



## Identifying Conflict Strategies

Instructions: The following statements refer to the ways in which you may communicate in an interpersonal conflict situation, a situation involving a disagreement between yourself and some other individual with whom you have an interpersonal relationship. For each of the following statements indicate “True” if the statement is a generally accurate description of your conflict behavior, and “False” if the statement is a generally inaccurate description of your conflict behavior.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I avoid conflict situations by physically leaving the situation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I state my feelings and thoughts openly, directly, and honestly without any attempt to disguise the real object of my disagreement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I try to force the other person to accept my way of thinking by physically overpowering the individual or by threatening to use physical force.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I take responsibility for my thoughts and feelings. I say “I feel hurt....” Rather than “you hurt me....”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I use humor (especially sarcasm or ridicule) to minimize the conflict.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I try to feel what the other person is feeling and try to see the situation as the other person does.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I try to establish who is to blame before attempting to resolve the conflict.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I validate the other person’s feelings. I let the other person know that I think his feelings are legitimate and appropriate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I cry and sometimes pretend to be extremely emotional in order to get my way or win the argument.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I concentrate on describing the behaviors I have difficulty with rather than evaluating them.



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\_\_\_\_\_ 11. I remember and store up grievances (past indiscretions and mistakes) and bring them up when a conflict arises.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. I state my position tentatively, provisionally, rather than as the final word. Further, I demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to change my opinion or position should appropriate reasons be given.

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. In an interpersonal conflict situation, I bring up the strongest arguments I can find, even if these are arguments the other person cannot deal with effectively or that may hurt the other person's ego or self-esteem.

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. I emphasize areas of agreement before approaching the disagreements.

\_\_\_\_\_ 15. I attempt to manipulate the other person by being especially charming (even disarming) and getting the other into a receptive and non-combative frame of mind.

\_\_\_\_\_ 16. I express positive feelings for the other person and for the relationship between us even during the actual conflict exchange.

\_\_\_\_\_ 17. I withhold love and affection and attempt to win the argument by getting the other person to break down under this withdrawal.

\_\_\_\_\_ 18. I treat the person with whom I have conflict as an equal.

\_\_\_\_\_ 19. I sometimes refuse to discuss the conflict/disagreement and sometimes even refuse to listen to the other person's argument or point of view.

\_\_\_\_\_ 20. I engage in conflict actively rather than passively as both speaker and listener.



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## **Results**

Generally, if you indicated "True" to even-numbered statements and "False" to odd-numbered statements, you are practicing recommended conflict resolution procedures.



## Unproductive Conflict Strategies

- **Avoidance, Redefinition and Nonnegotiation**
  - Physical flight (leaving the scene), falling asleep, or mentally withdrawing.
  - Psychological flight-not dealing with the problem or arguments by changing the subject, being abstract, incomprehensible, redefine the conflict so that it is not a conflict or becomes irrelevant.
  - Nonnegotiation is a type of conflict avoidance in which the person refuses to discuss the conflict, refuses to listen to the other party or POV.
    - Steamrolling is hammering away at one's own POV until the other person gives in. Form of nonnegotiation.
- **Force**
  - Force way of thinking or behaving by using threats or force, both physically or emotionally.
- **Minimization**
  - Making light of the conflict.
  - Use of sarcasm or ridicule, generally disguised as "humor."
- **Blame**
  - When we blame the other party, we fail to acknowledge our own role in the creation and maintenance of the conflict.
  - Self-blame can be used to manipulate the other party.
- **Silencers**
  - Fighting techniques that silence the other party such as crying, extreme emotionalism, physical reaction (headache, shortness of breath).
- **Gunnysacking**
  - Storing up grievances in order to "dump" them on the other party when a conflict occurs instead of dealing with conflicts as they occur.
- **Beltlining**
  - Knowingly using information to hurt someone in an argument. "Hitting below the belt" used to win the battle and destroy the opponent, thus damaging the relationship.
- **Manipulation**
  - Attempt to divert conflict by being charming or disarming in order to cause the other party to be receptive and/or noncombative and acquiesce (sometimes unknowingly.)
- **Personal Rejection**
  - Withholding love and affection, acting cold, uncaring and attempting to demoralize the other party in order to cause the other party to question his own self-worth.



## **Productive Conflict Strategies**

***The objective is not to win but to increase mutual understanding and to reach a decision that both parties can accept.***

- **Openness**
  - State feelings and thoughts openly, directly, and honestly without attempt to hide or disguise the real object of the disagreement.
  - Respond openly to incoming messages from the other party.
  - Own your thoughts and feelings. Use “I” statements.
  - Address the real issues.
  - Center your attention on the present. Don’t dredge up the past.
- **Empathy**
  - Listen with empathy. Try to feel what the other person is feeling and to see the situation as does the other person. Note how it differs from your own perspective.
  - Demonstrate empathic understanding by validating feelings where appropriate.
- **Supportiveness**
  - Describe behaviors with which you have difficulty vs. evaluating or labeling them. (“I have a problem with you coming home drunk.” vs. “You are an alcoholic.”)
  - Express your feelings with spontaneity rather than with strategy.
  - State your positions tentatively, provisionally. Demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to change your opinion or position should appropriate reasons be given.
- **Positiveness**
  - Capitalize on agreements and use them as a basis for approaching disagreements and impasses.
  - View the conflict experience in positive terms. The aim is to achieve greater understanding and strengthen the relationship.
  - Express positive feelings for the other person and for the relationship.
  - Approach the conflict with the attitude that solutions can be found and that the relationship will improve as a result.
- **Equality**
  - Treat the other person as an equal.
  - Express a respect for the inevitable differences that will arise in any conflict.
  - Give each other equal time to express himself. Avoid interrupting.
  - Be both a speaker and an active listener. Voice your own feelings and the feelings of the other party’s.



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- Grant permission to the other party to express himself freely and openly.
- Avoid power tactics.

*Adapted from The Interpersonal Communication Book by Joseph A. DeVito.*