

Module 1
Section 7

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

How to Manage Conflict,
Dangerous Communication, &
Tools for Unique Situations

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

Learn various methods for managing
conflict.

Discover how to handle specific kinds
of conflict.

Recognize and respond to dangerous
conflict situations.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Talking About Problems in a Good Way

Have you ever felt nervous or unsure when talking about something difficult with someone? It's totally normal. But there are ways to make these conversations easier and less stressful.

A book called "Difficult Conversations" helps us learn how to talk about tough things in a helpful way. It says that we can have better conversations if we understand the difference between good and bad ways to talk.



Bad conversations often make things worse. We might jump to conclusions, say things that hurt others, or blame them for the problem. This makes it hard to solve problems and can even hurt our friendships.

Good conversations are about understanding each other. We need to be curious about what the other person

is thinking and feeling. We should try to see things from their point of view, even if we don't agree with them. Here are some tips for having good conversations:

Understand your own feelings: Think about how you feel and be okay with those feelings. Sometimes we feel lots of different things at once! Share your feelings honestly and try not to judge yourself or the other person.

Don't make assumptions: We often think things without really knowing if they're true. Before you jump to conclusions, ask yourself, "What else could be going on?"

Don't blame: It's not helpful to spend time figuring out who's wrong. Instead, try to understand how the problem started and what you can do to fix it together.

Think about the bigger picture: Imagine you're looking down at the problem from above. Try to see things from both of your perspectives. Work together to find a solution that makes both of you happy.

Another way to talk about problems is called **STLC**: stop, think, listen, communicate.

Stop. Take a moment to calm down before you start talking. If you're feeling upset, take some deep breaths or go for a short walk.

Think. Think carefully about what happened and what each person is saying. Try to understand why they feel the way they do.

Listen. Pay close attention to what the other person is saying. Don't interrupt or judge them. Just try to understand their point of view.

Communicate. Talk to each other in a calm and respectful way. Use kind words and body language.

After you've talked, it's good to think about how the conversation went. Did you understand each other? Did you solve the problem? What could you do better next time?

There's another way to think about problems called "**The Third Side.**" It's like being a mediator, helping people find a solution that works for everyone.

- Understand all sides: Try to see the problem from everyone's point of view.
- Work together: Encourage everyone to talk and find a solution that everyone can agree on.
- Find a fair solution: Make sure the solution is good for everyone involved, and for the whole community.

The Third Side helps us remember that we're all part of a bigger community, and we need to work together to solve problems.

Talking When Feelings Are Big

Sometimes, talking to people can be really hard, especially when everyone is feeling upset. This is called a "**highly emotional conflict.**" It's important to be careful when people are feeling strong emotions because we don't want to hurt our friendships.

Everyone shows feelings differently. Some people don't show their feelings very much. They might think people who get upset easily are being "silly" or "unfair." But it's important to remember that everyone feels things differently. When people are upset, we need to help them calm down so we can talk peacefully.



Three Ways to Help Calm Things Down

1. Say What You Hear: Try to say what the other person is feeling in your own words. You can say things like:

"It sounds like you're feeling really sad."

"That must be really frustrating for you."

"It sounds like you're feeling angry."

2. Show You Understand: Let the other person know that it's okay to feel the way they do. You can say things like:

"I can see you're really upset."

"I understand why you feel this way."

"I'm sorry my actions made you feel this way."

3. Ask Questions: Before you decide how someone is feeling, ask them questions to get more information. Remember, we want to be curious and learn more! There are two types of questions:

Closed-ended Questions: These are questions that have a simple answer, like "yes" or "no." Use these to check facts.

Open-ended Questions: These are questions that need a longer answer. Use these to help the other person explain their thoughts and feelings.

Talking to Different Kinds of People

Let's face it; there are people in our lives who are just hard to talk to! There was an article in the December 2023 edition of Reader's Digest titled "How to Get Along with Anyone". The author, Rosemary Counter, gives tips for dealing with people who are hard to talk to: complainers, contrarians, and chatterboxes, and frenemies.

Complainers: These people always seem to be unhappy. Try to listen to them and show that you understand how they feel. Maybe they just need someone to listen.

Contrarians: These people love to disagree with everything! You can try to agree with them about some things or ask them questions to understand why they think the way they do. Sometimes, it's best to just change the subject.



Chatterboxes: These people love to talk! Listen to them for a while, then politely tell them you'd like to share your thoughts too. If you're short on time, let them know how much time you have left.

Frenemies: These people can be nice one minute and mean the next. It's best to be honest with them about how you feel. You can say things like, "I don't like it when you talk to me like that" or "I value our friendship, but I don't always feel like you feel the same way".

How to Handle Family Conflicts

Families are great, but sometimes they can fight too. Here are some tips for talking to your family:

Family Meetings. Have regular meetings where everyone can share how they're feeling. This helps everyone feel heard and prevents problems from getting too

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Think about a time when you had a disagreement with a friend or family member. How did you try to understand their point of view? Did you use any of the strategies from this section? What did you do to communicate effectively?

2

This section talks about the importance of listening carefully when someone is sharing their thoughts and feelings. How can you be a good listener when someone is disagreeing with you? What are some things you can do to show that you are listening?

3

Think about a time when you were feeling angry or upset. How did you show your feelings? Did someone try to help you calm down? How did they do it?

4

Have you ever been in a situation where someone was complaining a lot? How did you feel? What did you do?

5

Have you ever been in conversations with complainers, contrarians, chatterboxes, or frenemies? How did you handle talking to them? What is hardest about talking with them? Which is the most challenging type for you?

6

If you use texting or social media, to talk to people, is your writing clear, or could people misunderstand what you mean? Do you sometimes jump to conclusions or answer messages too quickly? What are a few things you could do to make your online conversations better?

PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR JUST MORE TO CONSIDER

1 Think about a well-known fairy tale like "The Three Little Pigs," "Little Red Riding Hood," or "Cinderella." Imagine telling the story again, but this time, use the four steps for having good conversations we learned about in this lesson. How would the story end differently if we used these steps to talk things out?

2 Talking about problems with the "Third Side" way takes time and working together. Decide on a conflict that has two sides. Divide your group into three parts. Two parts will each take one side of the conflict. The third part will play the mediator and take the "Third Side". Apply what you've learned in this section.

If you have a personal conflict you want to resolve outside of this class, start by thinking about inviting everyone who needs to be part of the conversation. You can send a note, text, call, or even talk to them face-to-face. Ask them to meet and share their thoughts, listen to each other, and talk things through.

3 Imagine you're in one of these situations:

Situation 1: One person (Person A) loves to keep things clean and tidy. They make their bed every morning and like everything in its place. The other person (Person B) is messy and doesn't like to clean up, which makes Person A really upset.

Situation 2: One person (Person A) worked hard to buy new shoes. The other person (Person B) borrowed the shoes without asking and got them dirty and scratched. Person A is really angry.

Pair off and act out one of these situations. One or both of you can try using the "paraphrasing," "validating," and "questioning" skills we learned. You can also write down how you think the situation would go if you used these skills.

RESOURCES

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Westmaas, Laura. "9.4 ABCs of Conflict – Conflict Management." eCampusOntario Pressbooks, Creative Commons, 2022, <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/conflictmanagement/chapter/9-3-abcs-of-conflict/>. Accessed 9 July 2024.

Wrench, Jason S., et al. *Interpersonal Communication: A Mindful Approach to Relationships*. SUNY Geneseo, 2020. Accessed 23 July 2024.

For more information, consider the following resources:

Moddes, Wendy. "Which Style are You? Discovering Your Communication Style quiz." College in the Schools Introduction to Communications, Brainerd High School. Class handout, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sBnzz_j54r6BW8p9xrGggQtD3qxHzwDt/view?usp=sharing.

(Your results on this quiz will indicate whether your conflict management style is passive, aggressive, or assertive—it is a close equivalent to the ABCs of conflict mentioned in the previous section: avoiders, battlers, and collaborators.)

Ruby, Kathleen. "12 Steps Handout. Planning for a Difficult Conversation." Washington State University. Handout, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S3lVS6Wxf2MfAwO8UjRNodZHqslIaym8/view?usp=sharing>.

(This step-by-step process for preparing to manage a conflict was modeled after the *Difficult Conversations* book by Stone and colleagues. It provides a succinct reminder of how to navigate through difficult topics and reach a satisfying outcome.)

Moddes, Wendy. "The 10 Commandments of Conflict Management." College in the Schools Introduction to Communications, Brainerd High School. Class handout, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1s3wxL8KJdbn8wgQt5GHLylOnuPPnpNxY5fpKZvqTvVM/edit?usp=sharing>.

(This includes a set of guidelines to ensure that difficult conversations are handled with compassion for self and others.)



Christ Centered Corner

Extra encouragement from a Christian perspective.

When Christians talk to each other and try to solve problems, they try to show love, understand each other, and make things right again. Here are some important ways they do this:

Listen Carefully. James 1:19 in the Bible says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." This means we should listen before we talk and try to understand what the other person is saying.

Tell the Truth with Kindness. When we talk, we should be honest, but we should also be kind. The Bible says, "Speak the truth in love," meaning we should be honest but also gentle and caring. Ephesians 4:15.

Forgive and Make Things Right. One of the most important things Christians do is forgive each other. The Bible says, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you," meaning we should let go of anger and try to make things right with the person we are mad at. Colossians 3:13.

Don't Spread Rumors. Christians are told not to spread rumors or talk bad about others. Proverbs 16:28 warns, "A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends."

Try to Make Peace. The Bible encourages Christians to try to make peace with others. It says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This means we should try to solve problems and make things better between people. Matthew 5:9.

Ask God for Help. When Christians have problems, they ask God for help. The Bible says, "Present your concerns to God, who provides peace and wisdom." This means we can pray to God and ask him to help us solve our problems. Philippians 4:6-7.

Get Help from Others. Sometimes, when people can't solve a problem on their own, they can ask someone else for help. The Bible says we should talk to a church leader or someone else who can help us make things right. This means we can ask for help from someone we trust to help us solve the problem. Matthew 18:15-17.

By following these values, Christians can talk to each other and solve problems in a way that shows their love for God and each other.

MODULE PRESENTERS & CONTENT PROVIDERS



Vicky Kinney is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and a former educator. She retired from her private practice to start a non-profit corporation working to solve homelessness. She is a mother, a grandmother and also runs a farm animal sanctuary.



Ann Anderson started Practical Leadership in 1998 and works as a consultant. Her background is in human resource strategy, leadership development, training, organization development and project management.



Wendy Vandeputte, M.Ed is a language arts teacher at Brainerd High school, and an instructor at Central Lakes Community College. She is passionate about helping her students learn to effectively communicate.

This course was developed by My Neighbor to Love Coalition and Lighthouse Beginnings with a Community Impact grant from Sourcewell.