10 Tips to Resolve and Handle Conflict

Practical habits for better conversations at home, work, and community

1. Encourage face to face conversations.

Much can be lost when trying to communicate via text message or phone call. Whenever you can, converse with someone so you can look them in the eye.

By meeting in person you allow them to also better understand your heart. Set the cell phone aside. Pay attention. Step away from distractions. Read their body language.

2. Listen before talking. Listen more - talk less.

Sometimes, things can be resolved with just you listening and seeking to understand. Eye to eye contact, full attention in your body language, and even taking notes can highlight to the individual you genuinely care about what they are sharing. This can decrease tension and give a better space for understanding.

Example: Ask genuine questions to demonstrate you are listening and you care. You do not always have to share the wisdom. As they feel heard, they will be more open to you sharing your perspective.

3. Use phrases that allow you to take the responsibility.

It's amazing how much it can help just by "taking the blame" for the confusion. Even if you are not in the wrong, putting yourself in the position to bear some of the responsibility can put the other party in a less defensive mode. Sometimes serving in this way can build bridges and bring healing.

Example: say things like, *"If I am understanding you correctly ..." or "This is what I hear, but tell me if I am mis-understanding..." or "I think I did a poor job at communicating ...can I try again?"*

4. Recognize each person comes to a conversation with their own lens.

What is commonsense to you could be complicated to others. Your position, experience, culture, relations, can contribute to how you see a situation.

Someone's worldview, their personal story (have they often been misunderstood and therefore wounded), or vulnerability can contribute to how they interpret something. Recognize neither of you may be right or wrong, but your experiences and worldview may influence how you are seeing things and that matters.

Example: "Based on our different experiences, I can see how we confused this situation. Let's start over. Can we both agree on _____?"

5. Always be willing to attempt your point a different way.

If someone is not getting what you are saying, don't repeat it for the 10th time or say it louder. Step back, and try to use language or a scenario that connects with the audience.

6. Don’t sweat the small stuff: it’s okay to not be 100% right.

Remember your priorities: is it the relationship or “being right?” Conflict does not have to be bad - it can be refining and edifying if handled appropriately.

Example: *“I think we are going to have to disagree on this one but that’s okay - we can revisit the topic at a later time. I respect you too much to let this side track us!”*

7. Be known for extending grace.

Always assume the best of the person who is trying to get their point across to you. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes letting them have a win - is a win for you in the long run.

Example: *“Harry, I appreciate your passion on this topic. I have heard what you have shared and would like a little more time to ponder it. Let’s move on but know I am going to work to wrap my arms around this because I see it matters immensely to you and that matters to me. Thank you for sharing.”*

8. Smile - when appropriate. Be aware of what your face is saying.

Body language conveys a lot. You can be genuinely interested in what someone is saying but when you look at them as they speak, your mind may wander to a personal to-do list What you don’t see is your face scowling as you try to remember if you turned off the coffee pot this morning. What your audience may see is someone who is not understanding or appreciating what they are trying to convey.

Always smile when you can and be cognizant of what your face may be conveying.

9. Be quick to find commonality and things you can celebrate.

You can use statements like,

- *Yes! I agree with that point too.*
- *Oh! I very much appreciate what you are saying!*

Sometimes tension can be resolved or decreased just by people identifying *“I hear you! And I agree!”* It also lets them know you hear them.

10. Remind the person they are loved.

Even when you can have explosive encounters, or harsh disagreements, walking away and circling back with said individual with a reminder they are loved can mean the world.

Example, “I know we see this differently but I just want you to know I respect you immensely. I hope we can continue to be friends.”