



What is **conflict** resolution?

Conflict comes from the Latin word, *conflictus*, meaning collision.

That's a good description of a conflict. You feel passionately about one thing and your opponent, feeling just as passionate, disagrees. Your opinions, feelings, and even fists charge forward and smash together. They collide with force and emotion.

Conflict resolution seeks to prevent such messy and damaging collisions. It seeks to find compromises and resolutions without one side surrendering, running away, or using violence because such methods usually do not solve the original problem. They also often create more problems that, in turn, lead to more conflicts.

Using the principles of conflict resolution can help people develop communication and problem-solving skills and reduces violence in our society.

Why do we need **Conflict Resolution**?

Too many people, teens included, believe that when a disagreement arises, they have no choice but to fight or use violence. Some teens say the only way to save face or to have respect is to fight. They don't know how to avoid physical conflict or control themselves in the face of a perceived insult.

In one survey of junior and senior high school students:

- 33 percent said that when they were really angry there was no way they could control themselves.
- 41 percent said that if they were challenged, they would fight.
- 21 percent said that avoiding fights is a sign of weakness.

And in a 1999 nationwide survey more than one in three high school students said they had been in a physical fight in the past year.

Yet there are other options to fighting. Conflict resolution allows people to work through disagreements and problems in ways that allow both people to feel pleased with the end result. Sometimes challenging conflicts, when properly worked out, can lead to positive results and experiences for everyone involved. It really is possible for everyone to win.

Some types of conflict resolution include:



Negotiation,

a discussion among two or more people with the goal of reaching an agreement.

Mediation,

where a neutral person helps the people in conflict address difficult issues and reach an agreement.

Peer Mediation,

a process in which young people act as mediators to help resolve disputes among their peers with supervision and guidance by adults.



What are the steps of **Conflict** resolution?

- 1 Set the stage.** Agree to try working together to find a solution peacefully and establish ground rules such as no name-calling, blaming, yelling, or interrupting.
- 2 Gather perspectives.** Allow each person to describe the dispute from his or her perspective, without interruption. Listeners should pay close attention and then ask clarifying questions in a non-threatening manner. Listeners should consider not only what the other participants say they want, but why they want it. For example, if someone insists that you pay for something they believe you broke, they may be doing so not because they really care about the object or the money, but because they feel that you don't respect them. Addressing the other person's need to feel respected may be essential to resolving the conflict.
- 3 Find common interests.** Establish which facts and issues all participants agree on and determine why different issues are important to each person. Identify common interests, which can be as simple as a mutual desire to resolve the problem without resorting to violence or a shared need to save face.
- 4 Create options.** Take time for each student to brainstorm about possible solutions. Come up with a list of options without immediately judging them or feeling committed to them. Try to think of solutions where both people gain something – think “win-win!” Too often everyone assumes that for one person to win, another has to lose. In reality, it is often possible to think creatively and come up with a solution that satisfies both people, and where both walk away feeling that their needs have been met.
- 5 Evaluate options.** After a number of options are suggested, each student discusses his or her feelings about the proposed solutions. Participants will negotiate and often will need to compromise in order to reach a conclusion that is acceptable to both. They may need to agree to disagree about some issues to reach an understanding.
- 6 Create an agreement.** The students involved explicitly state their agreement and may even want to write it down. If necessary, they set up a time to check back to see how the agreement is working. When teens use such an approach to resolve conflicts and disagreements, they often find that conflicts don't have to be avoided, nor do they necessarily lead to violence. Conflict can actually be a positive force in their lives; it can provide teens with an opportunity to take a close look at themselves and their attitudes and beliefs. If resolved positively, conflicts can actually help strengthen relationships and build greater understanding.