

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is a natural part of life. It demonstrates that individuals are interested, passionate and engaged, and willing to express themselves with others around them.

Conflict can escalate into more inflammatory situations if not handled well. Conflict is not a problem in itself – it is what we do with it that makes the difference. If you are in conflict with someone and you don't know what to do, you may find these tips helpful.

If there is no threat of physical violence, talking it out is the best solution. Face-to-face contact is the preferred option over letters and messages – and a good deal better than banging on walls, throwing objects, or complaining about it to everyone else!

If you accept that conflict is a perfectly natural part of life, you can learn to manage your own responses when faced with an emotionally charged situation.

Consider working through the following steps if you find yourself in a situation where conflict has arisen.

1. **Stay calm.** If you get angry in return, you'll only fuel the other person's anger. You're not responsible for their anger, but you can help lower the intensity of the situation by staying calm yourself.
2. **Decide.** Should you ignore the angry outburst and give them space to 'let off some steam'? Should you get away because they may become violent? Is this a good time to get them to talk? Use your judgement to decide the best – and safest – thing to do right now.
3. **Listen to the other person.** Let the person know you are listening. You may not agree, but there's nothing more frustrating than trying to talk to someone who doesn't appear to be listening. Say that you're glad you're talking about the issue. This helps to ease the tension and is a great help in moving things towards an agreement.
4. **Acknowledge his or her anger.** Whether it's at the time or later on, tell the other person that you understand they are angry. Even if you think it's too obvious or simple to say 'I see that you're angry', this type of comment will help lower the other person's level of anger. Your comment may not resolve the anger, but it will decrease the intensity of the situation.

Understand that your own reaction to an emotional outburst may reduce or amplify the conflict. Your communication skills are a powerful influence, and may be the key to de-escalating a situation.





5. **Manage your emotions – stay out of the anger.** Acknowledge the other person's anger – but do not become part of it. Even if you agree with the other person about whatever is making them angry, you want to avoid being associated with their emotional way of expressing it. If you are the target of the anger, you still want to avoid the intense feelings.
6. **Talk about the issues.** When you decide it's time to talk, focus on the issues the other person is angry about, not about their anger. 'I understand that you're angry about the program' or 'I understand that you're angry at me for forgetting to give you the message' are examples of sticking to the issues.
7. **Choose your role – carefully.** You can apologise and promise to be more inclusive, consultative or careful about giving messages and information. You can say you understand their views about the program. But avoid 'taking on' the problem. Do not add your own complaints about the program or the other things you dislike about what's happening at work. Let the issue or concern belong to the other person and avoid getting tangled up with the issue.
8. **Genuinely consider the other person's point of view.** Gain an understanding of the other person's perspective. To help understand the problem, it may be useful to ask questions about their point of view.
9. **Imagine yourself in their shoes.** Never say 'you're wrong'. In fact, try hard to look for areas of agreement and build on them. There's power in the words 'Yes, I see what you're saying. Do you mean...?' This shows the other person you are listening and validating their concerns. By doing this, you gradually begin to break down their anger.
10. **If the situation turns verbally abusive, put a stop to it.** State firmly but calmly: 'You're very angry right now and you're saying things you don't mean (give them the benefit of the doubt). I'm going to excuse myself. We can talk again after you calm down'. Then leave the room or ask them to leave.