


Tips on Managing Conflict – 11 Practical Ways To Deal with Difficult Conversations

If you are in conflict with another party and are unsure how to deal with it, the following tips may help you prepare mentally and emotionally and work your way towards agreement:

- ✓ **Talking about the issues is the best solution if there is no threat of physical violence.** Communicating with the other party *face-to-face* is more effective than emails, letters, fax or through third parties and much better than complaining about the conflict to others.
- ✓ **Approach the other party at a time when neither of you is in a hurry.** Choose a time to talk when neither party is under pressure (such as from getting to work, having a bad day or when there is a lot of noise/activity around) as this will avoid intensifying the frustration. Try setting the scene with something you both enjoy like a coffee. Select a comfortable neutral location where you can sit and talk quietly and privately. Explain to the other party that the issue has been worrying you and you would like to resolve it.
- ✓ **Prepare ahead of time what you want to say.** *Writing your thoughts down* may help you keep calm and focused. It will help clarify your feelings and the main issues. Choose words that are not emotive or inflammatory but rather state *factually* the situation indicating how what happened made you *feel* (e.g. "When this happened, I felt..." rather than "It's your fault that..."). *State clearly* what you perceive the issue to be and your feelings about it.
- ✓ **Open the conversation in a non-accusatory way** – try not to put the other party on the defence by blaming them. The aim is to be heard and then listen to the other party's point of view and circumstances. Try to *avoid name-calling or raising your voice* as this will make it more difficult for the other party to take on board what you are saying. Set the other party's *expectations* of where the discussion is heading by explaining you would like the opportunity to discuss your thoughts and feelings so the other party understands your viewpoint. Reassure the other party that when you are finished, you would like to listen carefully to their thoughts on the matter.
- ✓ **Try not to be judgemental.** Sometimes things are not what they seem on the surface and there can be another explanation other than what you are interpreting as the *facts* of the matter. To resolve the dispute it is important firstly to state the specific issues calmly by summarising the situation in a factual, composed manner. e.g. Rather than saying: "You're turning your music up loudly and leaving your windows open on purpose, just to annoy me." You could say: "You probably don't realise, but when you turn your music up loudly and leave the windows open, I feel really upset because I can't get to sleep."



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- ✓ **Give the other party an opportunity to share their side of the story.** Be prepared to relax, *listen respectfully* and openly. *Actively listen* to all the information you are not aware of and be open-minded to find points you both have in common. Honour the other party by not interrupting before they have had their say. It may open up new options to resolve the dispute and an opportunity to restore the relationship.
- ✓ **Let the other party know you are listening.** Even if you don't agree with what they are saying, respect their right to share their side of the story. It can be very frustrating trying to talk when the other party doesn't want to listen. Talking about the problem will help *clear the air, ease tensions* between the parties and *assist in reaching an agreement* on how to resolve the conflict issues. It is preferable rather than interrupting, to *make notes to bring up when they are finished*. This will demonstrate you are really listening.
- ✓ **Clarify the meaning of statements.** If you are uncertain what the other party means, *make a note* to come back to that point or if you really feel that you can ask a question without de-railing the other party's thought processes, you may respectfully try clarifying the situation before they continue on a different topic. E.g. *"Excuse me (Jane) before you move on, to help me understand what you have just said, can you please be more specific about ... or would you rather I raise that at the end?"* or *"Excuse me (Joe), but to make sure I understand you correctly, did you mean ... by that statement or are you going to cover that in a moment?"* This not only ensures you are communicating correctly and have *interpreted the issue as the other party intended*, but also shows you are really listening and trying to understand what they have to say.
 
- ✓ **At this point, work cooperatively on the main issues and decide what needs to be done to resolve the problem.** There may need to be give and take on both sides, rather than one party telling the other they have to change. Make a concerted effort to *find points you both agree on first*. If necessary, start with the little issues and agree on these first before moving onto bigger ones. Finding common ground to build on will be a great step forward.
- ✓ **Rather than putting off more difficult issues or leaving out points that are harder to discuss,** it is better to resolve the dispute once and for all. These will only cause the conflict to continue in the future. *Get all the issues out in the open* no matter how hard they are to talk about. It will be a relief to sort out a solution for both parties.
- ✓ **Make another time to continue discussing the matter soon after** if you do not have enough time to agree on a resolution then. *Make an agreement on what the parties are going to do* to resolve the conflict. Be specific about making a time to check on how each party is going in the future.

If you need assistance handling matters, please contact Collaborate Australia for advice. A trained practitioner will be able to help you reach a prompt, cost-effective resolution to your dispute. In the meantime, visit our website now to **take advantage of more communication strategies and tips** by **subscribing to our FREE bi-monthly Newsletter "Getting to Agreement"** which provides **practical "how to" articles** that you can put into practice in every issue.