



Northwest Frontier

**ATTC**

Unifying science, education  
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# Addiction Messenger

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*Ideas for Treatment Improvement*

## Conflict Management

### Part 3 - Tips for Improving Your Response

**C**onflict and disagreement are sometimes unavoidable parts of life. Conflict can be constructive when it helps expose important issues, leads to learning and creativity, and builds trust and openness. Recognizing the different sides of a conflict and the ways in which conflict escalates allows us to deal with situations more effectively. Reducing conflict in relationships is not achieved through repressing natural human emotions but rather by exploring feelings and issues honestly and openly without hurting the other person in the process.

Hallmarks of healthy conflict include:

- Identification of needs and feelings,
- Energy to meet your needs and the needs of others,
- Decrease in the number of conflicts over time,
- Creation of a healthy, accurate respect for yourself and others, and
- Enhanced patience, tolerance, and openness.

Unhealthy conflict can result in:

- Use of learned responses that can escalate conflict,
- Limited identification of real needs and feelings,
- Energy not being used to find solutions, but rather to blame and shame,
- Increased conflict,
- Creation of a false sense of power and authority, and
- Increased sense of impatience, urgency, and a reluctance to communicate freely.

#### Managing Conflict in a Healthy Manner

Healthy relationships strive for mutual respect and civility in times of conflict. There is a sense of "give and take", feeling supported, and being supportive. Trust and honesty are part of the relationship along with fairness and equality. Communication is open and direct without fear of reprisal, hidden agendas, or manipulation. Effective "boundaries" are present that establish healthy limits between two individuals.

The *Conflict Resolution Trainer's Manual* and a companion *Participant Workbook*, developed by Cynthia Moreno Tuohy at NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, provides useful tips for developing healthy responses to conflict; responses that maintain mutual respect, allow honest sharing and

*"Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding."*

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~  
(1869 - 1948)

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**Next Series:**

**Cognitive  
Behavioral  
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build mutual understanding.

### **TIP 1: Stand Still In the Moment**

Be deliberate about choices when at the moment of making a “fight or flight” decision. When you stand still in the moment you:

- Learn or strengthen impulse control.
- Deliberate about choices and decisions. Personal power is present when you take time to deliberate.
- Take time to ask yourself whether your response will build, maintain the status quo, or tear down the relationship.
- Gather information, temper your tone, gestures, and intensity to match your response.
- Unclutter your mind and begin to set priorities for the best way to respond.

### **TIP 2: Never Assume Intent**

You are at risk for conflict when you jump to conclusions. On the other hand, when you ask your partners to explain their intent, you are taking steps to build a positive relationship. When you jump to conclusions—you are often wrong. You can determine intent by asking the other person to explain what they mean by their behavior. “Your actions tell me . . .” or “What were you try to accomplish when you...?” Culture and background history can be factors when exploring intent.

### **TIP 3: Dig Deeper**

Dig deeper to learn what’s really behind someone’s anger when conflict occurs. When you dig deeper to understand conflict you can determine how seemingly trivial things or circumstances can contribute to discord. You can aim to understand what’s really at the heart of the conflict.

- Does denying negative feelings during the work week play a part in arguing over trivial things at home?
- If those feelings were shared would it lead to less energy/reason for conflict?

### **TIP 4: Cultivate Confusion**

Approaching conflict with confusion can help establish a mutual solution to a problem. You can use this skill in conflict situations to:

- Withhold judgment for a moment to lessen the chance of someone feeling blamed,
- Collect information from the other person before judging and dispensing a “guilty verdict”,
- Create an opportunity to explore and understand the other person’s motives and intentions.

- Approach the other person to get more information in a neutral, information-gathering way by stating, “I’m confused. Is this what you intended?” or “I’m confused. This is the way I see it. Is that what you meant?”

### **TIP 5: The Paradox of Control**

The harder you try to control another the less in control you become.

- Controlling behaviors can be replaced with collaboration and discovery.
- For some people the loss of control is equated to loss of respect.
- Insight can be gained by asking “Why am I pushing for control?” or “Is having control going to get us what we want, which is mutual respect and agreement?”

### **TIP 6: Look to the Misunderstanding**

Lessen misunderstanding during a conflict by recognizing and moving past faulty perceptions. Beneficial strategies include:

- Allowing room during a conflict for yourself and the other person to start over and say what was meant to be said by divorcing yourself from your first reading of the conflict.
- Taking time to speculate how your and the other person’s perspective might simply be different views of the same exact thing. Remember that your perceptions may not be exactly correct or perfect.
- Allowing others to explain themselves and receive the benefit of the “misunderstanding.” This provides an opportunity to begin again on equal footing.

### **TIP 7: Have A Blameless Relationship with Yourself**

Strategies for having a blameless relationship with yourself include understanding the family system you grew up in. How did that system affect you then? Do you try to relive that family system now to “get it right”, make sense of it, or finish unfinished business so you can move on?

### **TIP 8: Avoid Premature Forgiveness**

Premature forgiveness can stop a conversation when the conflict is making the other person upset. When you prematurely forgive you are often left to pick up the pieces later. You may be motivated to smooth conflict over and may not share how hurtful the experience was for you. You pass up an opportunity to ask for what you need in the wake

of a conflict: mutual understanding and joint problem-solving.

#### **TIP 9: Put Down Your Dukes**

Try to stop using defensive, blaming and controlling behaviors. When you get defensive you often cut off attempts to communicate. Focusing on whose needs take priority in a relationship can be damaging. Overreacting or under reacting covers up what you truly think and feel as you try to stop others from recognizing your vulnerabilities. Intimacy is difficult in relationships when people are afraid to “put down their dukes”.

#### **TIP 10: Self-fulfilling Prophecies**

Be careful not to fall into self-fulfilling prophecies, behaviors or thoughts. Developing a deeper understanding of how you shape your own destiny is a challenging step. If you believe you can't handle difficult life events you start feeling overwhelmed. If you think the world is out to get you and you react aggressively, then the people approaching you will have their guard up. Exploring your behaviors and thoughts is essential to breaking the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies.

The following Fair Fight Ground Rules come from the *Conflict Resolution Participant Workbook*.  
*Participant Workbook*.

#### **Fair Fight Ground Rules**

1. I am critical of ideas, not individuals. I do not judge you. I realize I am reacting to an energy, thought, or action. For example, I disagree with what you are saying or I do not like what you did – not you as a person.
2. I take responsibility for how I communicate my differences with you. I am responsible for cooling myself down, choosing how I communicate, working through my projections, and so forth.
3. I focus on coming to the best decision, not on winning. I remember that we are all in this together.

4. I watch how my voice sounds when I communicate with you. Blaming, shouting or raising my voice, name calling, bring up the past and accusations only alienate us.

5. I give you time to express your side, perceptions, and reasons for doing or saying what you did. I realize you might not want to communicate if in the past we have not been able to ‘fight fairly’. I also realize that you might not be at a place where you want or know how to communicate your viewpoints or perceptions with me, and that is okay. I am responsible for how I communicate about my feelings and how I treat you, not how you communicate and act. However, I can choose to separate myself from you if you continue to be abusive in the relationship since I have chosen to stop being an abusive person to myself and to you.

6. I actively try to understand your viewpoint without giving in to yours or changing my own. By doing this, I allow you to be you and me to be me. Perhaps by doing this, we can experience a new level of intimacy, relationship, or trust.

7. I change my mind when evidence indicates that I should do so.

8. I understand that all conflict is an opportunity to learn about myself; therefore, I treat conflict as a positive experience in my life to help me grow stronger in my ability to express my feelings, learn appropriate boundaries, value myself, value others and their point of view and communicate effectively and honestly with others.

#### **Sources**

##### **Conflict Resolution in Recovery - Trainer's Manual**

Downloaded from the World Wide Web on May 5, 2009 at [http://www.naadac.org/index.php?option=com\\_oscommerce&Itemid=79](http://www.naadac.org/index.php?option=com_oscommerce&Itemid=79)

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## TEST Series 34

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the part of the brain that reacts with a "fight or flight" response (fill in the blank).

2. Relationships can be improved by taking time to discover the needs and perceptions of others

True or False

3. Skills that can be used to help a person choose words deliberately include:

- a. Being sensitive to their own level of anger,
- b. Asking themselves if their words will build, maintain, or tear down the relationship,
- c. "a" and "b",
- d. None of the above

4. Hallmarks of healthy conflict are:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (fill in the blanks).

5. Cultivating confusion and asking questions is not healthy in conflict situations:

True or False

6. When we "stand still in the moment" we can stop or slow down our thoughts and actions by asking ourselves these 3 questions:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

7. The 5 conflict response styles are:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Over use of the Accommodating style of conflict response can lead to loss of influence and contribution in groups and relationships.

True or False

9. Using the Collaborating style of conflict response is beneficial for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blanks)

10. The benefits of "looking for the misunderstanding" in a conflict situation include:

- a. Allowing room for each person to "start over" and say what they meant to say,
- b. Prolonging the conflict to gain control,
- c. Avoiding premature forgiveness,
- d. a and b.
- e. All of the above

