



Managing conflict in your life

How to work things out when issues arise

Aetna Employee Assistance Program



Disagreement is a common, natural experience in human relationships. Handled effectively, it can help us to grow and develop positive, creative ideas and solutions. Disagreement also can deepen meaningful relationships. Mastering effective conflict resolution skills can be valuable in both our personal and work lives.

How can conflict be managed positively?

There is no single, simple answer to this question. It depends on the type of conflict, the people involved and the setting in which it happens. However, you might consider some ideas:

- Be honest, fair and respectful.
- It's a good idea to approach people and situations with an open mind.
- Use active listening — with eye contact and friendly body language. It helps you to hear and understand. It also lets others know that you care about their thoughts and feelings.
- Remember that agreement isn't always needed. Respectful acknowledgement of differing points of view can be an acceptable outcome in many situations.
- Consciously decide if this is an issue that needs to be dealt with objectively — like one in a workplace — or if it's one where a discussion of feelings is important, such as in a close personal relationship. Manage the conversation accordingly.

- “Own” your thoughts and feelings when talking about them. You can do so by using “I” in your conversation rather than “you,” which can sound accusing.
- Check that you are dealing with the “real” issue. Fighting about what movie to see resolves nothing — if the real issue is that feelings were hurt because of a forgotten anniversary.
- Consider compromise as an option.
- Remember: You are in charge of yourself and your life. The other person is responsible for him/herself. Watch out for the desire to control someone else through indirect or coercive means — this is unfair.
- If this is a workplace issue or you are a parent dealing with a child, and you choose to use your authority to resolve the issue, do so directly. Then tell the person why you are choosing to resolve the conflict in this way. Express your hope that he or she will cooperate and support the decision, even though you know that they would have preferred another choice.

“Disagreement can deepen meaningful relationships.”





Use a six-step process

You may find these steps helpful when working out a difficult problem where you must come to an agreement.

1. Set aside a time and place to address the situation with the person involved.
2. Write down your description of the conflict, how you feel about it, and your needs and goals. Read these to the other person. Have the other person do the same.
3. Switch roles. Have each person discuss the other's point of view. This ensures that both parties truly understand each other.
4. Write down and share suggestions for achieving your goals. Ask the other person do the same. It's good to include win-win ideas.
5. Bring in a "go-between" if needed. This can help keep everyone focused and agreeable.
6. Finally, write a plan of action. Include next steps, responsibilities and a way to measure success.

Choosing our battles

Is this the time, place and issue worthy of addressing? Some battles are worth it, while others are not.

When conflict is resolved in a positive way, people can function together better and more happily, at work and at home. It's a wonderful feeling to know that you have the ability to work through even difficult issues with other people in your life.

Contact your EAP

If you'd like help in dealing with life's pressure, your Aetna Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here for you. It's a confidential service that helps employees and their families work through life's challenges.

**Free, confidential support.
Anytime, day or night.
Call toll free:
1-888-AETNA-EAP
(1-888-238-6232)
Or visit www.aetnaeap.com
and enter your company ID.**

**Real life. Real issues.
Real support.**

Feuds that made history:

**Queen Elizabeth I
vs. Mary, Queen of Scots**

**English Parliament
vs. King Charles I**

**Aaron Burr
vs. Alexander Hamilton**

**The Hatfields
vs. the McCoys**

**Joseph Stalin
vs. Leon Trotsky**

**Lyndon B. Johnson
vs. Robert F. Kennedy**

**J. Edgar Hoover
vs. Martin Luther King Jr.**

Evans, Colin. "Great Feuds in History: Ten of the Liveliest Disputes Ever." <http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?isbn=0471225886>. Accessed August 2007.

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