

Understanding **CONFLICT**

Conflict styles

Objective

- Develop awareness of people's behavior while in conflict.
- Learn about the five conflict styles.

Audience

High school and above

Time

30 minutes

Supplies needed

- Role-play scenario (see attached support materials)
- Name tags for role players
- Flip chart
- Markers
- Paper, pens

Source

Kenneth Thomas. 2002. *Introduction to Conflict Management*. CPP, Inc. Mountain view, CA.

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Background

Conflict is part of our daily lives. Conflict with others occurs when the things we care about differ from what others care about, or we may disagree on how to do something. Figuring out ways to manage conflict constructively can help us realize what is happening and keep us from getting caught up in the conflict. In general, people prefer dealing with conflict in a certain manner. This, then, is their conflict style. While we may prefer a certain style because we are comfortable with it, we can choose a style that best fits a particular situation. Using different conflict styles, depending on the situation, can contribute toward a positive outcome in the conflict situation. Choosing how we "act" rather than "react" in a conflict can give us a sense of well-being.

What to do

1. Introduce the word "conflict." Ask the group what conflict means to them. Conflict with others occurs when the things we care about are different from what others may care about.
2. Request that four volunteers read the role-playing scenario. Ask that they quietly read through their role while you give directions to the observers. Remind volunteers to take on the behaviors of their character so everyone can more easily recognize that particular style.
3. Ask observers to jot down the names of the characters and then single words that describe the behaviors they observe, include words and body language of each character. We will use these words for discussion of the styles.
4. Volunteers read the scenario.
5. Ask observers to take a moment to think about what they observed and continue jotting down words.
6. At this point, you could ask the observers if they want to see the role-play and observe the behaviors again.

Understanding CONFLICT

Processing

Write the name of the first character on a flip chart. Ask observers to name a behavior they observed, going around the room until ideas are exhausted. Continue with each character. Say that the next step is to think about a word that collectively describes each character.

Finally, write the name of the conflict style beside each character:

- Competing
- Avoiding
- Compromising
- Accommodating
- Collaborating

These are the conflict styles that researchers have identified. You observed and identified them in our scenario. People usually prefer a style, but they often use a combination of styles. Choosing to react to a conflict in a collaborative manner offers a chance for consensus or decision that meets a common goal.

Let's talk more about the styles and the behaviors that we saw.

- Ask probing questions about the interaction of the characters. Try to elicit examples from the group.
- Have you seen these actions in groups to which you belong? Can you talk more about that?
- Did any of you see yourself in these characters?
- Let's ask our players. How did you feel playing your character?
- Can you think of some situations where you could have behaved in a way that was more constructive in the conflict?

Summary

A conflict style is how we prefer to deal with or react in a conflict. There is not a right or wrong way to be in a conflict. Being aware of the different styles can help us to avoid getting caught up in our usual way of reacting. Being aware of the styles can also help us to make more effective choices about how we want to "act" rather than "react" in a conflict.





Participant role-play scenario—The project

Scene: The group is meeting to plan a project.

Chris: “Let’s get going with this project. It’s a lot of work! The last time I did most of it, and I sure don’t look forward to doing that again!”

Bailey: “What do you mean?”

Chris: (Louder voice) “I did most of the work. That’s what I mean! You people sit on your hands talking, but that doesn’t get the job done!”

Riley: (Speak quietly and defensively) “I thought we pitched into the project the last time.”

Kelly: “Do we have to talk about this now? I think I forgot my notebook in the car.” (Get up to leave, but return shortly)

Riley: (Speak quietly and kindly) “Would it be ok if we just talk about the project?” (Shrug shoulders) “Nobody wants to talk about the past.”

Chris: “No, I want somebody else to take charge of this! How about you, Riley? I think you could do it!”

Riley: (Speak softly and kindly) “Oh, Chris... I think it’ll all work out fine if we just start planning...”

Chris: “How about you, Bailey?”

Bailey: “I’m working on three other things right now. I don’t see how I could do it.”

Chris: “You could do it! It’s about time you took a turn!”

Bailey: “How about if... I would be a co-chair with you? That way we’d each be doing half.”

Chris: “No! I want somebody to take it over. How about you, Kelly?”

Kelly: (Make a reluctant face. Get up and start walking away.) “Does anybody want a soda? I’m thirsty.”

Chris: “Kelly, come back here!”

Kelly: (Return to the group) “Do you want a soda?” (Pause, then leave) “I’m getting a soda.”

Chris: “Riley, how about you?”

Riley: (Start to cave in) “I have two other events that I’m working on. I really don’t think I could do it.”

Chris: “Come on... What’s one more thing? Just watch a little less TV.”

Riley: “Well, I suppose I could...” (Look worried and stressed) “I really don’t want to...”

Bailey: (Look at Chris) “It seems like you feel like you have always carried the load for the project, and nobody else pulled their weight.”

Chris: “That’s exactly right!”

Bailey: “We all want the project to be a success. Would it help if we looked at all the things that needed to get done last time, but didn’t?”

Chris: “The last project was one big mess!”

Riley: (Speak quietly and kindly) “Calm down a little.” (Speak kindly and reluctantly) “Chris, you did work hard on it. I suppose I could take it over to help out.”

Bailey: “Maybe we could just look at the project from the last time. We could talk about what happened each step of the way and then go from there.”





Facilitator role-play scenario—The project

Scene: The group is meeting to plan a project.

Chris: “Let’s get going with this project. It’s a lot of work! The last time I did most of it, and I sure don’t look forward to doing that again!”
(Competing)

Bailey: “What do you mean?”

Chris: (Louder voice) “I did most of the work. That’s what I mean! You people sit on your hands talking, but that doesn’t get the job done!”
(Competing)

Riley: (Speak quietly and defensively) “I thought we pitched into the project the last time.”
(Accommodating)

Kelly: “Do we have to talk about this now? I think I forgot my notebook in the car.” (Get up to leave, but return shortly) (Avoiding)

Riley: (Speak quietly and kindly) “Would it be ok if we just talk about the project?” (Shrug shoulders) “Nobody wants to talk about the past.” (Accommodating)

Chris: “No, I want somebody else to take charge of this! How about you, Riley? I think you could do it!”
(Competing)

Riley: (Speak softly and kindly) “Oh, Chris... I think it’ll all work out fine if we just start planning...”
(Accommodating)

Chris: “How about you, Bailey?”
(Competing)

Bailey: “I’m working on three other things right now. I don’t see how I could do it.”

Chris: “You could do it! It’s about time you took a turn!” (Competing)

Bailey: “How about if... I would be a co-chair with you? That way we’d each be doing half.” (Compromising)

Chris: “No! I want somebody to take it over. How about you, Kelly?”
(Competing)

Kelly: (Make a reluctant face. Get up and start walking away) “Does anybody want a soda? I’m thirsty.”
(Avoiding)

Chris: “Kelly, come back here!”
(Competing)

Kelly: (Return to the group) “Do you want a soda?” (Pause, then leave) “I’m getting a soda.” (Avoiding)

Chris: “Riley, how about you?”
(Competing)

Riley: (Start to cave in) “I have two other events that I’m working on. I really don’t think I could do it.”
(Accommodating)

Chris: “Come on... What’s one more thing? Just watch a little less TV.”
(Competing)

Riley: “Well, I suppose I could...” (Look worried and stressed) “I really don’t want to...” (Accommodating)

Bailey: (Look at Chris) “It seems like you feel like you have always carried the load for the project, and nobody else pulled their weight.”
(Collaborating)

Chris: “That’s exactly right!”
(Competing)

Bailey: “We all want the project to be a success. Would it help if we looked at all the things that needed to get done last time, but didn’t?”
(Collaborating)

Chris: “The last project was one big mess!” (Competing)

Riley: (Speak quietly and kindly) “Calm down a little.” (Speak kindly and reluctantly) “Chris, you did work hard on it. I suppose I could take it over to help out.” (Accommodating)

Bailey: “Maybe we could just look at the project from the last time. We could talk about what happened each step of the way and then go from there.” (Collaborating)



Descriptions of conflict styles

Competing—Assertive and uncooperative. Trying to satisfy your own concerns. Dictating a decision. Arguing. Bargaining. Making every effort to “win”.

Avoiding—Unassertive and uncooperative. Avoiding people and issues that are troublesome. Postponing until later. Wishing the problem away.

Compromising—In the middle between assertive and unassertive and cooperative and uncooperative. Measuring gain. Keeping track. Exchanging concessions. Taking turns.

Accommodating—Unassertive and cooperative. Appeasing. Deferring to others. Doing favors. Sacrificing your own needs for others.

Collaborating—Assertive and cooperative. Aiming for a win-win solution. Reaching for new insights to gain a deeper understanding.