

Candidate Guide

ENGAGING WITH DIFFICULT STUDENTS

**GET
READY**

TO NOMINATE YOURSELF

BSU

ELECTIONS

2024



BRIGHTON
STUDENTS' UNION

[BRIGHTONSU.COM/ELECTIONS](https://brightonsu.com/elections)

Engaging with difficult students

Our beliefs and values shape how we behave. Beliefs are our deeply held opinions, while values are guiding principles influencing our decisions. When someone challenges these, it's natural to feel defensive, seeing their perspective as unreasonable.

Beliefs can both empower and hold us back, influencing how we perceive our abilities and situations. Reflecting on our evolving beliefs is crucial for personal growth, especially when talking to others.

Reasons we might find behaviours difficult:

1. Different than our own.
2. Contradicts our beliefs on what behaviour is appropriate.
3. Concern that their behaviour might escalate, and we will not be able to control it within our ability.
4. Fear that the interaction might have a negative impact on our image or message.
5. Doubt in our ability and skills to handle the situation.
6. Anxiety about our own behaviour escalating and becoming unacceptable.
7. Fearing the consequences of not being able to resolve the situation.
8. Uncomfortableness.

Some things we can do to tackle those reasons:

1. Prioritizing them based on how they affect us currently or how they might affect our future.
2. Implementing small strategies, like having a friend keeping us grounded.
3. Setting clear aims on what you want to achieve before talking to people to stay focused and positive.
4. Using SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound).

Dealing with challenging behaviour depends on various factors:

- Our own personality, knowledge, and experience.
- Context, including energy levels and the amount of people in the group.
- Previous experience with the behaviour.
- Relationship with the person - reactions might change if you know them.
- Expectations and understanding of the person we are talking to.

Behaviours often fall into three categories:

You might see difficult behaviours in student voters, fellow candidates and maybe even amongst your campaign team! Remember this is a natural response to stressful situations (such as campaigning), but it's always good to recognise the kind of behaviour and how you can deal with it constructively.

Aggressive:

- Pushing their own rights at other people's expense.
- Confrontational tone and body language (glaring, staring, loud voice, standing too close, pointing at people).
- Dominating conversations (interrupting, talking over others).

Passive:

- Avoiding eye contact and confrontation.
- Quietness and not assertive of their rights.
- Reluctance to express different opinions and giving in to forceful demands.

Passive-Aggressive:

- Indirectly expressing hostility (notes, email, social media...).
- Sarcasm and stubbornness.

Short-term effects of such behaviours include emotional strain and campaign disruption, while long-term consequences may affect your confidence and reputation.

Strategies for managing difficult behaviour:

1. Pick your battles wisely; it's okay to stop talking to someone if they're making you uncomfortable. Try to wrap up the conversation quickly and take a 5-minute breather before talking to other people
2. Be assertive, keep your composure and set clear boundaries. But also make sure you're listening to the other person's point of view - you never know!
3. Think about the impact this behaviour is having on yourself, and if campaigning is turning sour maybe it's time to move to a different conversation! Prioritize your self-care and keep a positive attitude, but ensure you're taking time to breathe if you need to
4. Seek support from the Students' Union if you need it.

It's important to know and identify your own behaviour to be able to deal with challenging behaviours from others. You can do this through "putting yourself in their shoes", otherwise known as Perceptual Positions, to understand the other's perspectives.

Perceptual Positions:

1. Standing in your own shoes
2. Standing in the other person's shoes
3. Standing outside the situation as an independent observer

This can be guided through some questions:

1. How do I see the situation? How do I feel?
2. How does the situation seem from their perspective? How does it feel to be there? How are you seeing yourself from their point of view?
3. What does this look like from the outside?

Active Listening:

- Listen properly and use the Perceptual Positions to understand the reasons for someone's behaviour and how to support them
- Give people time to form sentences about their feelings and to allow them to express themselves
- Don't be scared of moments of silence! This gives people the chance to process their thoughts, especially if they're upset

- Focus on what the other person is saying without interrupting, try to avoid immediately comparing their story to your own experience
- Pay attention to their non-verbal communication and use your own to encourage the behaviour you want to see (smiling, nodding, making positive eye contact)
- Ask open ended questions to allow them to express themselves further
- Reflect on what they have said by summarising what you have heard them say - this ensures them that you have been listening and they can also correct you if you've misunderstood them
- Keep in mind people will come from different backgrounds and abilities, so that might affect how they express themselves and the words they use

'I' statements:

This is particularly useful when mediating conversations between people who disagree, and it avoids making assumptions about the other person and keep expectations aligned and realistic.

The "I" statement should be delivered by:

- Describing how you're affected by a person's behaviour
- Describing the other person's behaviour based on fact (what they have said or done rather than your interpretation of it)
- Stating what you would like to happen next

Avoid:

- Being aggressive or passive-aggressive
- Using it to highlight how you have been victimised by other people's behaviour