicts can be resolved successfully. But these techniques can help us figure out if the other person is:

- Really interested in your answer
- Knowledgeable about the topic or is repeating an inaccurate stereotype
- Just wants to get you mad

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