Conflict Resolution

Conflict 101

- **A conflict is more than just a disagreement.** It is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat (whether or not the threat is real).
- **Conflicts continue to fester when ignored.** Because conflicts involve perceived threats to our well-being and survival, they stay with us until we face and resolve them.
- **We respond to conflicts based on our perceptions** of the situation, not necessarily to an objective review of the facts. Our perceptions are influenced by our life experiences, culture, values, and beliefs.
- **Conflicts trigger strong emotions.** If you aren’t comfortable with your emotions or able to manage them in times of stress, you won’t be able to resolve conflict successfully.
- **Conflicts are an opportunity for growth.** When you’re able to resolve conflict in a relationship, it builds trust. You can feel secure knowing your relationship can survive challenges and disagreements.

Healthy and Unhealthy ways of managing and Resolving Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unhealthy responses to conflict</th>
<th>Healthy responses to conflict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An inability to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person</td>
<td>The capacity to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person</td>
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<td>Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions</td>
<td>Calm, non-defensive, and respectful reactions</td>
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<td>The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment</td>
<td>A readiness to forgive and forget, and to move past the conflict without holding resentments or anger</td>
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<td>An inability to compromise or see the other person’s side</td>
<td>The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing</td>
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<td>The fear and avoidance of conflict; the expectation of bad outcomes</td>
<td>A belief that facing conflict head on is the best thing for both sides</td>
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The ability to successfully resolve conflict depends on your ability to:

- **Manage stress quickly while remaining alert and calm.** By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication.
- **Control your emotions and behavior.** When you’re in control of your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, frightening, or punishing others.
- **Pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as the spoken words of others.** Validate the feelings, not the person.
- **Be aware of and respectful of differences.** By avoiding disrespectful words and actions, you can almost always resolve a problem faster.

Psychologist Connie Lillas uses a driving analogy to describe the three most common ways people respond when they’re overwhelmed by stress:

- **Foot on the gas.** An angry or agitated stress response. You’re heated, keyed up, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
- **Foot on the brake.** A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.
- **Foot on both gas and brake.** A tense and frozen stress response. You “freeze” under pressure and can’t do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you’re extremely agitated.
Stress interferes with the ability to resolve conflict by limiting your ability to:

- Accurately read another person's nonverbal communication
- Hear what someone is really saying
- Be aware of your own feelings
- Be in touch with your deep-rooted needs
- Communicate your needs clearly

**Why emotional awareness is a key factor in resolving conflict**

Emotional awareness—the consciousness of your *moment-to-moment* emotional experience—and the ability to manage all of your feelings appropriately is the basis of a communication process that can resolve conflict.

Emotional awareness helps you:

- Understand what is really troubling other people
- Understand yourself, including what is really troubling you
- Stay motivated until the conflict is resolved
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Attract and influence others

**Tips for managing and resolving conflict**

Managing and resolving conflict requires the ability to quickly reduce stress and bring your emotions into balance. You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by sticking to the following guidelines:

- **Listen for what is felt as well as said.** When we listen we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us when it's our turn to speak.
- **Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right."** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than “winning” the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.
- **Focus on the present.** If you’re holding on to grudges based on past resentments, 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 in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- **Pick your battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it’s important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy.
- **Be willing to forgive.** Release the urge to punish which only adds to our injury.
- **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.

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/eq8_conflict_resolution.htm