

## Conflict Resolution



WHAT'S THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF THE WORD....CONFLICT?

Many people think conflict is not good so they try to avoid it. But the truth is conflict is not good or bad, right or wrong — it just is. How we HANDLE conflict is what makes the difference!

Since we spend most of our waking hours with people, conflict is a natural part of life. It can be seen as an opportunity to build relationships - not tear them down. Conflict can bring about change that helps us learn and grow.



I feel good about the way I handled that!

### THERE ARE TWO PARTS TO RESOLVING CONFLICT:

1. The way people behave toward each other.
2. The way people go about solving their problems.

# How People Behave in Conflict Situations

Check out how YOU typically behave in conflict situations by reading the characteristics below:

## NONASSERTIVE:

Nonassertive people behave in ways that show respect to others but not to themselves. By not standing up for themselves... or for what they believe in..., they allow others to treat them disrespectfully.

### Nonassertive people:

- Seldom make eye contact
- Often have poor slouchy posture
- Speak in a quiet, unsure voice
- Wait for others to make decisions
- Lack confidence
- Do not share their point of view
- Try to please everyone
- Avoid arguments
- Appear nervous or scared
- Frequently apologize



## AGGRESSIVE:

Aggressive people behave in ways that are particularly disrespectful of others. When people act tough and threatening it's not pleasant to be around them — especially if their aggression is directed at you.

### Aggressive people:

- Get in your face and in your space
- Often have tense and intimidating posture
- Speak in a loud and demanding voice
- Bully others in order to get their way
- Appear to have great confidence (but really feel insecure inside)
- Overstate their point of view

continued...



Check out these other characteristics of aggressive people!

**Aggressive people: (continued)**

- Look for reasons to argue
  - Make others nervous and scared
  - Never apologize
- Verbally attack others by making **“You” statements** (“You” statements accuse, put down, blame, or call people names. They make others feel angry and defensive or threatened and scared. An example is “You idiot! I told you not to touch that!”)

**ASSERTIVE:**

Assertive people have self-respect and also show respect to others. They are confident and able to politely express their point of view.

**Assertive people:**

- Maintain appropriate eye contact
- Usually have a relaxed and open posture
- Speak in an even and strong voice
- Are confident and considerate
- State their own point of view
- Listen to what others have to say
- Use conflict creatively
- Make others feel comfortable and important
- Apologize when necessary
- Communicate respectfully by making

**“I” statements**

(“I” statements calmly express how people feel about a situation and what they would like to have done about it: “I feel frustrated when you touch my new CD player because I worked hard to save money for it and I don’t want it broken. I’d like you to tell me which CD you’d like to hear and I’ll be happy to play it for you.”)



# The ABC's of Conflict Resolution

The second part of conflict resolution deals with **HOW** people go about solving their problems. Here's a system you just might find helpful.

## Step #1

**A**llow Yourself Time To Calm Down And Clarify The Problem



It can be difficult to sort things out when emotions are high. That's why, in a conflict, it's usually best to allow everyone time to calm down first.

Look over the following list of strategies and decide which ones would work best for you:

- Go for a walk or a run
- Talk it out with someone you trust
- Count to 10.....or 20.....or 30
- Write in your journal
- Do a breathing exercise
- Listen to your favorite music
- Other ideas?

When you feel calm enough to think clearly, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this relationship important to me? (If it is, it's in your best interest to work things out.)
- What is the problem, and what are the specific issues we're really arguing about? (Take your time. This often is harder to figure out than you would imagine!)
- How do I feel about this situation?
- How would I ideally like to see it resolved?

## Step #2

**B**e Respectful As You Talk And Listen

Begin by asking the other person what he or she thinks about the problem. Listen openly and try to understand what the person is really saying.

First, choose a time when there will be no interruptions.....and a place where everyone will feel comfortable and safe. Then talk and listen assertively.



continued...

Check out these important tips!



### Step #2 continued...

As you listen, remember to:

- Avoid interrupting, changing the subject, making judgements, or giving advice.
- Ask questions to clarify anything that's not 100% clear.
- End by repeating what was said in your own words to make sure you understood it correctly.

Now, be respectful and explain what YOU think about the problem.

As you talk, remember these guidelines:

- Focus on the facts of the current problem.
- Share your feelings and what you'd like to have done about it.
- Use an appropriate tone of voice.
- Make sure your body language matches your words.
- Avoid sarcasm and put-downs. They only make things worse.

### Step #3

#### Consider Solutions And Choose One

- Discuss ALL possible solutions.
- Consider the positive and negative outcomes of each.
- Then together, select the one you think will work best for BOTH of you.

Remember, when resolving a conflict, people can't get everything they wish for. Instead, aim for a **WIN-WIN** solution. That means finding a middle ground **BOTH** parties can agree on and live with.....one that's comfortable for everyone and shouldn't create more problems in the long run.



While helpful, behaving assertively and following the ABC's for resolving conflict aren't enough.

You also need to be able to use good communication skills. The next two skill building sections will help you learn how to talk and listen more effectively. For more information, read on.....

# Skill Building: "I" Statements

Whenever **YOU** are the one having the problem, consider making an **"I" statement**. "I" statements are a way to respectfully and assertively express your feelings and state what you'd like to have done about a situation.

Here are the four parts of an "I" statement:

**I feel** (add words to describe your feelings)

**when you** (tell what the person did)

**because** (describe how the person's behavior affected you)

**I would like it if** (state how you would like things to change).



**FOR EXAMPLE:** You sign a book out of the library, and your friend borrows it. Even though SHE loses it, the librarian says it's your responsibility to pay for it. A respectful and assertive way to state your point of view is to say:

## ALRIGHT.....

If they feel strange, you don't have to use these exact words. Use your own instead.

### Just remember:

The format of an "I" message can really help clarify your thinking. It can help you figure out what you're feeling and what you need in order to solve the problem.

Being respectful also makes it easier for the other person to respond in a way that takes YOUR needs into account. It can actually help you use conflict in a way that can strengthen relationships.

**I feel** frustrated and angry  
**when you** lose things I lend you  
**because** I'M the one expected to replace it.



**I would like it if**  
YOU took responsibility for finding the book or paying the librarian for a new one.

# Skill Building: Reflective Listening

Whenever the **OTHER** person seems to have a problem, **consider doing some reflective listening**. This means restating in your own words what was said to help insure you heard correctly.

**HINT:** Pay special attention to the speaker's facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. These will give you important clues as to what the person is actually feeling.

A reflective listening response looks like this:

**You feel** (choose a word that best describes the speaker's **FEELINGS**)  
**because** (now restate the **FACTS** in your own words to show that you understand what was said).



## FOR EXAMPLE:

Your best friend looks totally stressed and says, "I'm so tired! I've been up for 3 nights studying, and I just found out that if I don't pass the test, I might not be able to be in the school play."

Try saying something like:

**"You feel** tired and worried  
**because** you might not be able to do what you love best — acting."

## ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

Your friend says, "I'm so mad! Ever since Tom moved into the neighborhood, you never spend time with me anymore. You're supposed to be my best friend, but you act as if I don't exist."

You could respond with:

**"You feel** hurt and left out  
**because** I'm not spending time with you like I used to."



# MORE POINTERS ON TALKING & LISTENING

## Talking...

In addition to using “I” statements, it’s important to remember the following:



## DO:

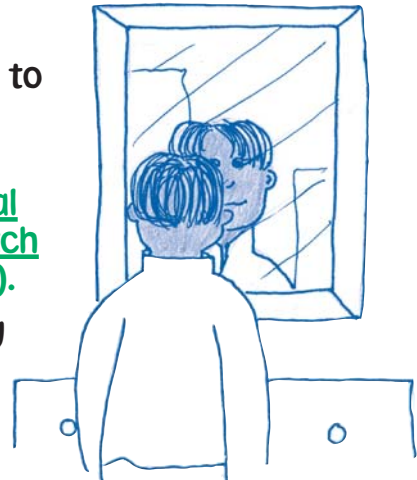
### Maintain eye contact

Looking directly at the other person sends the message that you want to be taken seriously.



Have your nonverbal communication (your facial expressions, body positions, and movements) match your verbal communication (the words you use).

It can be very confusing to a listener if you say you’re angry, but have a smile on your face.



## DON'T:

### Blame others or put them down

Keep your self-esteem and the other person’s self-esteem intact.



### Make “You” statements

Such as “You stupid jerk! I told you not to tell anyone our secret!”

“You” statements put others on the defense and keep people from addressing the real problem.

“You” statements stop effective communication.

Use “I” statements instead.



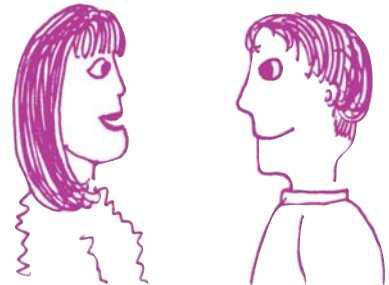
# Listening...

In conflict situations, it's important to assertively state your viewpoint AND actively listen to the viewpoints of others. Listed below are some do's and don'ts of being a good listener.



## **DO:** Maintain eye contact

This shows that you care about what the person is saying. It'll also help you pay attention to the speaker's body language and tone of voice. These can often clue you in, sometimes faster than the words themselves, as to what the person is REALLY feeling.



Ask questions if you don't fully understand what is being said.



## Pay attention to feelings

Use reflective listening, when appropriate.



## **DON'T:**

Interrupt or change the subject

Judge or put down the other person.

Give advice or try to solve others' problems. If they want your help, they'll ask for it.



# Skill Building: "I" Statements

A fight could result from each of the situations below. By using an "I" statement, you may be able to resolve the conflict peacefully. If using any part of the "I" statement feels "fake" or "phony," write out whatever you are comfortable saying. Just remember at all times to be **respectful** and **specific** about both your feelings and how you would like to see the problem solved.



Your sister's playing music so loud it's interfering with your telephone conversation in the next room.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.  
I would like it if \_\_\_\_\_.

You're sitting at the lunch table waiting for your friends. At the last minute, they decide to sit with another group instead.



I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.  
I would like it if \_\_\_\_\_.

Think of a recent situation when you were in conflict with someone else. How did you handle it?

What did you say or do?

Would using an "I" statement improve the way things turned out? Try it here:

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.  
I would like it if \_\_\_\_\_.

# Skill Building: Reflective Listening

Become a more effective listener by practicing your reflective listening skills.

In your own words, identify each speaker's **FEELINGS** and restate the **FACTS**. This lets them know you care.



“My mother’s going to kill me! My sweater is ruined! Sam squirted mustard on it during lunch today.”

You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

“I can’t believe it! I’ve been looking all over for my notebook and I just saw John with it. What a jerk! HE stole all my notes, and I got in trouble with the teacher!”



You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

**NOW** — can you use reflective listening when someone is in conflict with YOU?

(This can be difficult because it’s normal for people to want to yell back or defend themselves.) Try using reflective listening in each of these situations. It should help calm things down and let you deal with the issues more effectively.

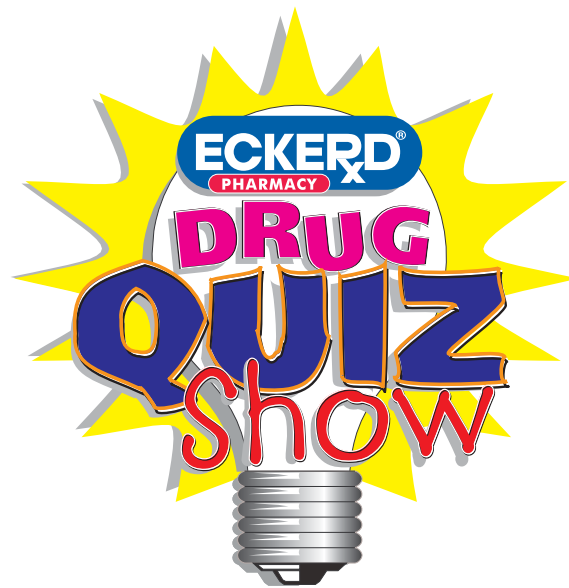
“I hate you! All you do is gossip about me! I know what you’re saying. You better watch out or I’ll get even with you.”

You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

“You think you’re so great! All of a sudden you hang out with the jocks and act like you’re so tough. You’re nothing but a fake and a phony.”

You feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.





# Acknowledgements

The Drug Quiz Show gratefully acknowledges  
the Eckerd Pharmacy  
for making possible the creation of this Learning Center.

Special thanks also go to the following individuals for their  
dedication, expertise and assistance:

- Concept:** Mattie Bicknell, Prevention Educator
- Content:** Valerie Stedman, M.S. Health Educator  
Christian Brothers Academy
- Patricia Schramm, M.S.  
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program  
Syracuse Diocesan Schools
- Linda Shapess, Teacher Trainer New York Health Central  
Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES
- Margery Burstein, Development Director  
Vera House, Inc.
- Susan Meidenbauer, Executive Director  
Eckerd Drug Quiz Show
- Debrah Shulman, Ph.D.  
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program  
Jamesville-DeWitt School District
- Artists:** Jennifer Pisegna, M.S., C.A.S., School Counselor  
Westhill Central School District
- Anthony Washington, Syracuse, NY
- Graphic Design:** David VanWie, Syracuse, NY

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