

# How to Deal With Difficult Behavior

Editor's note: Our Tailgate Training Tip Sheets are [available in Spanish at www.gemplers.com](http://www.gemplers.com).

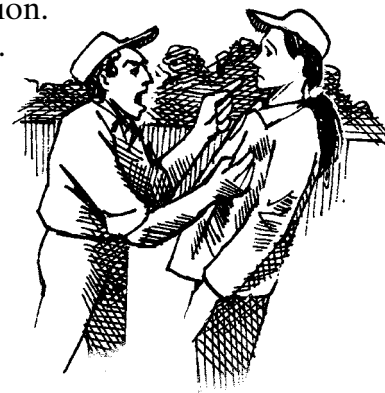
**KEY POINTS:**

- Pay close attention to difficult or unusual behavior.
- Be on the lookout for warning signs that could result in violence.
- Report any unusual behavior to management.
- Call for outside emergency help when necessary.

*Note to trainer:* Follow this script or use it to help guide you through a 10- to 15-minute tailgate training session for your ag/hort workers. You may photocopy this sheet for your employees' personal use. However, it may not be published or sold. Be sure all of your supervisors are familiar with the warning signs of potentially destructive or otherwise violent behavior, that they encourage the reporting of unusual behavior without fear of reprisal, that they document any erratic behavior they spot, and that they take all such reports seriously.

**Recognizing unusual behavior**

- All of us occasionally have “bad days.” These may occur for a variety of reasons, including a lack of sleep, problems at home, financial difficulties, medical problems, stress on or off the job, or unhappiness with our work situation.
- Having an occasional bad day doesn't necessarily lead to a change in behavior.
- Sometimes, though, we may notice that a co-worker is acting different or unusual. It's important that we don't just blame this on a “bad day” – especially if it continues or worsens over time.
- Unusual or difficult behavior is by no means limited to co-workers. We may also notice it in a supervisor or other manager, customer, vendor, or visitor to our operation.
- Be sure to tell your supervisor or another member of management about any unusual behavior. Difficult or unusual behavior sometimes leads to violence in the workplace. It's our goal to avoid that, and to keep you safe.
- We won't punish you for reporting any unusual behavior.

**Here are some warning signs to look out for**

- sudden disinterest in work or other changes in behavior
- carelessness on the job
- sudden non-communication
- increased use of food, alcohol or cigarettes
- defensive or hostile, argumentative behavior
- a large number of absences or tardiness for non-medical reasons
- accidents or “near-misses”
- destructive behavior or a disregard for other people's rights and property
- irrational reaction to even gentle criticism
- poor grooming or appearance
- antisocial behavior, such as threats of violence or the display of a weapon
- physical, sexual or verbal harassment



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## How to Deal With Difficult Behavior

### How to appropriately respond

- It's important that you report any of these warning signs to your supervisor or another manager as quickly as possible.
- We also encourage you to write down what you observed, including the date and time. Keep a written record of your observations.
- Some **poor** ways to respond to difficult behavior include using power or force, arguing or fighting back, ridiculing the person, or denying the person his or her feelings.
- If someone is verbally hostile with you, here are some tips on appropriate ways to respond:
  - Stay calm. Avoid raising your voice or getting angry.
  - Don't argue with the person, engage in personal attacks, or physically respond.
  - Carefully listen to what the person is saying. Show respect, even if you disagree.
  - Don't embarrass or make fun of the person and don't act like you know all of the answers and the other person doesn't.
  - Call for help when necessary.



Getting angry with a person exhibiting difficult behavior is a poor way to respond.

### Getting additional help

- If you are in a situation you feel is dangerous, we encourage you to call for outside emergency help.

*Note to trainer: Let trainees know if you have the emergency 911 phone number in your area, and where emergency numbers are posted.*

- Know that there are laws to protect you from harassing or otherwise violent behavior. These include disorderly conduct laws and laws enabling people to get restraining orders when their personal safety is at risk.
- Help is also available from agencies in the community for people exhibiting erratic behavior due to alcohol or drug use or other reasons.
- We encourage you to contact your supervisor, our human resources or safety director, or another manager for help if you are faced with difficult or threatening behavior either here or at home.



### Are there any questions?

*Note to trainer: Take time to answer trainees' questions. Then review the Difficult Behavior Do's and Don'ts.*

## DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR DO'S AND DON'TS

### DO:

- Report any unusual or difficult behavior to a manager as soon as possible.
- Take all threats seriously. Don't treat them as a joke.
- Know that there are laws to protect you from threatening behavior.

### DON'T:

- Allow a co-worker, supervisor or any other person to harass or abuse you, always report it to a supervisor.
- Argue or get into a fight with a person exhibiting difficult behavior.
- Hesitate to call for outside emergency help when necessary.

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