



Tips for Managing and Resolving Conflict

Read Non-Verbal Cues

When people are in the midst of a conflict, the words they use rarely convey the issues at the heart of the problem. But, by paying close attention to the other person's non-verbal signals or "body language", such as facial expressions, posture, gestures, and tone of voice, you can better understand what the person is trying to say. This will allow you to respond in a way that builds trust and gets to the root of the problem.

Be Mindful of Your Own Non-Verbal Cues

Your ability to accurately read another person depends on your own emotional awareness. The more aware you are of your own emotions the easier it will be for you to pick up on the clues that reveal what others are feeling. Think about what you are transmitting to others during conflict, and if what you say matches your body language. If you say, "I'm fine," but you clench your teeth and look away, then your body is clearly signaling you are anything but "fine." A calm tone of voice, a reassuring touch, or an interested facial expression can go a long way toward relaxing a tense exchange.

Listen For What Is Felt as Well as What Is Said

When you really listen, you connect more deeply to your own needs and emotions and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens, informs, and makes it easier for others to hear you when it's your turn to speak.

Make Resolution the Priority

Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your priority. Be respectful of the other person and their viewpoint.

Focus On the Present

If you're holding on to grudges based on past conflicts, 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 right now to resolve the problem.

Pick Your Battles

Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is worth 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 empty spots, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.

Be Willing to Forgive

Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling to forgive others. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can serve only to deplete and drain your life.

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.

Be Polite

Maintaining common courtesy is a good way of keeping conflict at bay in all situations because it helps prevent misunderstandings and keeps the setting professional.

Use Humor to Lighten the Situation (If and When Appropriate)

You might avoid confrontations and resolve disagreements by communicating in a humorous way. Humor can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without offending someone. However, it's important that you laugh with the other person and not at them. When humor and play are used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can become an opportunity for greater connection.

Own Your Mistakes

Made a mistake? Admit it, apologize, and move on. People don't like it when they can see you were obviously wrong and you're unable to say it. It looks dishonest and it breeds mistrust. Trust is fundamental in resolving conflict so do what you can to keep trust levels high. Being honest in other areas helps conflict too. If you can talk openly about what you want to happen, you'll reduce misunderstandings and better manage expectations. Clarity and good communication can stop some of the smaller disagreements before they even start.

Spot Potential Conflict Early

Be alert for signs of imminent conflict. When you spot it, try to draw it out. Conflicts tend to fester and if you can address it early you can work to resolve the problem before it turns into something larger. Have a quick chat: talk about what's bothering the person and how you can work together to resolve the situation satisfactorily. A quick intervention early can prevent a longer, drawn out exercise to resolve issues later.

Show Empathy

Even though we might think we do, we don't know what's going on in the head of someone else. Assumptions are often the start of conflict situations, especially if you assume someone will or should act in a certain way and then are disappointed when they don't. It's a cliché, but try to put yourself in the position of the other person. What are they going to want to get out of this interaction? How is it making them feel? And if you don't know, it's OK to ask.