Tips for Managing Conflict

Accept conflict. Remember that conflict is natural and happens in every ongoing relationship. Since conflict is unavoidable we must learn to manage it. Conflict is a sign of a need for change and an opportunity for growth, new understanding, and improved communication. Conflict can not be resolved unless it is addressed with the appropriate individual(s).

Be a calming agent. Regardless of whether you are being a sounding board for a friend or you are dealing with your own conflict, your response to the conflict can escalate or decrease the intensity of the problem. To be calming, provide an objective or neutral point of view. Help plan how you are going to work with the other party to achieve resolution.

Listen actively. Work through how you feel, what the specific problem is and what impact it is having on you. Use I-based statements to help do this (see formula below).

- I feel (strongest feeling)
- When you (objective description of the behavior)
- Because (specific impact or consequences)
- I would like (what you want the person to do in the future to prevent the problem)

Analyze the conflict. Analyze the conflict to help clarify the specific problem. Some questions that you may ask are:

- What triggered the conflict?
- Who are you angry with?
- What are you not getting that you want?
- What are you afraid of losing?
- Is your conflict/anger accurate or over exaggerated?
- How can your conflict be resolved?

Model neutral language. When people are in conflict they use inflammatory language such as profanity, name calling, and exaggerations that escalate the conflict. Restate inflammatory language in a more objective way to help make the information less emotionally laden and more useful for future discussions.

Separate the person from the problem. View the problem as a specific behavior or set of circumstances rather than attributing negative feelings to the whole person. This approach makes the problem more manageable and hopeful than deciding you "can’t stand" this person any longer.

Work together. This requires that each person stop placing blame and take ownership of the problem. Make a commitment to work together and listen to each other to solve the conflict.

Agree to disagree. Each person has a unique point of view and rarely agrees on every detail. Being right is not what is important. When managing conflict, seeking the "truth" can trap you
rather than set you free. For example, consider the differing testimony of witnesses that all see the same car accident. Truth is relative to the person’s point of view.

**Focus on the future.** In conflict we tend to remember every single thing that ever bothered us about that person. People in conflict need to vent about the past but they often dwell on the past. Often the best way to take ownership of the problem is to recognize that regardless of the past, you need to create a plan to address the present conflict and those that may arise in the future.

"Move past positions". A position is the desired outcome of a conflict. Often the position is "I need a new roommate" or "This person is impossible to live with". Positions are not negotiable and result in impasse. To resolve conflict, each person has to "move past positions".

**Share your interests.** To solve interpersonal conflict, all parties must talk about their interests or the WHY’s behind their positions. They must share their true interests and work together to find a solution that satisfies those interests. Common interests for students are to sleep, study, entertain and relax in a comfortable atmosphere. Often their interests are more intangible such as respect, belonging, friendship, and fun. When individuals have differing lifestyles, values, and schedules the need to discuss their differences is critical in managing conflict. You must develop a balanced plan of give and take that satisfies everyone’s interests.

**Be creative.** Finding a resolution to the problem that satisfies everyone requires creativity and hard work. Be careful not to give in simply to avoid conflict or maintain harmony. Agreements reached too early usually do not last. Generate silly options to begin thinking "outside of the box" of original positions.

**Be specific.** problem solving be very specific. For example, if you are using a roommate agreement to facilitate the discussion make sure that everyone fully understands each point that is written down. Clarify ambiguous terms that each person may interpret differently.

**Maintain confidentiality.** Encourage others who are in conflict to deal directly with the person they are in conflict with. Avoiding the conflict and venting to others tends to escalate the conflict and fuels the rumor mill. If rumors are already part of the conflict, encourage them to work out a plan to put an end to the gossip. Do your part to quell rumors.

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