

10 Tips for Successful Conflict Resolution

From time to time, conflict can arise. If it does, we can choose to allow it to become a source of stress, drawn-out battles, long-term friction and ruptured relationships or we can choose to work collaboratively to resolve problems openly and honestly, in a way that satisfies all parties.

If you'd like to take the latter, more positive approach, here are 10 tips (from a total of 19!) Chris Kole refers to as ingredients for successful conflict resolution, in her book *Crystal Clear Communication*:

1. **Mutual respect:** When we respect ourselves, we naturally want to solve any problems or difficulties we run into and we make sure the solution meets our own wants and needs. Respecting the other person will encourage us to make sure that the solution meets their wants and needs too and leads to win-win solutions.
2. **Look for the common ground:** Rarely do two people have entirely opposing views with absolutely nothing in common. If we look hard enough, we're bound to find points of agreement or shared goals on which to build. This subtly shifts us from being 'opponents' to being on the 'same side.'
3. **Redefine the problem or point of disagreement if necessary:** If you absolutely can't find anything to agree on, try a fresh approach. Step back and see the dispute from the bigger picture, step in closer and see the details or 'step to one side' to view the predicament from a different angle. The more we keep 'moving around the problem' to explore it, and view it from all angles and perspectives, the more likely we are to increase our understanding of it and find an answer.
4. **Start with a goal acceptable to all parties - then work backwards:** What is the end result both parties want? Forget win-lose. That's for sports. Conflict is not a sport.
5. **Focus on your goals:** Staying focused on our points of disagreement will only keep us there. We need to focus on how to attain the goals we both share to find paths around the problem.

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6. **Create options:** Are you searching for the 'one best answer?' The reality is, there are probably several workable options. The only decision is 'which will work best for us?' When we agree on crystal clear goals and crystal clear expectations, this gives us something to assess our options against.

7. **Keep an open mind:** Rigid thinking, 'wearing blinkers' and holding on to preconceived ideas all destroy attempts at conflict resolution. They lead to treating a problem in terms of competing solutions, or in terms of 'only one possible solution - mine.' The more open-mindedly we explore a problem and search for alternative solutions, the more we increase our chances of finding a way out of conflict. A flexible approach allows us to hear views, other than our own, and to explore a variety of options.

8. **Be positive, not negative:** Behaviour breeds behaviour. Negativity is catching and a negative approach is depressing and destructive. A positive approach is catching, too. It's uplifting and encouraging. Shifting our thinking and our words from negative to positive might require some thought, but the results are well worth the effort. Before you disagree, outline your reasoning and finish up with something like: 'And that's why I look at it differently,' or summarise your understanding of the other person's views, then say 'And here's how I see it...'

9. **Get 'on the same side':** It's easy to argue with someone sitting opposite us and difficult to argue with someone sitting next to us, which encourages an attitude of cooperation and allows a collaborative mindset to surface - 'You and I are working together on a shared problem.' It might be subtle, but it's effective. Problems are usually best discussed sitting down, since body language can more easily become aggressive and intimidating, or be interpreted that way, when we're standing.

10. **Work together to solve the problem:** We're more committed to the success of a path that we've had a part in planning and that meets at least some of our needs. If we share information, pool ideas, discuss our needs, wants and worries, and search for a solution that meets as many of them as possible, we'll increase our commitment to a solution and our understanding of each other at the same time.

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