

# Making Peace - Tips on Managing Conflicts

Irritated? Frustrated? Angry? Ready to explode? You're not alone. Whether it's an argument with a friend, aggravation because a driver cut in front of you, or rage because your ex-girlfriend or -boyfriend is going out with your best friend — conflict is part of everyday life. Anger leads to conflict, produces stress, hurts friendships, and can lead to violence. We can't always avoid anger or conflict, but we can learn to manage it without violence.



## Steps To Managing Conflict

- Understand your own feelings about conflict. This means recognizing your triggers — words or actions that immediately cause an angry or other emotional response. Your trigger might be a facial expression, a tone of voice, a finger being pointed, a stereotype, or a certain phrase. Once you know your triggers, you can improve control over your reactions.
- Practice active listening. Go beyond hearing only words; look for tone, body language, and other clues to what the other person is saying. Pay attention instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. Demonstrate your concentration by using body language that says you are paying attention. Looking at the ground with your arms crossed says you're uninterested in what the other person is telling you. Look the other person in the eye, nod your head, and keep your body relaxed and your posture open.
- Come up with your own suggestions for solving the problem. Many people can think of only two ways to manage conflict—fighting or avoiding the problem. Get the facts straight. Use your imagination to think up ways that might help resolve the argument.

## Moving Toward Agreement

- Agree to sit down together in a neutral place to discuss the problem.
- Come to the discussion with a sincere willingness to settle the problem.
- State your needs — what results are important to you — and define the problem. Talk about the issues without insulting or blaming the other person.
- Discuss various ways of meeting needs or solving the problem. Be flexible and open-minded.
- Decide who will be responsible for specific actions after reaching agreement on a plan. Write the agreement down and give both people a copy.

## Confronting the Issue

Good communication skills are a necessity throughout our lives. They allow us to resolve issues before they become problems and help keep us from getting angry. When talking to people, especially those who are acting confrontational,

- look and feel relaxed
- keep your voice calm
- be direct and specific about what's bothering you. Use "I" statements — statements that emphasize how you feel, rather than blaming the other person. Instead of yelling, "You always interrupt me! You don't care what I think," try saying "I feel frustrated when I can't finish making my point. I feel as though my opinions don't matter."
- ask — don't demand. Instead of saying, "Get away from me," try asking, "Would you please leave me alone right now? I am trying to talk to my friends."
- make your statement once, then give it a rest. Don't repeat your point endlessly.

## If You Can't Work It Out... Get Help

*Mediation.* Many schools offer programs that train students to act as mediators for their peers. Mediators do not make decisions for people — they help people make their own decisions. Mediators encourage dialog, provide guidance, and help the parties define areas of agreement and disagreement.

*Student Courts.* Many schools have implemented teen courts to help students solve disputes. Teens serve as judges, juries, prosecutors, and defenders in each case. Students caught fighting on campus can use the courts to settle arguments, and teen juries can "sentence" those students to detention or community service, rather than imposing suspension or expulsion.

*Anger Management.* How to recognize attitudes, actions, and circumstances that trigger an angry reaction and how to control that reaction are skills that many teens — and even some adults — have not learned. Anger management training helps individuals take command of their emotional reactions instead of allowing their emotions to take command of them.

*Arbitration.* In arbitration, a neutral third party determines an action. Disputing parties agree on an arbitrator who then hears evidence from all sides, asks questions, and hands down a decision.

## **Where To Find Help**

- Schools (check on whether they have peer mediation programs), colleges, and universities.
- Community or neighborhood dispute resolution centers.
- Local government — family services.
- Private organizations listed in the telephone directory's Yellow Pages under "arbitration" or "mediation services."
- Law school legal clinics.