

## **Defensive People: Tips for Dealing With Them**

The following tips may help you deal with defensive people.

### **Provide positive feedback**

Remember that most defensive people are really insecure. Let them know that you believe they are competent and worthy of their position.

### **Listen**

Never respond with defensiveness. Instead, become an attentive listener, paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal messages. Reflect what the person has said by paraphrasing (ie, "What I am hearing is that you feel...").

### **Avoid arguing**

Never argue with someone who is in a mode of defensiveness.

### **Understand how defensive people act**

Keep in mind that defensive people usually are acting from their subconscious and that they generally are not trying to create problems or difficulty. Defensive people often are working from a self-protective instinct and are trying to avoid others attacking them by preemptively attacking others first.

### **Stay on the topic**

Do not expect the following actions to work—changing the subject, trying to interject humor into the conversation, or attempting to soothe the defensive person. You must stay on the topic of what is upsetting the person.

### **Avoid absolutes**

Avoid absolutes, such as "you never" or "you always."

### **Move toward defensive people**

Move toward defensive people, not away from them, which proves that you are interested in improving the situation. Our natural inclination is to move away from defensive people, but this often compounds the problem by making them become more critical of us.

### **Do not hide your intentions**

Never try to hide your intentions from defensive people, because they are extremely sensitive to this type of manipulation and can discern it more easily than the average person. Speak without hesitation, using neutral language without accusation, whenever possible. Always focus on the issue and not on the person.

### **Do not ask them to calm down**

Know that attempts to comfort defensive people by stating that they are too anxious and need to calm down will backfire. To defensive people, this means that you are not accepting them as they are, and that you are attempting to change or alter them, even during stressful times.

### **Do not play into their demands**

Do not play into the defensive individuals' demands to explain yourself. Defensive people often use this technique to validate their position, by making it sound as though you either do not know what you are talking about, or you are making excuses for yourself or others. Keep your explanations to a minimum. Do not allow yourself to become emotionally upset by these demands.

## **Help**

Dealing with continually defensive people often is emotionally exhausting. Defensive people may need outside help to deal with the cause of their defensive behavior.

## **References and recommended readings**

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