



Find the best route to your destination

Conflict resolution

Conflicts with other people tend to come about when two people have trouble seeing the other's perspective. In contrast, mindful problem solving involves shifting your focus from getting what you want from someone else (a battle), to getting what you want while the other person does, too (a collaboration).

Before engaging in a conflict, decide what is most important to you – getting your own way or preserving the relationship. If the conflict is with a person who matters to you (including an authority figure who has say over important things such as punishments or rewards), it makes sense to put the effort into finding an effective way to preserve the relationship and find a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict. Here are some strategies:

- **Recognize there's a conflict, and define it**
 - Figure out what you really want in this situation. Since others can't read your mind, you may need to describe what you want.
 - Figure out what the other person really wants (you may have to ask the person to state this clearly).
 - Figure out what it is that you both want that doesn't "fit" together.
- **Empathize with the other person**
 - Recognize the other person's point of view. The other person needs to trust that you are not considering just your own interests.
 - Let the other person know that you understand his/her point of view. For example, if someone says "I hate having you as my lab partner," consider saying in response, "I get it...it doesn't feel like we're working well together and that's really annoying to you."
 - Find the "good intent gone awry." Usually people do things with good intentions, so finding that intention makes it easier to connect with that person. For example, if a good friend says, "Those shoes look awful on you," realize that the person is probably trying to help you look good for the other kids.
 - Use "it" to describe what you think the other person is feeling; instead of saying, "you seem mad," or "you're annoying me," consider "it's frustrating,"

since “it” doesn’t seem like you’re blaming or accusing the other person, and “it” suggests that you both share this feeling.

- **Agree on what the problem is**

- First, try to define the problem in a way that makes it seem fixable. Then generate multiple solutions and consider the consequences and logistics of each one. Seek the other person’s view. Ask, “How do you understand our situation?”
- Invite the other person to help generate and then invest in solutions. Consider phrases such as, “Let’s see if we can come up with a way that works okay for both of us,” rather than, “You’re not being fair,” or “I have an idea.” (“I have an idea” is the better of these two, but it still positions the other person to argue against your idea.)
- Offer solutions that would be hard for anyone to disagree with. For example, “Sounds like it was pretty complicated last night—maybe we could just do something that we both enjoy to relax together.”

- **Collaborate on a solution that’s workable for both people**

- A potential solution must be feasible, doable, and helpful for both people.
- Consider saying something like: “How would it work if we tried _____?” This helps both people predict what will happen if a particular solution is attempted.
- People operate on their own timelines. Even though you and the other person may have considered the same information and same solutions, it may take the other person some time to completely grasp and enact a solution, even when you’re both in agreement on the solution. So revisiting the solution, and patience, are sometimes very important.
- Allow the other person to save face. Consider solutions that don’t embarrass the other person, or result in one of you looking like the bad guy.

- **Recognize that there may not be a solution**

Sometimes even the best solution may not feel like a solution to you. If that happens during a conflict, probably the best thing to do is to “agree to disagree” or agree to “let it be.” When people are in this situation, if they indicate by what they say and by the way they say it that they respect each other, it doesn’t feel so bad to have had a conflict. Agreeing to make due with the situation leaves the

door open to arriving at a better resolution in the future, and provides a way out of the conflict in a way that doesn't blame anyone.

- **Offer a sincere apology if you've said or done something hurtful to someone**
If the other person apologizes first, try your best to put any bad feelings behind you and accept the apology. If you apologize first, think carefully about your words. "I'm sorry you're mad," implies that you're not sorry about what you did; you're just sorry the other person reacted. "I'm sorry for what I said," shows that you're taking responsibility for your contribution to the problem or conflict.

Most kids in high school don't find it easy to apologize. (Some adults struggle with this, too.) But you might find that if you apologize, the other person may apologize to you – either in the moment or at some future time.

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