



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is a part of life. While it can cause a range of problems from resentment and hurt feelings to job loss, family discord, and even war, it can also be a positive influence for change, productivity, and creativity when handled appropriately. We all engage in it, sometimes knowingly, sometimes unwittingly. We emerge from conflict exhausted, sad, satisfied, or triumphant.

Conflict can be uncomfortable and energy-consuming as it involves perception, feeling and action. Experts believe that it all begins with a perception, real or imagined. It exists if at least one person believes or perceives that it exists and engages another, signaling a disagreement. When people have needs that are not being met or that are inconsistent with the needs of others, they engage in conflict. Bernard Mayer, author of *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, explains that these needs may be based on survival needs (conflict over food, shelter, health or security), identity needs (such as the need for community, meaning, intimacy or autonomy) or interest needs (communication, decision making, how one is treated/respected/acknowledged.) Everyone has different priorities and styles of dealing with situations and these differences are the root of all conflict.

Do You Have An Anger Problem?

ARE OTHERS COMMENTING ON YOUR SHORT FUSE AND QUICK TEMPER? HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF INVOLVED IN MANY CONFLICT SITUATIONS? BY EVALUATING YOUR OWN HOSTILITY AND ANGER TRIGGERS, YOU MAY BE ABLE TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF CONFLICT IN YOUR LIFE.

The following are signs that anger has become too intense and is no longer being expressed appropriately or adaptively.

ANGER IS A PROBLEM WHEN:

- when it happens too often and/or is too intense
- when it damages people or property
- when the consequences include relationship problems, legal problems, or job loss.
- when there is frequent yelling
- when it negatively affects decisions, such as driving erratically while angry
- when the expression of anger comes at inappropriate times or in inappropriate ways
- when you suffer medical symptoms as a result of your anger, such as elevated blood pressure, muscle tension and digestive problems.

Typical responses to conflict include *withdrawing* from a mate, *reasoning* with a child, *engaging in revenge* against an office rival, or *agreeing* with an argumentative parent, to list just a few. Overall, these methods are conditioned responses, based on what has worked in the past in similar situations. Human nature encourages people to try and take control of the situation and resolve it to their benefit. But if the method for handling conflict isn't productive, hostile tempers may flair and the conflict will only escalate. Through negotiation skills, anger management techniques, and compromise, most conflicts can be resolved, and with a positive outcome.

CONSIDER THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF NEGOTIATION SKILLS WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF INVOLVED IN A CONFLICT AND KEEP THE FOLLOWING TIPS IN MIND DURING NEGOTIATION.

- Be hard on the problem, soft on the person. Attack the issue at hand, not the person himself.
- Focus on the needs that have to be met, not who has what position on the matter.
- Be inventive about multiple options
- Make clear agreements to avoid future conflict and negotiations.
- Respond, don't react. Manage your emotions.
- Pick your battles. Let some accusations, attacks, ultimatums or threats pass.
- Make it possible for the other party to back down without feeling humiliated.

THREE TYPES OF HEALTHY SOLUTIONS:

- **WIN-WIN:** Most conflicts are in areas that have more than two alternatives. If you do not like the choice your partner wants, and your partner does not like your choice, with a little effort you might be able to find a third alternative that you both like and want.
- **NO LOSE:** When you cannot find an alternative that you both want, look for an option that is acceptable to both of you, or negotiate an agreeable compromise. Neither gets *everything* he/she wanted, but each gets *enough* to be satisfied.
- **WIN-LOSE EQUALLY:** When the conflict is over an issue that has only two choices, one person will get what he/she wants and the other will not. There will be a winner and a loser. If you are fair with each other and generally half the time each gets your own way; it will be easier for each of you when you don't. The loser will trust that next time or the time after that he/she will be the winner.



How to stay cool when you are criticized

adapted from eHow.com

ALTHOUGH CONFLICT IS UNAVOIDABLE, YOU CAN MAKE SURE THE SITUATION DOESN'T ESCALATE BY KEEPING YOUR COOL. TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND UTILIZE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING TIPS TO HELP REMAIN CALM.

- Show the person doing the criticizing that you heard his or her criticism, by pausing, nodding or giving some sort of verbal acknowledgement.
- Ask for more information about the criticizer's comments to give you both time to cool down. Try and look for his positive intent.
- Reply with your perspective. Remain calm, and the other person, if agitated, will eventually calm down too; it will be embarrassing to lose his or her cool while you remain relaxed.
- Listen for commonalities between your perspective and your critic's and build from them.
- Ask for comments on your viewpoint.
- Try rephrasing your viewpoint.
- Demonstrate your desire to find a compromise. Look for what the criticizer's real objection is and how you can solve it; ask if he or she has a solution in mind.
- Remember that you can't always please everyone. Ask yourself whether there is truth in your critic's complaints, and whether this may be someone you just can't make happy.
- Be willing to leave the conflict unresolved until you have both calmed down.
- Avoid interrupting with defensive remarks. When people feel they aren't being heard, they will only come on stronger.



Stages of Healthy Conflict Resolution

- by clinical psychologist and marriage & family therapist, Larry Allen Nadig, Ph.D.

- **IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR ISSUES.** Have a discussion to understand both sides of the problem, conflicts, needs, and preferred outcomes. Clarify to each other exactly what the conflict or problem involves. This is the initial stage where you say what you want and you listen to what your partner wants. The goal at this stage is for you each to clearly express what you each want and to understand what the other wants. Use I message language and avoid blaming your messages. Also use your active listening skills when you listen to your partner's side.
- **GENERATE SEVERAL POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:** This is the creative integrative part. Drawing upon the things you both agree on and upon your shared goals and interests, look for several possible alternatives that might solve the problem. Avoid evaluating and judging each idea until it looks as though no more are going to be suggested. This is a brainstorming approach
- **EVALUATE THE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS:** Consider each suggested solution and eliminate those that are not acceptable to either of you. Keep narrowing them down to one or two that seem best for you both. In this stage you both must be honest and be able to say things like, "I wouldn't be happy with that," or "I don't think that would be fair for me."
- **DECIDE ON THE BEST SOLUTION:** Select the alternative that is mutually acceptable to both of you. Make certain there is mutual commitment to the decision.
- **IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION:** It is one thing to arrive at a decision, another to carry it out. Sometimes it is necessary to talk about how it is to be implemented. Who is responsible to do what and by when?

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Web Site www.portagepath.org

Appointments 330-253-3100
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline 330-434-9144
888-434-8878



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