

Steps to Resolution

While conflict is inevitable, we do have choices about how we are going to deal with it. When handled in a constructive manner conflict can be a catalyst for new awareness, new understanding, creative solutions, and enhanced relationships.

However, when conflict occurs we don't always deal with it in the most constructive way, or we sometimes don't deal with it at all. The problem is that conflicts rarely get better with time. Here are some suggestions for how to deal with conflict the next time it arises. Experience has shown that they really do work!



Ahead of Time:

- **Plan to Talk Directly**

Plan on talking directly with the person with whom you have the problem, assuming that there is not the threat of violence. Meet face to face, or talk over the phone, to explain your concern in a positive, respectful manner. Direct conversation is much more effective than sending an anonymous letter, banging on the wall, or complaining to your friends and neighbors.

- **Plan What You Will Say**

Think about what you want to say in advance. You will want to talk about the problem as you see it and how it affects you. You want to help the other person understand that a problem exists and invite them to help you find a solution that you can both live with.

- **Choose a Good Time**

Choose to talk with your neighbor when there will be enough time for a thorough discussion. Consider a time when you think the other person will be most receptive. A quiet place where you won't be easily disturbed, perhaps with a cup of coffee, can make it easier to talk and listen.

- **Resolve to Talk Openly and Honestly**

Have a positive attitude about working together to find solutions. Using unfriendly language or blaming the other person for everything makes it harder for him or her to hear you and understand your concerns. Remain open to hear a different perspective than your own, seeking to understand before being understood.

While you Talk:

- **Focus on Giving Information**

Discuss your concern with a focus on your feelings regarding the situation and how it affects you, not delivering a message.

- **Listen**

Give the other person a chance to explain their view, describe their own concerns, and share their own feelings. Relax and try to understand how the person feels about the situation. Summarize what you hear and ask questions to clarify your understanding of their view of the problem. Understanding the other person's perspective does not mean that you are agreeing with them. However, in order to find a solution you must have a complete picture of the problem.

- **Talk it Through**

Once you start, get all the issues and feelings out in the open. Don't ignore the part that seems too "difficult" or "minor". Your resolution will be durable if everyone's issues and needs are considered and addressed.

- **Consider Possible Options**

Brainstorm some solutions that might remedy the problem. Be creative in thinking up solutions but don't critique them until you have run out of ideas. Discuss the solutions that you both think might work. Two or more people cooperating to find a creative solution are much more effective than one person demanding that the other make a change.

- **Be Clear and Specific About a Solution**

A good solution should be "SMART" (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). For example, "Beginning tomorrow, I will bring my dog in at 9:30. If I forget you can call me and let me know."

- **Follow Through**

Agree on when and how you will check in with each other to make sure that your agreement is working, and then do it. Communicate immediately about any changes, or if your solutions are not having the desired result. Congratulate yourselves on working together to resolve the problem.

