

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING SOCIAL DYNAMICS



"What you hate is walking. This is hiking—hiking is different from walking."

We try to begin from an understanding there are usually underlying reasons beneath challenging behavior. Merely remembering there is a root cause can help us be empathetic. For example, someone who seems annoyed when you stop at a vista point to ask an engaging question may have a health condition that leads to bad sleep so they feel particularly tired at that moment.

What you can do to deal with challenging people on an outing

- Thank the person for their participation and indicate it is time to hear from others.
- Use humor to invite others to speak up.
- Acknowledge the person's expertise or experience and ask permission to call on them later for specific examples
- Restate intention of respect on the outing
- Have a second docent or other volunteer support you in listening to and working with the challenging participant.
- Let them know you will be happy to find an answer to their question after the outing and get back to them in the interest of time.

If these approaches don't work, try to following:

- Provide constructive feedback about the impact of the behavior on the outing, the participants, and/or you away from the rest of the group.
- Be specific when describing the situation. Just say what you saw or what you heard. This limits the odds of the person responding defensively.
- In case of a serious or upsetting incident, please be sure to reach out to your LandPaths' docent contact to report the interaction.

If you can, try to avoid doing the following:

- Compete with the person.
- Insult the person.
- Stifle the person's enthusiasm.
- Get defensive.
- Express anger.
- Let the person control the discussion.