

Conflict Resolution Skills

Successful conflict resolution depends on your ability to:

- **Manage stress while remaining alert and calm.** By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and non-verbal communication.
- **Manage your emotions and behavior.** When you are able to manage your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, frightening, or punishing others. You will also be better able to validate and express your needs.
- **Pay attention to the feelings being expressed** as well as the spoken words of others.
- **Be aware of and respectful of differences.** By avoiding disrespectful words and actions, you can resolve the problem faster.

Healthy and unhealthy ways of managing and resolving conflict

Conflict triggers strong emotions and can lead to hurt feelings, disappointment, and discomfort. When handled in an unhealthy manner, it can cause irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups. But when conflict is resolved in a healthy way, it increases our understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens our relationship bonds.

Unhealthy responses to conflict are characterized by:

- An inability to recognize and respond to matters of great importance to the other person
- Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions.
- The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment
- The expectation of bad outcomes
- The fear and avoidance of conflict

Healthy responses to conflict are characterized by:

- The capacity to recognize and respond to important matters
- A readiness to forgive and forget
- The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
- A belief that resolution can support the interests and needs of both parties.

Tips for managing and resolving conflict

Managing and resolving conflict requires emotional maturity, self-control, and empathy. It can be tricky, frustrating, and even frightening. You can ensure that the process is as painless and positive as possible by sticking to the following conflict resolution guidelines:

- **Make the relationship your priority.** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than “winning” the argument, is helpful with conflict resolution. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint . Ask for respect in return.
- **Focus on the present.** If you’re holding on to old hurts and resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- **Pick your battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it’s important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy. Maybe you don’t want to surrender a parking space if you’ve been circling for 15 minutes. But if there are dozens of spots, arguing over a single space isn’t worth it.
- **Be willing to forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you’re unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.
- **Know when to let something go.** If you can’t come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

Ground Rules for Conflict Resolution

- **Remain calm.** Try not to over-react to difficult situations. By remaining calm it will be more likely that others will consider your viewpoint.
- **Express feelings in words, not actions.** Telling someone directly and honestly how you feel can be a very powerful form of communication. If you start to feel so angry or upset that you feel you may lose control, take a “time out” and do something to help yourself feel steadier.
- **Be specific about what is bothering you.** Vague complaints are hard to work with.
- **Deal with only one issue at a time.** Don’t introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. That avoids the “kitchen sink” effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.
- **No “hitting below the belt”.** Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.
- **Avoid accusations.** Accusations will cause others to defend themselves. Instead, talk about how someone’s actions made you feel.
- **Don’t generalize.** Avoid words like “never” or “always”. Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.
- **Avoid “make believe”.** Exaggerating or inventing a complaint – or feelings about it – will prevent the real issue from surfacing. Stick to the facts and your honest feelings.
- **Don’t stockpile.** Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counter-productive. It’s almost impossible to deal with numerous old problems for which interpretations may differ. Try to deal with problems as they arise.
- **Avoid clamming up.** When one person becomes silent and stops responding to the other, frustration and anger can result. Positive results can only be attained with two-way communication.

- **Timing is everything.** It is necessary to choose an appropriate time to talk that will work for all parties. If one party becomes upset and is unable to continue due to a need to calm, agree on when to regroup to move forward to a conflict resolution goal.
- **Don't assume.** Be clear with what it is that is bothering you, what you want and what you are willing to do or not do to resolve conflict. Don't assume the other person knows.
- **Agree to disagree.** You will need to be respectful for others' opinions and points of view. Compromise may be necessary.

Managing and resolving conflict by learning how to listen

When people are upset, the words they use rarely convey the issues and needs at the heart of the problem. When we listen for what is felt as well as said, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for other to hear us.

Tips for being a better listener:

- Listen to the reasons the other person gives for being upset.
- Make sure you understand what the other person is telling you from his or her point of view.
- Repeat the other person's words, and ask if you have understood correctly.
- Ask if anything remains unspoken, giving the person time to think before answering,
- Resist the temptation to interject your own point of view until the other person has said everything he or she wants to say and feels that you have listened to and understood his or her message.

When listening to the other person's point of view, the following responses are often helpful:

Encourage the other person to share his or her issues as fully as possible.

- "I want to understand what has upset you."
- "I want to know what you are really hoping for."

Clarify the real issues rather than making assumptions. Ask questions that allow you to gain this information, and which let the other person know you are trying to understand

- "Can you say more about that?"
- "Is that the way it usually happens?"

Restate what you have heard, so you are both able to see what has been understood so far – it may be that the other person will then realize that additional information is needed.

- "It sounds like you weren't expecting that to happen."

Reflect feelings – be as clear as possible.

- "I can't imagine how upsetting that must have been."

Validate the concerns of the other person, even if a solution is elusive at this time. Expressing appreciation can be a very powerful message if it is conveyed with integrity and respect.

- " I really appreciate that we are talking about this issue."
- "I am glad we are trying to figure this out."