

Lesson 2

Conflict Resolution Techniques



Key Terms

apologize
compromise
mediation
negotiation
resolution

What You Will Learn to Do

- Apply conflict resolution techniques

Linked Core Abilities

- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Apply awareness of differences in behavior preferences (Winning Colors®) to conflict situations and resolution
- Evaluate the steps to managing conflict
- Assess personal conflict management skills
- Recognize different hot buttons and the behavior style they indicate
- Evaluate the pros and cons of alternatives to determine potential solutions to conflict
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Key Note Term

resolution – the process or capability of making distinguishable the individual parts of an object, closely adjacent optical images, or sources of light such as the sharpness and clarity of a picture

Introduction

The success or failure of any conflict **resolution** depends on the attitudes and behaviors of the people involved in the conflict. This lesson offers some strategies for seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts. The skills covered in this lesson promote positive and nonviolent conflict resolution, and include the following:

- **Awareness of others**
- **Awareness of the distinctions between self and others**
- **Listening skills**
- **Compromise**
- **Ability to express one's own thoughts and feelings**
- **Ability to respond to the feelings of others**

These are skills that you need to develop throughout your life. Although conflict is inevitable, you have control over your own response to the situation, and your actions can either diffuse or escalate the conflict. Remember that reacting defensively or judgmentally can trigger the same response in others.

Winning Colors® and Conflict Resolution

Effective communication skills are a key factor in the conflict resolution process. Sometimes to resolve a conflict, you need to go beyond your own comfort zone of preferred behaviors to facilitate good communications with the other party.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Winning Colors® is an assessment tool that is used to classify behaviors into four dominant categories:

- **Planners.** Planners are quiet and introspective. They like to be correct and are very detail oriented. They have excellent listening skills. They are calm, cool, and collected on the outside. They are likely to hide their feelings.
- **Builders.** Builders are natural leaders. They are up-front with people, expressing themselves openly and directly. They like rules, law, order, and direction and do not hesitate to tell others what they should do. Builders are typically punctual, dependable, and loyal.
- **Relaters.** Relaters are very social. They want to be liked and they love to talk. Relaters share their ideas and feelings readily. They work well in teams and need to be shown appreciation.
- **Adventurers.** Adventurers are action oriented. They are bored unless there is fun, excitement, and things are moving. They live in the present. They are flexible and thrive on spontaneity, and do not like structure.

Using an assessment tool such as Winning Colors® will not only help you evaluate your own behavioral strengths and weaknesses, but it will also give you valuable insights into the behavioral characteristics of the people you interact with on a

daily basis. Surely no one is going to walk up to you and say “My name is Bob and I’m an Adventurer,” so you will have to listen carefully and observe clues in the other person’s body language and speech patterns.

With insight and awareness, you will be able to adapt your communication skills and behavior to be able to negotiate a peaceful solution to a conflict.

Hot Buttons

By observing and identifying the behavioral characteristics and tendencies in others, you can determine how to best communicate with them to resolve a conflict. For example, some people respond better to facts and figures; others are more concerned with feelings and emotions. Hot buttons are strategies that you can use to communicate in a way in which the other person is more likely to hear you, understand you, and respond positively. In other words, it is important that both persons involved in a conflict speak the same language. To illustrate this metaphor, imagine trying to negotiate a settlement if you were speaking English and the other party was speaking Chinese. You would not get very far.

When you are speaking to someone who exhibits planner behaviors, you succeed by using planner hot buttons. The same is true if you want to communicate successfully with those who most clearly exhibit builder, relater, and adventurer behaviors.

Hot buttons for planners include the following:

- **Take a serious approach**
- **Show interest; be patient, calm, and collected**
- **Give ample warning before confronting them with a conflict**
- **Supply details and allow more time for decisions**
- **Try not to impose time constraints**
- **Respond in terms of causes rather than exterior effects**
- **Be prepared for interior understanding rather than exterior caring**
- **Show that you are competent and striving to understand the subject**
- **Be a good listener and sounding board**
- **Avoid silly talk and babbling**
- **Respond with new and innovative ideas**

Hot buttons for builders include the following:

- **Take a bottom-line approach**
- **Explain directions step-by-step**
- **Let them know what is expected of them**
- **Do not repeat unless requested to do so**

- **Be concise and clear in your speech**
- **Know the hierarchy of command and give it proper deference**
- **Look for law, order, and routine**
- **Make sure your actions deliver results**
- **Be prepared**

Hot buttons for relatives include the following:

- **Take a friendly approach**
- **Talk in a personal way and volunteer to help out**
- **Show genuine concern, smile, and be kind**
- **Respect their feelings by not imposing your feelings on them**
- **Show personal appreciation**
- **Give them opportunity to express themselves**
- **Validate their emotions and feelings**

Hot buttons for adventurers include the following:

- **Take a light-hearted/fun/action approach**
- **Move it; be an action-centered person**
- **Keep the discussion in the here and now**
- **Be willing to change and be flexible**
- **Show you are competitive and a winner**
- **The more spontaneous you are, the more you will be appreciated**
- **Have an easy-come-easy-go manner with good humor to win you points**
- **Give immediate results or feedback whenever possible**
- **Avoid theoretic explanations**
- **Create result-oriented action plans consistent with common goals**

Evaluating Consequences

Your response to a conflict should not be a knee-jerk reaction, but rather a carefully considered response. It is important to think through the consequences of your behaviors before you act on them. If you act hastily or in anger, your behavior may add fuel to the fire and conflict could escalate to violence.

As You Go Through This Lesson

Focus on these questions as you read this lesson.

- What should always be a person's first concern in any conflict?
- What strategies are important for resolving conflicts peacefully?

One method of analyzing a response to a conflict is to list three or more alternative solutions at the top of a sheet of paper; then record all of the positive and negative consequences of each option. This forces you to take the time to brainstorm and predict all the possible outcomes you could expect. The result will be a more reasonable and well-thought-out response.

Your goal should be to agree on a nonviolent solution in which both party's needs are met. Remember, if the conflict is over something trivial, or if you will not have contact with the person again, you could choose to ignore the conflict or to **apologize** to settle it peacefully.

Key Note Term

apologize – to make an apology or express regret for a wrong

Preventing Fights

If, after reading this chapter, you have concluded that fighting does not solve problems you may now be wondering what peaceful alternatives exist. You also may doubt whether it is really possible to pursue peaceful solutions if the other person wants to fight.

Although it is certainly not always easy to avoid fighting, it can be done. As you read these strategies, you may come up with ways to adapt them to particular situations or personalities. You may also come up with strategies of your own that you can share with friends, siblings, and others that you care about.

Recognizing a Conflict Early

When people who know each other fight, there is usually a history of events that led to the fight. Events such as name-calling or rumor-spreading may go on for a day, a week, or more before a fight breaks out. By recognizing that a potential fight situation is building, you may be able to prevent it. The earlier you deal with problems, the lower the levels of anger, and the easier it can be to resolve the problem.

Learning to Ignore Some Conflicts

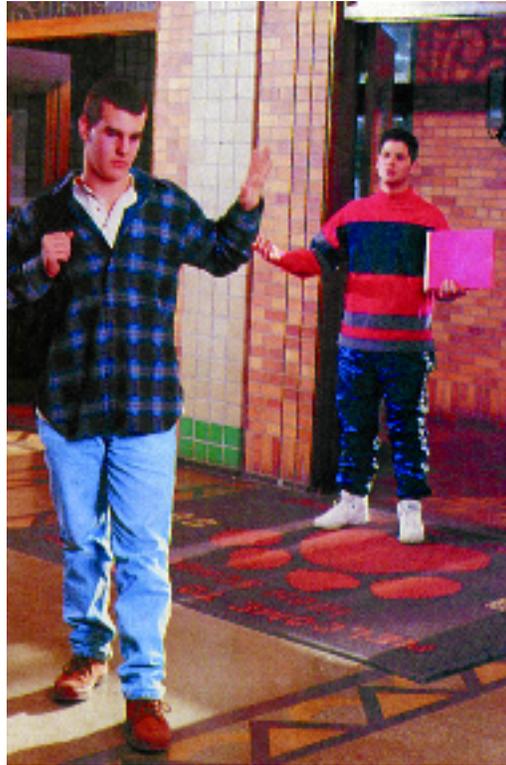
Not all conflicts require that you respond. In some situations it may be smartest to walk away and do nothing at all. You may decide it is best to ignore a situation if

- **It is unlikely you will ever see the person again.**
- **The person or situation is not very important to you.**
- **The conflict is based on rumors that may not be true.**
- **The conflict is over something trivial or silly.**
- **The person is just trying to make you angry so you will fight and get into trouble.**

Some people think that ignoring a conflict is a sign of cowardice. Actually, it is a sign of maturity and self-control to walk away from some situations. Fighting out of pride or to “save face” may instead be an act of cowardice. As shown in Figure 5.2.1, walking away is one option.

Figure 5.2.1: When a conflict is over something unimportant, it may be best to simply walk away.

Courtesy of Ken Karp.



In deciding how to deal with any conflict, your safety should always be your first concern. If you think that a person might be more angered if you ignore the situation, you need to proceed carefully. It is important to trust your judgment and be prepared to try a new tactic if your first choice does not diffuse the situation.

Confronting a Person Wisely

In some cases it may not be advisable or even possible to ignore a conflict. The person may be someone with whom you are in frequent contact, or the issue may be too important to ignore. In these cases you may decide to confront the person, as shown in Figure 5.2.2. The way in which you handle the confrontation, however, is critical to its success. The steps described here can help you resolve things peacefully.

Choose the Time and Place Carefully

It is always best to confront a person when the two of you are alone. If friends are present, the person may think you are intentionally trying to embarrass him or her in front of them. The person may feel pressured to start a fight to avoid embarrassment. Choosing a time when the person is alone and when both of you are calm can help avoid a fight.

It is also important to avoid a confrontation when a person has been using alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drugs impair judgment and may increase the likelihood of fighting. Never use alcohol or drugs yourself. If you suspect the other person is under the influence of drugs, postpone your discussion until another time.



Figure 5.2.2: When confronting a person about a problem, find the steps you can take to negotiate a peaceful solution.

Courtesy of Bob Daemmrich/Stock Boston.

Stay Calm

Although it can be difficult to remain calm when you are upset, it is important for keeping peace. Try to keep your voice low and calm. By avoiding screaming or name-calling, you can remain in control of the situation.

Analyzing Risks and Benefits

You just took a seat on a crowded subway when the person seated next to you lights up a cigarette. When you point out the **No Smoking** sign, the person replies, “Too bad. If you don’t like it, move!” Make a list of the potential risks and benefits of confronting the person again. What would you do?

Everybody has his or her own technique for keeping calm under pressure. Some people find it helpful to rehearse the confrontation beforehand with an uninvolved person. Other people use deep breathing or count to 20 when they feel their tempers beginning to rise. Despite all your efforts, however, you may find yourself unable to keep calm and control your temper. If that happens, it may be best to try to postpone your discussion until a later time.

Negotiate a Solution

There are skills for effective communication and **negotiation**. Skills such as using “I” messages, assertiveness, and seeing the other person’s point of view are important for resolving conflicts peacefully. Making statements such as, “I get upset when . . .” or “I know this issue is important to both of us . . .” can open the lines of communication without putting the other person on the defensive. Showing an understanding of the other person’s feelings can also help keep emotions under control. Some other strategies that may be useful in negotiating a peaceful solution include the following:

Key Note Term

negotiation – discussion or conference that is aimed at bringing about a settlement

Key Note Term

compromise – a settlement of differences reached by mutual concessions

- **Do the unexpected.** If, instead of being hostile, you are friendly, confident, and caring, the other person may relax his or her guard. Try to make the situation seem as if it is not serious enough to fight about. The person may agree and decide to work with you to resolve things.
- **Provide the person with a way out.** Sometimes fighting breaks out simply because people see no other way to resolve things without losing pride. To avoid fighting, present the person with **compromise** solutions that you both can live with. By saying something like, “Let’s try this for a week and see how it goes,” you give the person an easy way out.
- **Be willing to apologize.** In some situations, be willing to say “I’m sorry” or “I didn’t mean to embarrass you.” Apologizing does not mean that you were wrong or that you are a coward. Instead, a sincere apology can be the quickest way to diffuse a fight.

Helping Others Avoid Fights

When you are not personally involved in a conflict, you can still play an important role in preventing fights. You have learned how friends and acquaintances can put pressure on people to fight. These same people, however, could instead play a key role in preventing fights.

Mediation

A growing number of schools today are training students in the skill of **mediation**. Mediation is a process for resolving conflicts that involves a neutral third party. As is true for all people involved in a conflict, mediators need to think about their own safety first. Mediators should never get involved in heated conflicts that have the potential for turning violent at any moment.

Key Note Term

mediation – working with opposing sides to resolve a dispute or bring about a settlement.

Your Role as an Onlooker

How can friends and acquaintances help reduce the pressure that others feel to fight? Friends can use their influence in many positive ways. A person can show disapproval of fighting by

- **Ignoring people when they talk badly about others**
- **Refusing to spread rumors or to relay threats or insults to others**
- **Staying away from potential fight scenes**
- **Showing respect for people who can apologize to others, ignore insults, and otherwise avoid fights**

People who advise friends to ignore someone’s insults or not to hold grudges do their friends a very important service. They help keep their friends safe from the potential of deadly violence.

Getting Help When You Need It

Controlling anger and avoiding potentially violent situations are not skills that can be learned overnight. They are, however, skills that can be mastered.

If you are not satisfied with the way you now deal with anger, many people can help you. Parents, teachers, coaches, school counselors, and members of the clergy are just some of the people you can turn to for help. If these people cannot help you themselves, they may be able to refer you to trained counselors who can. By asking for help, you take an important first step toward gaining control over your behavior and your future.

Another time when it is important to ask for help is when a friend reveals plans of violence to you. Such plans should always be taken seriously, especially if your friend talks about using a weapon. Although it is never easy to break a friend's confidence, it is critical for you to share your friend's plans with a trusted adult. Doing so is a true act of caring. It shows that you care too much to let your friend be lost to violence.

Focus on Issues: How Can Schools Be Kept Safe?

Jonesboro, Paducah . . .

Littleton, Conyers . . .

The list of schools that have experienced terror in their hallways seems to grow each year.

Surprisingly, however, school violence is actually declining. There are fewer homicides, fewer assaults, and fewer students carrying weapons into class. What has increased is a kind of random violence that seems more intent on the act of killing rather than a desire to injure a specific person. It may be the ultimate mark of isolation that these murderers cannot even identify an actual enemy.

The struggle against random violence has led to a variety of ideas:

- Metal detectors, see-through backpacks, and security guards to reduce the number of weapons
- Checklists and social workers to identify and help at-risk teens
- School uniforms to help end cliques and isolation
- More school activities to involve students
- A reduction in the violence of music, movies, and video and computer games

What do you think should be done to keep schools safe from violence? Explain.

Conclusion

Effective communications are essential to successful conflict resolution and negotiation. Sometimes we misinterpret what others say, or vice versa; however, if we practice self-awareness and seek to understand others, we will be much more successful in maintaining healthy relationships. Understanding your own communications style, being able to appreciate others, and adjusting accordingly will enable you to resolve conflicts successfully.

This concludes Chapter 5, “Conflict Resolution.” Next, you will learn about the NEFE High School Financial Planning Program. This program can help guide you to a more secure financial future.

Lesson Review

1. Using your Winning Color®, explain how you would find a solution to conflict.
2. Explain how evaluating consequences should be important before responding to a situation.
3. Why is it important to choose the time and place to confront a friend or family member about a problem?
4. Who would you go to if you could not manage anger on your own? Why would you choose that person?