

Q: My back door is difficult to open and close because it's sticking. Can I repair it?

A: (from Brad Staggs, *Ask DIY Home Improvement* expert) There are a couple of easy, quick fixes that may be helpful in dealing with a sticky door.

Materials (may include):

Cordless drill and screwdriver attachment

Utility knife

Wood or cardboard shim

Wood toothpick

Suggestions:

- The first thing to check is the strike plate mounted in the door frame. The strike plate is part of the door-latch mechanism. Sometimes the screws holding the strike plate in place can work themselves partially loose (**figure A**). If the screws are loose, they may be interfering with smooth operation of the door, or they may be allowing the strike plate to become misaligned and interfere with the door closing. If the screws are loose, tighten them and then check the door to see if the situation improves.
- A related problem may arise if the strike plate is not mortised far enough into the doorframe -- causing the door to stick. You may want to remove the strike plate and inspect the mortise (or recess) in which the frame (**figure B**).



Figure A



Figure B



Figure C



Figure D

- If necessary, use a utility knife to trim out around the edge of the mortise (**figure C**) so that the strike plate can sit further back into the frame.
- Once you've trimmed out enough wood, reinstall the strike plate (**figure D**) and check the door's operation.
- A separate problem may arise if the hinges aren't seated or functioning properly, causing the door to hang improperly. Check the gaps around the perimeter of the door. Around the top of the door, the gap should be about 1/16-inch. Along the bottom, the gap should be about 1/4-inch, or slightly more if it has to clear carpeting when it opens. Along the lock side, the gap should be about 1/8-inch all the way down the length of the door. If the gap is uneven at the top or bottom, the door may be tilted slightly in the frame because of a hinge that is loose or not mounted properly. You may simply need to tighten the screws holding the hinges in place to correct a minor problem.
- If tightening the screws doesn't provide enough adjustment, you may need to remove the hinge entirely, and place a thin wood-shim spacer (**figure E**) behind it. A shim can be made from a piece of a paint-stir stick, cut to the proper size. For a less severe problem, a cardboard spacer may be sufficient.
- After the shim is in place, reinstall the hinge -- screwing the wood screws right through the shim and into the existing holes (**figure F**).
- By using shims to adjust the way that the door hangs, you may be able to realign the door so that the gaps are even (**figure G**) and the door no longer sticks.



Figure E



Figure F



Figure G



Figure H

Tip: If the wood screws holding a hinge or strike plate in place have become stripped, you can tighten the screw's grip by inserting a wood toothpick in the screw hole before reinstalling the screw (**figure H**). Break the toothpick off so that there is none extending outside the hole. The extra sliver of wood in the hole will help tighten the screw's hold on the wood.