

# Managing conflict

Few, if any relationships are devoid of conflict. From family dynamics to workplace environments, almost everyone experiences at least some degree of interpersonal disagreement from time to time.

Avoiding conflict, or merely pretending it doesn't exist, may sometimes make the situation worse. A conflict that is ignored will rarely resolve itself until it is properly addressed.

Conversely, when we deal with conflict in a thoughtful and reasonable manner we learn more about others and ourselves.

## Effective ways to manage conflict

- Have empathy for the opposing viewpoint or position.
- Remain calm, respectful and reasonable.
- Let go of resentments and grudges as you work toward a resolution.
- Try to find common ground and areas where compromise is possible.
- Communicate clearly and directly.
- Listen actively. Be aware of the "feelings" being expressed, as well as the words being spoken.
- Maintain your interest and motivation in finding an acceptable resolution for both parties.
- Separate feelings from facts.
- Avoid assuming negative things about the other person's intentions.
- If you're unsure of something, seek clarification.

## Ineffective ways to manage conflict

- Refuse to recognize or acknowledge what is important to the other party.
- Use an aggressive, confrontational and nonconciliatory demeanor.
- Refuse to listen to new information relevant to the conflict.
- Take a rigid, inflexible approach. It's your way or the "wrong" way.
- Avoid the true nature of the conflict for fear of a negative outcome.
- Prioritize "winning" or being "right" over searching for genuine resolution.

It's easy to think of conflict as something that is resolved simply via verbal means, but nonverbal communication can have vitally important impact on managing and resolving conflict. Paying attention to things like subtle variations in body language, facial expressions, gestures, tone and subtext may lead to a better understating of not just the problem itself, but also the deeper and underlying motivations behind it.

Conflict resolution can be serious business, but it needn't be entirely humorless. An appropriately timed injection of humor and levity into a situation may be an effective way to ease tension, break the ice, and possibly even put the situation into much-needed perspective.

Managing conflict can be a difficult situation in any relationship, whether it's personal or professional. However, with the right tools, a calm perspective, and an open mind, finding a solution and maintaining the relationship is possible.

When you can recognize conflicting needs and are willing to examine them with compassion and understanding, it can lead to creative problem solving, team building and stronger relationships.



### Critical support when you need it

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