

# How to Deal with Annoying People

Learn strategies for coping with eight of the most grating personalities

By [Petra Guglielmetti](#) from [WomansDay.com](#)

Ever feel like you have to bite your tongue, smile and nod just to get through your day? We asked etiquette experts for their best tips on how to deal with eight irksome personalities you're bound to encounter often, whether on the job, in your [family](#) or out on the town.

## The Close Talker

As portrayed in a memorable episode of *Seinfeld*, the close talker positions her face mere millimeters from yours, making it exceedingly difficult to carry on a conversation (you're too focused on dodging spittle and avoiding direct inhalation of funky breath smells). When taking two steps back feels rude and obvious, here's an alternative: "What I tend to do is take one leg and pivot it to the side so my body is no longer directly facing the person," says Palm Beach-based etiquette expert [Jacqueline Whitmore](#). If you're at a crowded party, you can also hold your cocktail out from your body to encourage the space between you to gradually widen. Keep in mind that the close talker might simply be hard of hearing or from a different cultural background, notes San Antonio, Texas-based etiquette expert [Diane Gottsman](#). "The norm in the U.S. is to speak at approximately arm's length, or the distance of a handshake, but the definition of personal space varies among different cultures," she says.

## The Excessive Toucher

Whether she's ducking in for an overly familiar hug too early in your relationship or distractingly stroking or jabbing your upper arm during conversation, this personality type also lacks a sense of personal boundaries. If you're uncomfortable simply saying you're not much of a touchy-feely type, the easiest way to dodge contact is to use props whenever possible, says Marblehead, Massachusetts-based etiquette expert [Jodi R. R. Smith](#). "Try to sit down at a table opposite her, or hold something—a plate of food, even a child—to create a barrier between you and the other person."

## Debbie Downer

*Saturday Night Live* based an ongoing sketch on this familiar character, who possesses an uncanny knack for putting a negative spin on just about anything. To avoid letting her glass-half-empty outlook deflate your mood, pose questions in a strategic manner. "Instead of 'How was your [vacation](#)?' ask, 'What was the best part of your vacation?'" Smith suggests. "And when the person is telling a tale of woe, listen, then ask, 'So what did you learn from that?'" Whatever you do, resist the temptation to join her for an occasional group therapy session about office politics. "Complaining often begets complaining, so be sure not to chime in—not even a little!" Gottsman adds. Instead, she suggests saying that for 2010 you've decided to start looking on the bright side of things and that it feels great, so maybe she should join you.

## **Ms. Me, Me, Me**

This personality type quickly steers any conversation back to her own ongoing personal dramas. Not only is this habit annoying, it breaks a basic rule of etiquette. “Being a good conversationalist really is all about asking the other person things about him or herself,” Whitmore notes. However, in this case, you should probably suspend that rule of thumb and cease asking questions about the other person once the conversation starts to feel boringly one-sided. “If you’re really good friends, you can steal a line from Bette Midler and jokingly say, ‘Enough about you. Let’s talk about me!’” Gottsman says. With others, you might try, “Nice chatting with you—next time remind me to fill you in on some of the things I’ve been up to!”

## **The Oversharer**

This is the person in whose honor the popular term “T.M.I.” (too much information) was coined, so feel free to use it when the oversharer begins to reveal the gory details of her sex life, health issues and/or most recent dramatic bathroom episodes. Smith’s other suggestion: “Shh! Someone might overhear you!” Gottsman likes, “Sorry, this is a topic I wouldn’t even discuss with my own mother!”

## **The Constant Competitor**

Making one-upmanship into an art form, this type reflexively negates even your most innocuous social updates with braggy accounts of her own (apparently much more impressive) accomplishments, purchases, travels and children. “This person probably acts this way because she is seeking attention and wants to feel important and included,” Whitmore says. Of course, that doesn’t make the behavior any less of a turnoff. Rather than feed into back-and-forth competition, let her next one-up put an end to your conversation. If, as you mention your trip to Napa Valley, she cuts in with a tale of Sicilian vineyards, say, “Oh, that’s nice,” and let the conversation awkwardly end. Maybe she’ll take a hint.

## **The Small-Talker**

With this type, it’s exceedingly difficult to progress the conversation much past “How are you today?” She may make only generic comments about the weather or the nice house where the party is being held. A chronic small-talker remains firmly in that mode, even when you’ve known her for quite a while. “You can get real with this person if you know the right questions to ask,” Whitmore says. “Rather than simply ask what profession she is in, ask what the biggest challenge she’s having at work these days is.” Or, ask how she got into the profession in the first place and whether it’s what she always wanted to do. Or bring up a hobby of your own and ask what her recreational interests are.

## **The Smack Talker**

There’s harmless gossip and then there’s the relentless, mean-spirited stream of misinformation that comes from this acquaintance’s lips. It’s better to avoid this person or risk being associated with her—especially in work situations. “You could say, ‘I don’t think it’s fair to talk about Missy without her here to give us her side of the story. Shall we call her?’” Gottsman says. “Most people don’t gossip to be mean but to make conversation,” Whitmore notes. “Why not politely help that person understand that her words could be hurtful or destructive in the current setting? You could always turn the tables and ask how she’d feel if someone was saying that about her.”