

Steps to Conflict Resolution

1. Negotiate time for discussion. In the heat of the moment, not everyone is able to listen or express themselves well. Say, for example, *“I’d like to talk about what just happened. Is now a good time?”* For minor conflicts, this may be unnecessary. For conflicts which evoke strong emotions, however, it is very important. It is perfectly acceptable to need time to calm down, take a walk, put the kids to bed, think about things, etc. Suggest, however, a time when you will be ready to discuss the conflict. Being chronically unwilling to discuss conflicts can be a symptom of conflict avoidance, and can cause small problems to develop into large ones.

2. Use “I statements.” The basic principle of this model is taking responsibility for your own feelings, and asking for what you want. Inevitably, people experience the same situation differently. In order to resolve a conflict, we need to communicate how it seemed from our perspective. When we start sentences with “you,” we risk judging, blaming, interpreting, or in other ways defining the other person’s experience. Our feelings are our own, and no one has the right to argue with us about how we feel. But, unless we are careful, we can find ourselves fighting over the details of the situation, when we want to communicate how it affected us. “I statements” are most effective when they are specific, rather than vague. For example, *“I feel angry that you told mom about my being fired. In the future, I want you to let me decide who and when I will tell about important events in my life.”* is more effective than, *“I feel bad that you always air my dirty laundry for everyone to see.”* .

3. Take turns. Decide who will start. Without interruption, one person will tell his/her view of the situation, explaining how he/she feels and what their needs are.

4. Restating. The other person will repeat back to the first person what they heard, so they can be sure he/she understands how it seemed to the other.

(Repeat steps 3 and 4 with roles reversed, so both parties have spoken and been heard.)

5. Brainstorm solutions. Together, come up with a list of possible solutions to the problem. Take responsibility for your part of the conflict.

Following up on the example above, one might say, *“I’m sorry that I told your mother something that you considered private. I know that I’m more comfortable sharing that kind of information than you are. In the future, I’ll respect your preferences, and keep it to myself.”*

I statements

An "I statement" has four parts:

I feel _____ (state the feeling)
when you _____ (describe the other person's behavior)
because _____. (describe the results of the other person's behavior)
What I want is _____. (state what would correct the situation for you)

Active Listening

Ways to actively listen:

1. **Clarify** -- get more information, ask questions.
2. **Restate** -- say in your own words what you heard the other person say, including their feelings.
3. **Encourage** -- use neutral or nonthreatening words to help another person say more about the situation and how they feel.