

Career
Life
Work

Dealing with Conflict

Workbook

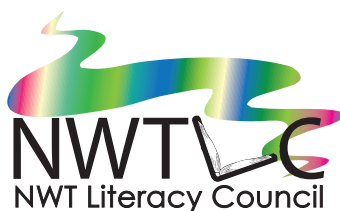
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There are 10 manuals and workbooks in the *Career – Life – Work* series. You will find a list of them on the last page of this workbook. You can find the whole series online at www.nwt.literacy.ca under the adult resources section. If you would like print copies, please contact the NWT Literacy Council.



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About this Workbook

Conflict occurs with two or more people. Despite their first attempts at agreement, they do not agree on a course of action, usually because their values, perspectives and opinions do not match. Conflict can occur:

1. Within yourself when you are not living according to your values.
2. When your values and perspectives are threatened.
3. When there is discomfort from fear of the unknown or from lack of fulfillment.

It is important to remember that we cannot change anyone's behaviour except our own. We cannot change our friend's behaviour, our partner's behaviour or our boss's behaviour. Sometimes, though, when we change our own behaviour, other peoples' reactions change.

This workbook will help you understand conflict and will give you ideas on how you can deal with conflict situations at home, in your community and at work or school.

You can work through this workbook on your own or with a friend. It is sometimes nice to have a friend to bounce ideas off and to hear a different perspective.

What is Conflict?

Your Turn!

What words come to your mind when you hear the word “conflict”? Write these words down below.

The dictionary defines "conflict" as "a struggle to resist or overcome; contest of opposing forces or powers; strife; battle; a state or condition of opposition; antagonism; discord; a painful tension set up by a clash between opposed and contradictory impulses."

Everyone has conflict in their lives no matter how hard we try to avoid it.

Looking at Conflict in a Different Way

Often when we hear the word conflict we think of negative things like fighting, arguing, or war. But conflict can also mean an opportunity for change. The Chinese symbol for conflict has two distinct symbols. One represents danger and one represents opportunity.



Your Turn! What are the opportunities in these situations?

1. Norm wants to go camping with his family, but his wife prefers to go to Edmonton to the mall.

Opportunity: _____

2. Jill likes her job, but lately her boss has asked her to do things that are not part of her job description. She finds the work hard and is very frustrated.

Opportunity: _____

3. You are tired of your friends coming over and making a mess, eating all your food and then leaving.

Opportunity: _____

4. You and your partner have a custody conflict about your two children. You both want them full-time.

Opportunity: _____

Causes and Responses to Conflict

What are the causes of conflict?

- Misunderstandings
- Personality clashes
- Competition for resources
- Authority issues
- Hurt feelings
- Lack of co-operation
- Differences of opinion
- Low performance
- Values or goal differences
- Cultural differences

What are some responses to conflict?

- Avoid the person
- Change the subject
- Try to understand the other person's point of view
- Find a judge/arbitrator
- Play the martyr
- Give in
- Work toward a mutually agreeable solution
- Apologize
- Whine or complain
- Fight it out
- Pretend to agree
- Try to find common ground
- Admit that you are wrong
- Turn the conflict into a joke

Your Turn!

Think of a conflict that you have had in the past. What was the conflict?

Why did you have that conflict? (personality issue, misunderstanding, lack of cooperation, etc.)

How did you respond to that conflict? (avoid the issue, yell at the person, try to understand the other person's point of view, etc.)

Five Styles of Conflict Management

There are many ways to deal with conflict. Here are five styles to study.

Your Turn!

Read each definition and then think about what the advantages and disadvantages might be for each one.

1. **Avoidance** means that a person knows there is a conflict but chooses not to deal with it. An avoider walks away from the problem and may avoid the person with whom he or she is having the conflict.

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

2. **Accommodation** is putting aside one's own needs and concerns to satisfy the needs of the other person.

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

3. **Competition** is trying to win or make the other person lose by giving in. In this style, a person defends his/her position or pursues his/her own goals without regard for the needs of the other person.

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

4. **Compromise** is giving up something to get something. It is an attempt to seek a middle ground.

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

5. **Collaboration** is working together to satisfy the needs of both people. It involves problem solving and assumes that both people can get their needs met.

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Your Turn!

Think about what style you use most. You might use different styles for different people. Which style do you use most frequently in a conflict with the following people?

Spouse/partner: _____

Child/ren: _____

Co-worker: _____

Boss: _____

Parent: _____

Sibling: _____

Friend: _____

Using the Five Styles of Conflict Management

A person can respond to a situation in many ways. Work with a partner to read each scenario and then give possible responses by using the five styles of conflict management.

Avoidance means that a person knows there is a conflict but chooses not to deal with it.

Accommodation is putting aside one's own needs and concerns to satisfy the needs of the other person.

Competition is trying to win or make the other person lose by giving in.

Compromise is giving up something to get something. It is an attempt to seek a middle ground.

Collaboration is working together to satisfy both people's needs.

For each scenario there are two styles listed. Look at the example below.

"I want to save money to take a vacation; Tim wants to save money for a car."

Possible response using "competition"

- "If you don't want to go on a vacation with me, I will go on my own. You can save your money for a car and I will save my money for a vacation!"

Possible response using "compromise"

- "Let's go on a small vacation this year and also save some money for a new car."

just
another
example

Your Turn!

"I want to spend time with my friends, but he wants us to spend time only with each other."

Compromise: _____

Competition: _____

You both agree that you would like children, but you disagree about when to have them.

Collaboration: _____

Accommodation: _____

Sarah decides she doesn't want to drink anymore. Her friends are always inviting her to parties and pushing her to drink.

Avoidance: _____

Compromise: _____

Your son wants to borrow the car. He never puts gas in it and often is late returning it. You would like him to be more responsible and get a job to pay for gas.

Competition: _____

Collaboration: _____

You are at work and your boss wants you to work overtime on Friday. You have made plans to go camping on Friday and want to leave early.

Competition: _____

Collaboration: _____

Working Through Conflict Using Collaboration

Does this sound familiar?

"You never clean the house. I'm tired of doing all the work."
"I do too help. I just did the dishes two days ago."
"Big deal! You did the dishes once in two weeks. What about all the clothes you leave on the floor?"
"What? Look at the mess you leave in the bathroom every night!"

Here are some steps to help you resolve conflict at home, at work and in other areas of your life.

Step 1: Cool off.

Conflicts can't be solved in the face of hot emotions. Take a step back, breathe deeply, and gain some emotional distance before trying to talk things out.



Your Turn!

Take a moment to brainstorm ten things that make you feel better when you're hot under the collar.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Step 2: Use “I messages.”

“I messages” help us express how we feel without attacking or blaming others. By starting from “I” we take responsibility for the way we perceive the problem.

This is in sharp contrast to “you messages” which make people feel defensive. A statement like, “You’ve left the kitchen a mess again! Can’t you ever clean up after yourself?” will escalate the conflict. Now take a look at how differently an “I message” comes across: “I’m annoyed because I thought we agreed you’d clean up the kitchen after using it. What happened?”

Your Turn!

Let’s practice. Change the following statements to “I messages”.

1. You never clean up after yourself.

2. You always make me late for work each morning.

3. You never listen to me when I am talking.

4. You make me mad when you insist on watching what you want on T.V.

Step 3: Retell the person what you heard.

Listening shows that we care enough to hear the other person out, rather than just focusing on our own point of view.

"I hear that you are frustrated that I have not cleaned up the kitchen and it shouldn't be your responsibility to clean up my mess."

"I hear that you wanted to go out with your friends so you didn't clean up the kitchen. I hear that you intended to do it when you got home."

just
another
example

Your Turn!

Think about a conflict you have had recently. Could you have listened better? Write down what you heard the other person say.

Step 4: Take responsibility.

In most conflicts, both people have some degree of responsibility. However, most of us tend to blame rather than looking at our own role in the problem. When we take responsibility we help to resolve the problem.

"I should have cleaned up the kitchen before I went out."

"I should not have yelled at you about the kitchen mess."

Your Turn!

How could you take responsibility for a conflict that you have had recently?

Step 5: Brainstorm solutions and come up with one that satisfies both people.

There are many solutions to conflict. The key is a willingness to find a compromise and work together.

Solutions to the kitchen mess...

- Leave a note and say that I will clean up the kitchen when I get home.
- Tell my friends that they will have to wait while I clean up my mess.
- Before I yell, wait to hear what my son has to say.
- Ignore the kitchen mess.

Your Turn!

What are some solutions to the conflict that you having been thinking about?

1.

2.

3.

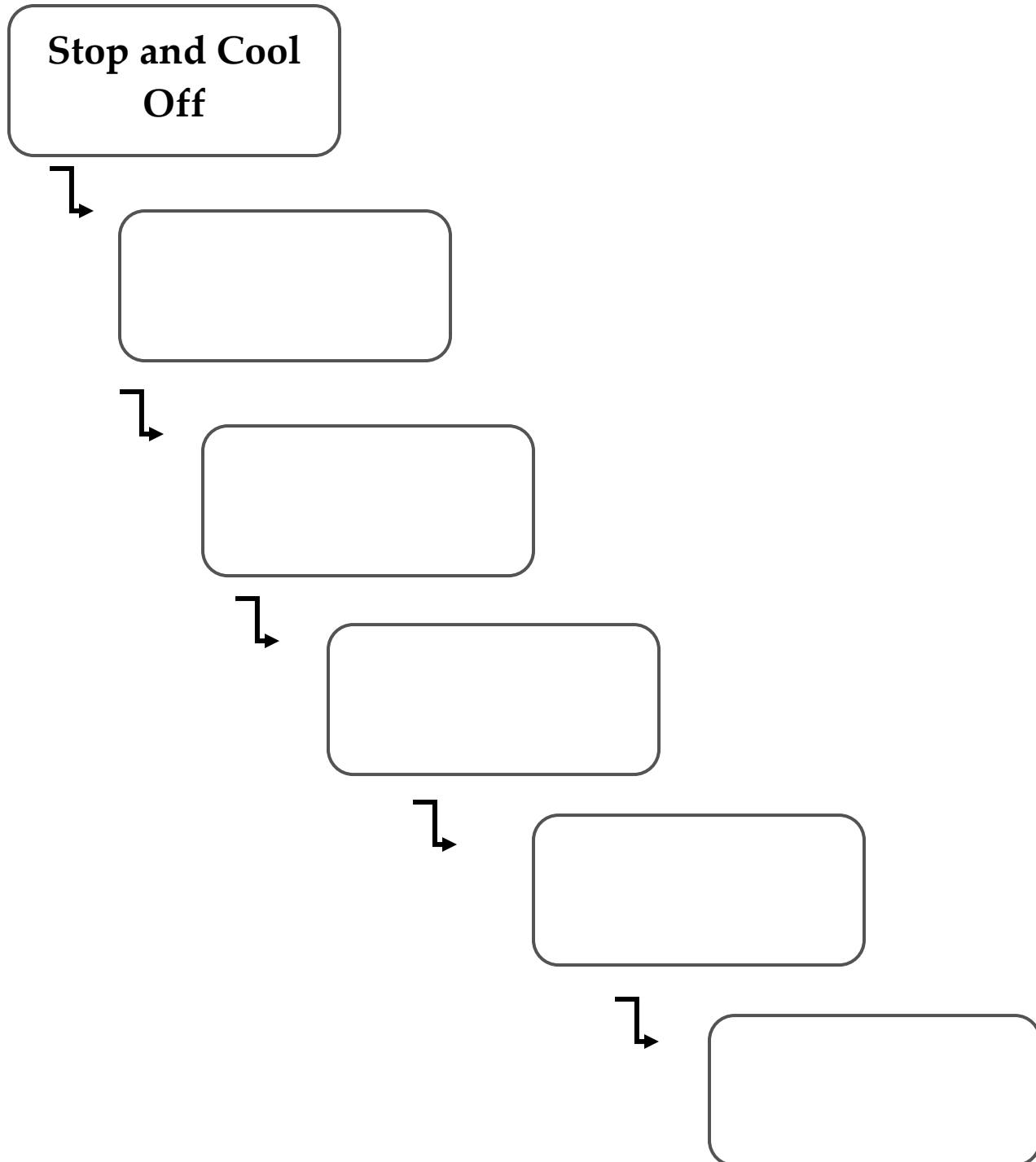
Step 6: Affirm, forgive, or thank.

A handshake, hug, or kind word gives closure to the resolution of conflicts. Forgiveness is the highest form of closure. Just saying thank you at the end of a conflict, or acknowledging the person for working things out sends a message of conciliation and gratitude.



Steps to Working Through Conflict

Use the information from the previous activity to create a flow chart of working through conflict. You can change the wording.



Workplace Conflict

All types of conflict in the workplace can be messy but it is differences in personality that cause the most grief. Statistics show that 85% of dismissals in the workplace are due to personality conflicts.

Your Turn!

Work with a partner or group and discuss some workplace conflicts that you have experienced or that you have witnessed. Write them down below.

For example: two co-workers not getting along, a co-worker gossiping about another co-worker, two different opinions on how to do something, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Your Turn!

Work with a partner or in a group. Choose one scenario and use the steps from the previous activity to solve the conflict.

Scenario One

Tom works as a stocker at the local grocery store. He enjoys his job and everyone thinks very well of him. He does his job well and is very pleasant to other employees and customers. He often does the store manager job if the manager is on holiday or out of town for business. He is hoping to become store manager one day. Problems arise for Tom when Joe starts work at the grocery store. Joe is a very loud and personable person. He is a bit lazy and only works hard when the store manager is around. He goofs off otherwise, but the store manager only sees him working hard. The store manager decides to make Joe the acting store manager when he goes away for two days. Tom gets really angry and frustrated.

Scenario Two

Your partner arrives home and tells you that he/she has been offered a promotion. It will mean moving area and house. You do not want to move as it will mean disrupting your career, leaving friends and moving your children's school. Your partner feels you should support him/her.

Scenario Three

You are a new employee at your job. One of your co-workers has been rude to you from the first day. When you asked him for help because he was the only one around, he pretended not to hear you. When you asked again, he spoke to you in another language that you didn't understand, even though you know he speaks English. You can tell that he doesn't like you, but you don't know why.

Scenario Four

You have started a new job. You are an administrative assistant for five people in an office. One person tells you to photocopy a bunch of stuff and that she would like it done by noon. Another person comes along and tells you to do something different. When you tell him that you are already busy he says that his stuff is more important and to disregard the photocopying.

Scenario Five

You have started a new job. You are assigned to work as a team with two other people who have been with the company a long time and are highly regarded. Your team is assigned to complete a task and are expected to work together until you clock out at 8 pm. There is no one at the work site other than you and your two team mates. At 6 pm your team mates approach you and inform you they are leaving early to go watch the playoffs. They tell you to stay and punch them out of the time clock at 8 pm and they will return the favour for you another time. They caution you not to tell anyone. They tell you to relax and hang out until 8 pm. What will you do?

Your Scenario: _____

Step One: Cool down.

Step Two: Use “I messages”.

Step Three: Retell the person what you heard.

Step Four: Take responsibility.

Step Five: Brainstorm solutions.

Step Six: Affirm, forgive, thank.

The *Career - Life - Work* series consists of the following:

- Personal Management Skills Manual
- Communication Skills Manual
- Career Development Manual
- Job Success Strategies Manual
- Dealing with Conflict Workbook
- Getting the Job Workbook
- Soft Skills for Work Workbook
- Planning Your Career Workbook
- Dealing with Stress Workbook
- Goal Setting Workbook

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