

Employee Assistance Program

*Health and Wellness
Presentations*



EAP



Dealing With Challenging Interactions



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Objectives

- Discuss different behavioral styles
- Review suggested approaches to each style
- Enhance coping skills when encountering difficult situations



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A Day in the Life...

- Some behavioral styles present interpersonal challenges
 - At work
 - At home
 - In our communities
- Examples?



Different Styles of Interacting

- We each have preferred styles of interacting and reacting
- Our style comes from:
 - Our personality and mood
 - Context—the situation
 - The other person(s) involved

Best Case Scenario

- Assertive behavioral style
 - Respectful of self and others
 - Direct without an edge
 - Self-confident but not overbearing
 - Able to calmly express needs
 - Aware of own boundaries and can set limits
 - Willing to collaborate and cooperate



Assertiveness Invites Connection

- There is always the possibility of disagreement or conflict
- An assertive interpersonal style allows for disagreement in a way that maintains respect
- For example:
 - Suppose you were covering for a peer who returned late from lunch, and has thus caused you to either have a shorter lunch period, or to arrive at a meeting ten minutes late. How might you respond?

“I” Message Format

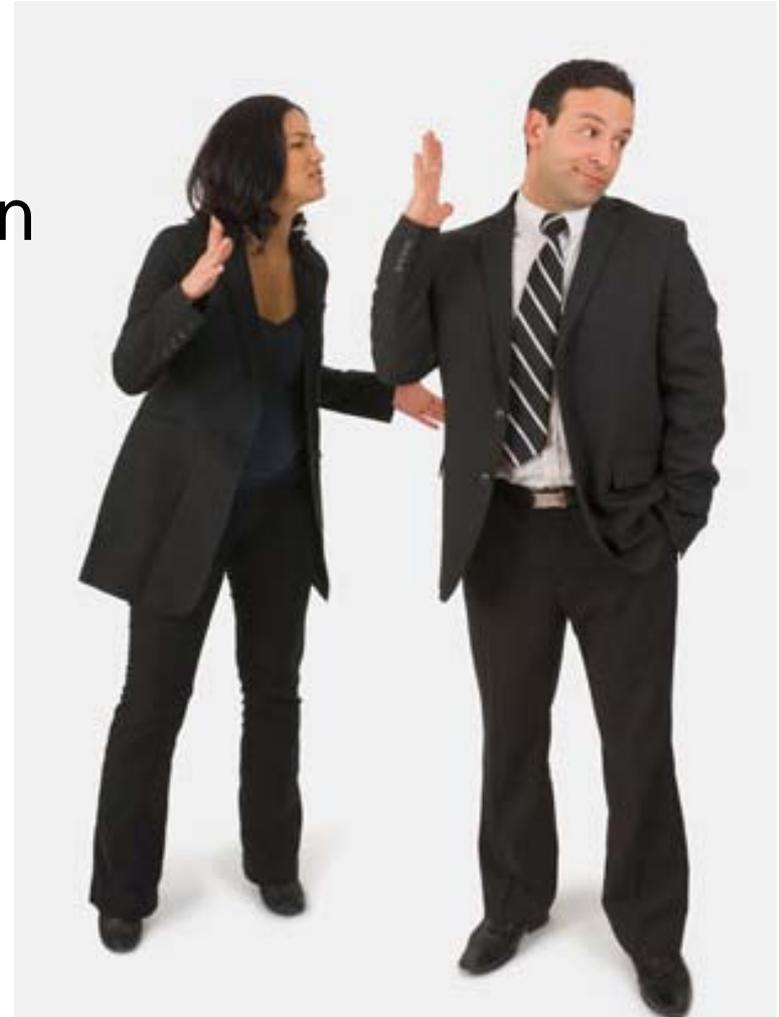
- “When you...
(state the behavior)”
- “I feel...
(state the reaction)”
- “Because...(state the
consequences)”
- “What I would
prefer/appreciate...
(state an alternative
behavior)”

For example:

“When you return late, I feel disrespected because I have limited time for what I have to do. I would appreciate it if you could call me if something unexpected comes up and you have to be late.”

Other Scenarios

- There are many occasions when we don't encounter an assertive style; instead we are faced with these styles:
 - Aggressive
 - Passive
 - Passive-aggressive



Aggressive Behavioral Style

- Intimidates
- Demands
- Accuses
- Interrupts



Responding to Aggressive Behavior

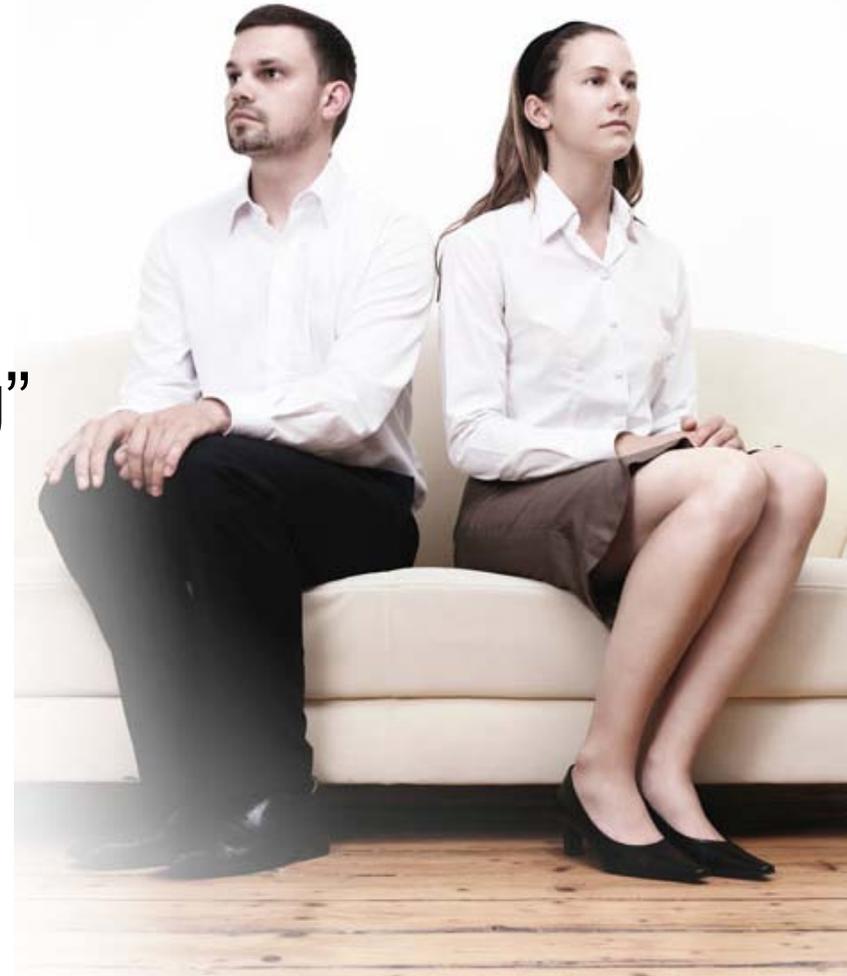
- Slow down
- Listen actively
- Do nothing; leave the room if you feel threatened
- Speak in a neutral tone
- Don't argue or apologize



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Passive Behavioral Style

- Unresponsive or silent
- Tends to avoid outright conflict
- May not want to be “wrong”
- May not want attention, or may actually want to be drawn out



Responding to Passive Behavior

- Allow the silence to continue
- Encourage sharing of ideas without judgment; use brainstorming
- Invite engagement: don't assume the other doesn't have an opinion or idea
- Use open-ended questions



Asking Questions

- Open-ended questions help to:
 - Demonstrate interest in what the other says
 - Show that the questioner is comfortable with silence, thus drawing out the quieter individuals
 - Allow for the fact that there's no one right answer
 - Uncover what's important to the person answering

Passive-Aggressive Behavioral Style

- Appears to be cooperative
- Makes digs in a subtle way
- “Attacks” with humor
- Negative
- Focuses on problems and not solutions



Responding to Passive-Aggressive Behavior

- Avoid joining the other in this stance
- Negotiate the underlying problem if possible
- Move into problem-solving mode
- Set specific goals to hold the other person accountable—then follow through



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Points to Ponder

- Consider which style is most challenging for you to handle
- Consider which is your default behavioral style
 - When have others experienced your interpersonal style as challenging?



Start with Self-Awareness

- Knowing which interactive styles are more challenging for us is key to managing a situation more constructively.
- Remembering that sometimes our interactive style presents a challenge for other people may help us show compassion for ourselves—and others—when we find ourselves in a difficult interaction.



Coping Tips for Challenging Interactions

- Assess the other’s behavior
 - Is the other person responding assertively or otherwise?
 - Is this a familiar pattern on the other’s part?
- Assess my reaction
 - What reaction am I having to this behavioral style?
 - Is my own reaction a familiar pattern?
 - Am I over-reacting?
 - What resources do I have to respond assertively?

Coping Tips: Next Steps

- Accept the situation
 - Stop wishing the situation were different
- Get some distance emotionally and/or physically
 - Slow down breathing
 - Take a time out if possible
 - Leave the room if safety is an issue



Coping Tips: Next Steps (cont.)

- Strategize an approach
 - How can I use assertive behavior in this situation?
 - Can the other's behavior be discussed directly?
 - If so, find the optimum time and place for the conversation.
 - If not, what other options are there to deal with the other's style?
 - In either case, let your own well-being be a priority as you choose how to communicate in a difficult interaction.



Coping Tips: Next Steps (cont.)

- Implement the approach
 - Say what needs to be said, not more and not less
 - Speak with calmness, clarity and respect
 - Stick to the immediate topic
 - Approach the interaction with a “can-do” attitude
 - Be open while still being clear about your boundaries
 - If a limit needs to be set, do it calmly
 - Lead by example



In Conclusion

- We all have different behavioral styles which we use in various situations.
- Understanding the behavioral styles may help us in responding to them.
- Having an awareness of what styles are challenging for us is a first step, as is recognizing that our styles may be difficult for others to handle.
- Practicing coping strategies when faced with difficult interactions can help us meet those challenging situations more effectively.



When More is Needed

- When we experience an extremely difficult interaction, or a relationship where difficult interactions have become the norm, it may be time to reach out for help.



- A confidential and free consultation with an EAP counselor can be a positive interaction that can lead to support and a change in the situation.



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