

15 Things to do and avoid in a conflict

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Practicing healthy behaviors in a conflict is not just a nice thing to do. Decades of experience in the conflict resolution field shows that the behaviors in the left-hand column are generally **more effective** for getting your needs met and getting unstuck from difficult situations. The behaviors in the right-hand column, in contrast, tend to exacerbate conflict and are less likely to result in desired outcomes.

Things to do in conflict	Things to avoid in conflict
1. Practice being curious by asking open-ended questions, even when you don't really want to.	1. Tell and retell your side of the story without seeking new information.
2. Realize you don't know the full story. Try to understand what is going on from the other person's perspective.	2. Make (and act on) assumptions. Believe you know exactly what's going on.
3. Give people the benefit of the doubt before you jump to conclusions.	3. Blame and shame the other person and vent about them to others.
4. Take ownership for the part you play in the dynamic.	4. Focus on the other person's behavior and try to find out what's wrong with them.
5. Communicate clearly, with a warm or neutral tone if you can.	5. Raise your voice to intimidate or threaten or use the silent treatment to shut the other person out.
6. Talk directly and respectfully to people about things that are bothering you.	6. Assume people know what is bothering you and believe that they just don't care.
7. Take a break from a difficult conversation and come back when things are more settled.	7. Push a conversation past its emotional breaking point.
8. Investigate and reflect on what is most upsetting to you. Try to understand your part in it.	8. Assume the other person is "making" you upset and there's nothing you can do about it.
9. Assume that other people have a lot going on.	9. Personalize everything; assume that the other person's behavior is purposely directed at you.
10. Focus on the current problem that needs resolving.	10. Focus on past grievances and complaints.
11. Offer a sincere apology when you caused harm.	11. Avoid apologies because they expose your weaknesses.
12. Take time to relax and enjoy things you like.	12. Dwell on the stress and anxiety of the situation.
13. Realize you have choices in the conflict.	13. Believe you have no choices in the conflict.
14. Take important, even small, steps toward addressing the conflict.	14. Take no constructive steps to address the conflict or actively invest in <i>escalating</i> the conflict.
15. Seek help from neutral, trusted advisors when you are stuck.	15. Avoid or downplay offers of support to resolve the conflict.