



Dealing with Conflict

Experiencing conflict, whether in a personal or professional relationship, can be stressful and overwhelming. Conflict is a normal and expected part of most relationships; however, how we choose to navigate these challenges is important to the ongoing health of our relationships and our own well-being.

What is conflict?

A conflict in a relationship is any disagreement between two people. For example, this could include your partner, friend, family member, coworker, or boss. Conflicts can exist for any reason, but most often can be linked to differences of opinion, experiences, beliefs, or perspectives. Common sources of conflict in partner relationships include finances, trust or jealousy, intimacy issues, and time.

Conflicts in relationships are not uncommon and some conflicts can be healthy and necessary. However, dealing with conflict, whether big or small, can be stressful and can make it difficult to focus on day-to-day responsibilities such as work or school.

Tips for Addressing Conflict

- **Acknowledge the conflict.** Pretending a conflict doesn't exist will rarely make it go away. The first step to dealing with conflict is to admit that the issue exists. If the situation allows, try to identify an uninterrupted time to directly address the conflict with the person involved.
- **Emotionally prepare.** Conflicts can easily cause us to feel a number of challenging emotions such as frustration, hurt, or anger; however, these types of emotions often make it more difficult to resolve an issue. The calmer one can stay when navigating a conflict, the more likely a successful outcome. If the situation allows, intentionally calm yourself prior to engaging in a conflict and practice taking deep breaths when you feel difficult emotions rising.
- **Listen.** In order to truly understand a conflict, it is essential to listen to the other person involved. This means giving the person a chance to talk without interrupting. Asking open-ended questions (questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer) can help you to learn more about the other person's perspective.
- **Express yourself using "I" statements.** It's important that you also get a chance to share your perspective. Try to avoid statements of blame, which will likely make the other person involved feel defensive. Using "I" statements can help in expressing how you feel without placing blame. For example, if you and your partner are in conflict because your partner forgot about your upcoming weekend plans together, you might say something such as, "I feel like I am not valued when plans are made, but then forgotten". This statement may be much better received than a statement that includes many uses of the word "you", such as, "You forgot our plans. You clearly don't value me!".
- **Clarify and analyze the conflict.** Once you have made a genuine effort to listen to and understand the perspective of the other person involved and after you have expressed your views, it can be helpful to clarify the conflict. Do you and the other person involved both see the same issue? Why is this issue causing one or both of you to be upset? What options might exist for resolution?
- **Separate the person from the problem.** Sometimes conflict escalates because we attribute an issue to the person involved in the conflict, rather than specific behaviors or circumstances. For example, if your friend asks you for money and forgets to pay you back after she promises she would, you could consider how the circumstances have influenced the situation (she's dealing with money issues and feelings stressed; maybe the loan slipped her mind) or you could consider how this is one difficult behavior (making promises and forgetting to follow through) but it does not define her as a person (perhaps she is a really good friend in other ways). Separating the person from the problem can help you to feel more willing and open to resolving issues that bring up difficult emotions.
- **Know your wants and needs.** Before generating possible resolutions, know what your own wants and needs are. What are you willing or unwilling to compromise on? Knowing your wants and needs will help you to assert yourself and may help you to "let go" of issues that you realize are not as important as they originally seemed or may help you to follow through to resolve a conflict that is important to you in some way.

- **Be creative in finding resolutions.** Encourage the opportunity for you and the other person involved to brainstorm ideas for resolving the issue. Keep an open mind and consider all options.
- **Agree to disagree.** In some situations, you and others involved will never share the same perspective. Trying to force another person to feel the same way as you or share the same views or beliefs as you is often a losing battle. Be prepared to consider how you might be able to move forward even if you continue to disagree on this issue.

Academic Conflicts

Conflicts regarding academic expectations or assessments happen. Experiencing a conflict with a course instructor can be stressful, but working through these issues can lead to growth and ongoing learning.

- **Talk in person.** Written communication via email can often lead to misinterpretations. If you are experiencing a concern, set up a time to meet with your instructor during office hours either in person or virtually (all instructors have set weekly office hours during which they are available to meet with students). Setting up a time to talk is important. Trying to resolve a conflict quickly before or after class can be unproductive since there is not enough time to fully process the concern.
- **Prepare your thoughts.** It can be helpful to write down a few notes or to practice what you want to say prior to meeting. This can help you feel more confident and make it less likely that you will forget something that you wanted to say.
- **Keep an open mind.** Be open to hearing the perspective of your instructor and to receiving feedback. Accepting feedback can help to promote your future academic success and overall growth.
- **Ask for help.** Consider connecting with Counseling Services for assistance in navigating the issue and for support in developing conflict resolution skills. See the box title “Counseling Services” for additional details.

Abusive Relationships

There are important differences between conflict and abuse. While conflict in a relationship often involves two people struggling for power (navigating the process of negotiating and compromising) for a specific outcome, abuse involves one person trying to seize and wield power over the other person. Abuse involves the effort to maintain power over another person using threats or coercion. If you are experiencing abuse or suspect possible abuse, you are encouraged to reach out for support. Counseling services, available for free to all Anoka Technical College

Additional Resources

There are many resources available on conflict resolution and related topics. Check out the following resources available online.

- How to Improve Communication Skills in Your Relationship
 - <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/how-to-improve-communication-skills-in-your-relationship/>
- Conflict Resolution
 - <https://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/conflict-resolution/>
- How to Safely End Unhealthy Relationships
 - <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/how-to-safely-end-unhealthy-relationships/>
- Understanding Anger
 - <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/understanding-anger/>

students, is a good place to start. See the box title “Counseling Services” for additional details. Support is also available 24/7 from the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or from the Minnesota Day One Crisis Hotline at 1-866-223-1111.

Seeking Help & Support

If you are experiencing conflict or you want to work to improve your conflict resolution skills, you are encouraged to reach out for support.

As an Anoka Technical College student, a great place to start is with a college counselor. See the box title “Counseling Services” for additional details.

For self-help resources, check out the information linked in the “Additional Resources” Section.

Counseling Services

Counseling services are available to support Anoka Technical College students. A counselor can talk with you about any concerns or difficulties you are facing, provide support, and help in developing strategies and skills to promote wellness and goal achievement. Counseling services are confidential and free. You are encouraged to reach out for support.

To learn more about counseling services, visit: <https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/counseling-services/>

To schedule an appointment with a counselor, visit the weblink above or call 763-576-7860.