

Working with Challenging Behaviors

As a neighborhood association board member you will work with people from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints. Try to remember that people aren't difficult – their behaviors are. The good thing is that while you can't change people, you can request different behavior.

Be Prepared

- **Always have an agenda for each meeting with topics and time limits.** This will help to keep the meeting focused and on track.
- **Have ground rules posted and refer to them** both at the beginning of each meeting and as needed throughout meetings.

What Causes People to Seem Difficult?

- Negative feelings from previous interactions or situations
- Inaccurate or incomplete information
- Seemingly incompatible goals
- Different styles of communication

Listen for Interests

- **Ask clarifying questions** to find out what is underneath a positional statement.
 - "What changes would need to be made to address your concerns?"
 - "So the key issue for you is _____, did I get that right?"
- **Show empathy** to acknowledge and validate a member's experience.
 - "I appreciate your willingness to talk to us about this sensitive issue."
 - "I can see how frustrating this situation is for you."
- **Reframe** a divisive comment to articulate an interest.
 - "So you are looking for a solution that is realistic and doable, right?"
 - "It sounds like your problem is essentially with unwanted behaviors, not necessarily with a group of people in general."
- **Summarize** so that a participant feels heard and can shift their focus.

Interrupt Behaviors

- **Refocus on topic**
 - "Let's get back to talking about..."
 - "Do you mind if I capture that on the bike rack/parking lot over here so we can make sure to address it through the proposals or at a later meeting?"
- **Invite new voices**
 - "I appreciate your input. In order to keep this discussion moving, we need to hear from others."
 - "Does anyone have any comments different from/in addition to those already stated?"
- **Refer to ground rules**