



# UConn 4-H Fact Sheet



## Working with Challenging Personalities

Personalities don't often change, but they can be managed effectively in a group or meeting situation. There can be many contributing factors in why a member has specific personality traits, so always remember to be as positive and nurturing as possible. Below are some difficult traits and how to handle each.

### Personality Traits & Suggestions

**The Non-Talker** - It is fine to be quiet out of respect or if you don't have a contribution to make, but there are times that silence is a concern. If you feel a participant is bored, indifferent, timid or feeling superior intervention may be needed. If a person displays a pattern of not talking, you should engage them outside the formal meeting space. Ask questions to see if they are nervous or timid. Try to provide small group or paired activities where a person can build up their confidence. If they are feeling superior ask for their opinion and grant their experience. Help them see that they could share knowledge in a productive way.

**The Too Much Talker** - Emotions, helpfulness, fear of silence, habit can all contribute to why people talk too much. Try to wait for a person to take a breath and then thank them for their input to refocus the group. If you have prior experience with a person, assign them to take notes, or ask them to help make sure that everyone has a chance to speak. Always set a good example as the leader. The group is looking to you.

**The Side Conversationalist** - Side conversations are blocking behaviors, even if they are talking about the subject matter. Don't embarrass the person. Ask them a question or restate the last topic and ask them to share an opinion in order to reengage them in the main conversation.

**The Non-Cooperator** - This is most often seen in children who's parents tell them what to do and when. They fail to see value in working together or group decision making. They view themselves as a follower or the boss and expect the group to operate accordingly. Enforcing group process and group planning will help them develop cooperation skills

**The Heckler** – Highly combative, argumentative and needling are traits of a heckler. They can target people, ideas or processes. Keep your temper in check, and stay calm. Try to find merit in their points and if they misquote facts refer them to correct subject matter. If it continues, talk to them separately to see if there is a problem that needs attention.

**The Happy Wanderer** – This person lacks understanding or focus on the topic. Some wanderers have great ideas but are unable to communicate them. Try rephrasing questions for them in clear, concise language with out sounding annoyed. Redirect them to the topic and refrain from saying things like “that’s not the point”. If possible, back up the discussion with visual images, which can help make the topic more concrete.

**The Complainer** – This person may not like a rule or policy of the program. Their complaint may be legitimate or totally off the discussion topic. Point out that you can not make a change to that right at this time. If the complaint is reasonable, perhaps work with them to suggest a rule or policy change to address the issue.

## Working with an Agitated Person

When encountering a parent/person who is agitated, the following suggestions are offered to assist in calming the person during the interview:

- Stay calm yourself. Work to reduce your own fear, and stay in control.
- Ask the parent/person to remain seated. Seat yourself nearby, and stay at eye level with the individual.
- Be clear and direct about your purpose for seeing the parent/ person. Do not argue, demand, demean or touch the person.
- Speak clearly, respectfully and in a low voice. Ask the parent/ person to slow down and speak clearly so that you can understand him/her more clearly and completely.
- Gear the focus of the interview to the immediate problem, even if this means altering your agenda.
- Respectfully listen. Let the parent/person talk. Communicate that you want to help resolve the problem.
- The interview should be terminated if the person continues to become agitated, uncooperative or verbally abusive, makes personal threats or displays a weapon. Exit promptly under such circumstances, and report the situation to your county 4-H educator.