

Confidently Managing Conflict

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Have you ever been bothered by someone's words or actions but hesitated to address them for fear of harming the relationship? In such instances, you might avoid a person or situation entirely just to prevent a conflict. But why is the mere idea of conflict so scary? These conversations can be difficult because our strong emotions make it uncomfortable to broach the topic or express our feelings, and often involve differing opinions or values (Larsen & Hafen, 2010; Shonk, 2024). Additionally, trauma, negative past experiences, or a non-confrontational personality can make these conversations feel intimidating or threatening. However hard addressing a topic may seem, properly handled conflict can benefit a relationship (Shonk, 2024).

So, how does one engage in a conversation that addresses a conflict? Here are some tips:

1. Examine the story you tell yourself

Sometimes, we assign negative motives to others' actions because we only see things from our perspective. Ask yourself if your thoughts are based on facts or assumptions. If your understanding is based on assumptions, step back and focus on what you actually saw or heard (Grenny et al., 2002). Use this to reframe your thoughts. Don't forget to ask questions to ensure you understand what the other person is saying and doing. This can help clear up any negative thoughts you might have about your interaction with them.

2. Use "I" Statements

For example, say, "When you ask, 'Why are you doing it that way?' I feel like you think I don't know what I'm doing."

3. Actively Listen

According to the United States Institute of Peace (2017), active listening involves non-verbal attentiveness, paraphrasing, showing empathy, asking questions for clarity, and encouraging the other person to share.

4. Practice Collaboration

This means you address the conflict in a way that meets everyone's needs (Omene, 2021). If you can't find a mutually satisfying solution, consider compromise, where both parties give up a little to reach an agreement (Cote 2023).

By following these steps and approaching tough conversations with empathy and clarity, you can navigate conflicts effectively, strengthen your relationships, and feel more confident in your ability to manage conflict. Remember, understanding and collaboration are key to resolving disputes while maintaining mutual respect.

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