

CONFLICT HANDLING AND ASSERTIVENESS

Affirmations

- I use conflict constructively in finding workable solutions for both parties
- I am confident in the face of conflict

Action!

- Keep a journal of any conflicts that happen in your life
- Highlight the ones that you handle well
- In what way did you handle them well?
- What does handling conflict well mean to you?
- What are the ingredients for constructive conflict?

Constructive conflict consists of each person:

- Explaining the situation and their needs
- Listening to each perspective
- Compromising on a solution which will work for both people (for a win-win situation)
- How can the time and place have a bearing on whether conflict is constructive? (e.g. energy, pressures of time, people within ear shot, interruptions, etc)
- How can you manage this?
- What would you say? (e.g. can we talk about this some other time, after lunch, after I have finished work?)
- How may this vary with different people or situations?
- How would your family, friend and colleagues describe your ability to handle conflict?
- What words are you proud of?
- What are your strengths?
- How can you build on this?
- What word would you like to erase?
- What would it look like if this word didn't apply to you?
- What can you improve in order to handle conflict more effectively?
- What steps can you take to achieve this?
- What conflicts in your life would you like to handle more effectively?
- Rewind back to just before a conflict that you didn't handle as effectively as you would have liked - how did you feel inside?
- What did you say/ do?
- What could you have done differently?
- What can you take from your experience of handling conflict effectively into these situations?
- What first steps can you take to put this into practice?

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Assertiveness

Assertion is standing up for your rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a direct way and an honest way without interfering with another person's rights. Be yourself whilst allowing others to be themselves. Clearly state your views and learn to feel good about yourself.

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
You are pushed around and taken advantage of	You do your own thing whilst allowing others to do theirs	You are pushy, you take advantage of others
You do not get what you want	You get what you want without hurting other people's feelings or violating their rights	You get what you want at other people's cost
You feel put down	You feel good about yourself. You have confidence in yourself.	You put others down
You allow others to choose for you	You choose for yourself	You push your choices on to others

Assertion has three main features:

- Be direct and constructive- use constructive language when discussing problems and give a clear message using "I" rather than "you", e.g. "I disagree" rather than "you're wrong". 'Blame' statements are threatening and destructive to solving problems. Express your own thoughts and feelings assertively, i.e. by simply stating what they are in a non-threatening way and be open to those expressed by your partner. Make sure you are understood, be polite. Avoid sarcasm and put-downs. Do not raise your voice or attempt to dominate the conversation. Remember you are not in competition with the other person; you are most probably on the same side, as members of the same team wanting to reach the same outcome- a win-win situation.
- Choose the right time to raise problems- express yourself as soon as possible so as not to store things up but not too soon if you are feeling angry and out of control. If you or your partner is upset or preoccupied with something else, this is not the right time to discuss problems. If necessary, arrange a time to discuss problems that suits both of you. Allow sufficient time to discuss problems in an unhurried and reflective atmosphere.
- be honest- especially about your own feelings

How to act assertively using the DESO formula

- Describe the problem
- Express how you feel
- Specify what you want the other person to do
- Outcome- tell the other person how the outcome will benefit them

Other techniques for handling conflict effectively

- Have a collaborative rather than a combative attitude towards conflict. A 'win-win' rather than 'win-lose' attitude. Conflicts will not be resolved if only one person is happy with the outcome.
- Have an accepting attitude towards conflicts as a natural part of relationships, i.e. as part of the work of relating. They should be viewed as problems to be resolved rather than as personal attacks.
- Develop good listening exemplified by active listening, which involves questioning, clarifying and thinking about what is said to try to understand the other person's point of view- if you were in their shoes how would you feel? Ask what it is about your behaviour that upsets them; where possible agree with the other person that they may be right, level with them; if wrong admit it and stress the positive side of things, e.g. it won't happen again.

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4. Be sensitive and responsive to the other person's expression of feelings and needs. Understand the importance of what is being expressed by the other person.
5. Both write down a separate list of all the things that are upsetting you, when you are both ready, come back and discuss what you have written.
6. Use the 'broken record' approach, calmly and patiently repeat what you want.
7. If emotions are running high, focus attention on this rather than the content of the conflict, e.g. there is no point in continuing until things have calmed down.
8. Express your willingness to reach a 'win-win' outcome/ a workable compromise.
9. Think more positively about yourself in general to protect your self esteem from being damaged from any verbal attacks. People with high self esteem are likely to handle conflict more effectively than people with low self esteem.

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
Oh sorry, I was going on a bit	Just a minute I'd like to finish what I'm saying	Stop butting in big mouth
Excuse me is there any chance of...oh never mind.	I'm afraid this radio is faulty. I'd like my money back please.	This radio is useless; give me back my money now.
Silence	I don't want any more advice Dad	Keep your big nose out of my life.

Positive and calm self talk

Remember to...	Questions to ask yourself	Example
Relax, relax, relax	Do I feel tense? Scan your body for tension. Am I breathing regularly and deeply?	If you have any tense areas, tense them up and then relax each one. Take slow deep breaths. Slow down your movements and speech. Concentrate on people or things that have a calming effect on you.
Identify the humorous side	What's funny about this situation? What might you be able to laugh about when you look back at this situation in 50 years time?	I can see the funny side now. I can imagine looking back at this when I'm 80 and laughing at the situation/ myself.
Prepare	What can I do to prepare to deal with this conflict? What would be the best time, place, etc?	"Can we talk about this some other time, maybe after lunch or after I have finished work?"
De-personalise	What else is going on here? Is the other person under pressure or dealing with other stress at the moment?	"It's not me he's getting at. He's just fed up with the situation."
Be realistic	What can I accept about this situation?	"I might as well accept this situation rather than make myself suffer."
Reward yourself	How have I handled this situation effectively? What can I do better next time?	"I handled that situation well. I can do even better next time by doing X, Y, Z."