



FACING CONFLICT: THERE'S NO AVOIDING IT

A WEBINAR FOR EMPLOYEES FROM YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Federal
Occupational
Health

INTRODUCTION



OBJECTIVES

- Identify conflict management styles
- Examine methods and antidotes for couples' conflicts
- Review guidelines for families and children in working through conflict
- Discuss ways to effectively manage workplace conflict

SECTION 1

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE 1: AVOIDING

Those who use this conflict management style:

- Tend to bottle up their emotions
- Choose to look the other way or leave the situation entirely
- Lack the skills to resolve conflict effectively



Advantage: Can be a successful short-term alternative



Disadvantage: May not solve the problem in the long-run

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE 2: COMPETING

People who use this style:

- Know what they want
- Tend to come from a place of power, expertise, and rank



Advantage: Can be effective in an emergency or when a decision needs to be made quickly



Disadvantage: Can result in people feeling unsatisfied or resentful if used in less urgent situations

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE 3: ACCOMMODATING

Individuals who use this conflict management style are:

- Willing to sacrifice their own interests to achieve resolution



Advantage: Useful when a peaceful resolution or the needs of the other person are more important than winning, or when there are time constraints



Disadvantage: The conflict will likely reappear later because a mutually beneficial resolution has not been achieved

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE 4: COMPROMISING

Those who use this style:

- Tend to reach an agreement through negotiation
- Prefer a solution that works for everyone
- Expect everyone to give up something



Advantage: Can be a successful (and potentially necessary) form of resolution, especially when the cost of conflict is higher than cost of losing ground, or when it's crucial for a sense of fairness



Disadvantage: When each party gives up something to meet in the middle, the solution may become watered down and ineffective; also challenging when a deadline looms

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE 5: COLLABORATIVE

Approach:

- The most effective method for reducing conflict in your life
- Both cooperative and assertive
- A way for individuals to work together to solve the conflict

Those who use this style:

- Try to satisfy all needs
- Recognize all parties' abilities, values, and expertise
- Acknowledge that everyone is important



Disadvantage: Often requires some degree of compromise and accommodation to achieve collaboration; can also be time-consuming and may not work when a basic sense of trust or goodwill is absent

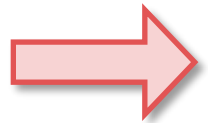


Advantage: Especially useful when bringing together multiple viewpoints, there's a history of conflict, or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off

POLL 1

Which of the five conflict management styles did you use in that situation?

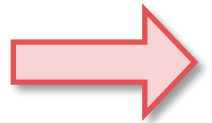
Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



POLL 2

Which of the five styles would you say is your go-to?

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



SECTION 2

CONFLICT IN COUPLES

THE FOUR HORSEMEN



A metaphor for the Gottman Method

- Explores couples' communication styles
- Examines patterns of behavior and personality
- Predicts end/success of relationship
- Incorporates research-based interventions
- Reveals communication patterns around conflict

HORSEMAN 1: CRITICISM

- Verbally attacking personality or character
 - Example: *“You never think about how your behavior is affecting other people. I don’t believe you are that forgetful, you’re just selfish. You never think of others! You never think of me!”*
- **Antidote: Gentle start-up**
 - The gentle start-up is a way of making a complaint without blaming
 - Use “I” statements and avoid saying “you”
 - » Such as: *“I feel _____,”* and *“I need _____.”*
or *“I need you to listen more when I’m explaining the kids’ schedules.”*
 - Example: *“I was scared when you were running late and didn’t call me. I thought we had agreed that we would do that for each other.”*



HORSEMAN 2: CONTEMPT

- Attacking your partner’s sense of self with an intent to insult or abuse
- Taking a position of moral superiority in an attempt to make your partner feel worthless
 - Example: *“You forgot to load the dishwasher again? Ugh. You are so incredibly lazy.”* (Rolls eyes.)
- Shown to be the single greatest predictor of divorce
- **Antidote: Build a culture of appreciation and respect**
 - 5:1 magic ratio: every negative action should have five or more positive
 - » Example: *“I understand that you’ve been busy lately, but could you please remember to load the dishwasher when I work late? I’d appreciate it.”*
 - Begin with a respect and understanding and ends with appreciation



HORSEMAN 3: DEFENSIVENESS

- Rebuffing a perceived attack by playing the victim and reversing the blame
 - Question: *“Did you call Betty and Ralph to let them know that we’re not coming tonight as you promised this morning?”*
 - Defensive response: *“I was just too darn busy today. As a matter of fact, you knew just how busy my schedule was. Why didn’t you just do it?”*
- **Antidote: Taking responsibility**
 - Defensiveness: *“It’s not my fault that we’re going to be late. It’s your fault since you always get dressed at the last second.”*
 - Taking responsibility: *“I don’t like being late, but you’re right. We don’t always have to leave so early. I can be a little more flexible.”*



HORSEMAN 4: STONEWALLING

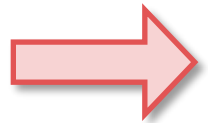
- Shutting down and withdrawing to avoid conflict
- Occurs over time; hard to stop due to being overwhelmed
- Thoughts of righteous indignation: *“I don’t have to take this anymore,”* or that they are the victim: *“Why am I always being picked on?”*
- **Antidote: Physiological self-soothing**
 - Take breaks during arguments
 - » Break for at least 20 minutes to allow the body time to calm down
 - Read, listen to music, or exercise and then return to resolving the conflict in a calmer manner
 - Make use of *“I”* statements to stabilize the conversation



POLL 3

Which of the four horsemen styles would you say is your go-to?

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



SECTION 3

FAMILY CONFLICT

AMONG PARTNERS AND SPOUSES

Fight fairly and peacefully

- Listen carefully, clarify differences: *“What I think you’re saying is _____. Is that correct?”*
- Frame the problem: you/your family vs. problem, not you vs. your partner/family
- Work toward a compromise
- Resolve issues immediately
- Take a time-out if conflict gets intense

Don’t use kids as an excuse

- Find ways to strengthen and unify as a team
- Set aside time to regularly communicate on important matters
 - Make a list of issues and address them
- Nurture your relationship and make time for each other
 - Consider scheduling a date night

AMONG PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Intervene and articulate the behavior you observed

Explain that it's okay to be angry but that they can't hurt others

Compliment children when they're helpful and cooperative

Propose consequences as kids develop, so they learn constructive solutions to managing conflict

Teach children emotional regulation and practice discussing feelings

Practice brainstorming solutions

AMONG PARENTS AND TEENAGERS

Specific communication strategies include:

Giving teens more freedom when they behave responsibly

Establishing reasonable house rules, like a curfew, together

Identifying priority issues, such as safety

Stopping to consider their request before saying no and, if you do, telling them why

Helping them to take care of themselves and to be responsible

Have open conversations

Setting a good example and apologizing when you're wrong

Continuing to coach them on ways to calm themselves down

MODELING GOOD COMMUNICATION

Encourage good conflict management skills throughout their childhood



Communication: Practice effective ways to ask for what they want.



Cooperation: Encourage kids to resolve conflict together, help them approach conflict in a positive way, and when possible, let them handle conflict on their own

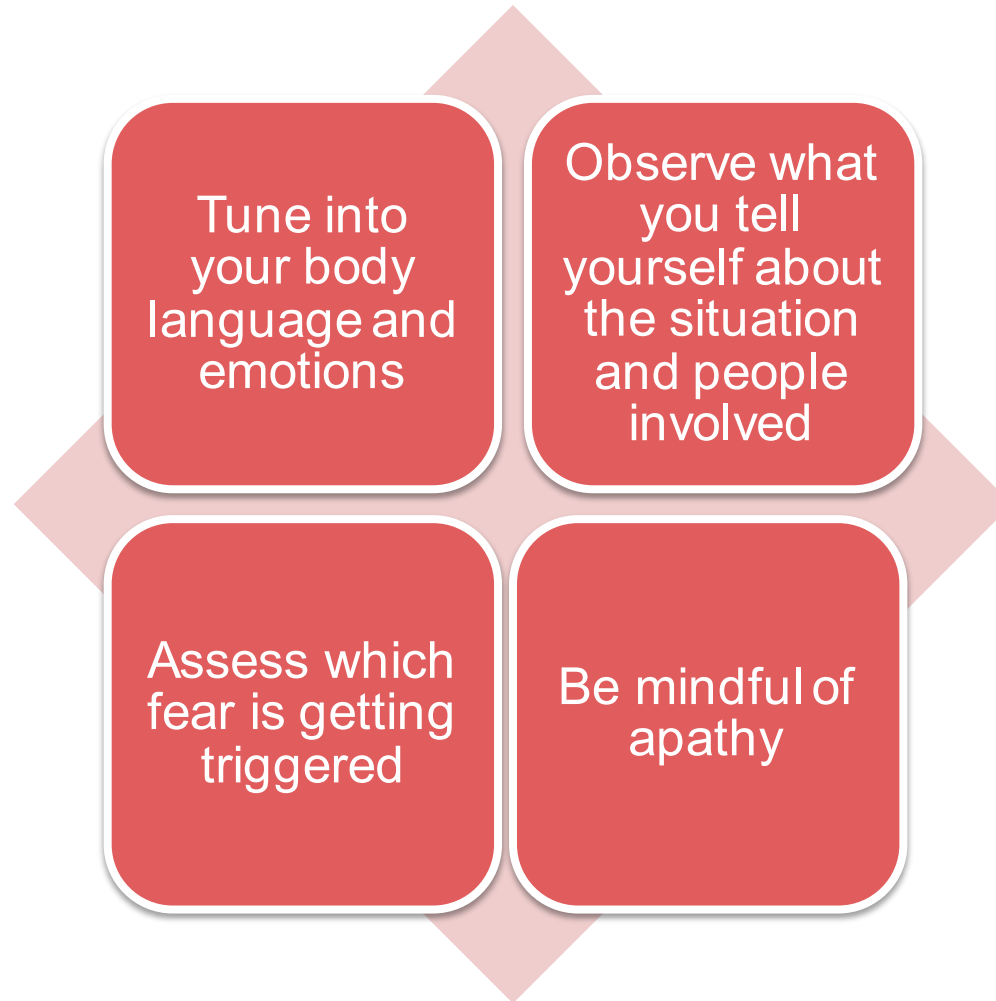


Empathy: Show kids what it means to listen and to understand the importance of acknowledging the needs of others.

SECTION 4

WORKPLACE CONFLICT

EMOTIONAL DEFENSIVENESS





1. THE SAFETY MINDSET

When job security feels threatened

- We go into survival mode
- We perceive ourselves as being under threat
- We show up as the worst version of ourselves

Moving out of the safety mindset

- Pay attention to your feelings given the frame of reference
- Be self-aware
- Change the narrative
 - i.e., what you tell yourself that hinders your best self
- Become solution-focused rather than focusing on the problems/dangers



2. LOOKING GOOD MINDSET

When our character feels threatened in front of leaders, we may:

- Resort to passive-aggressive behavior
- Respond spitefully or take credit for work that's not ours
- Boast about our performance/abilities
- Disparage the work of our perceived competitors

Moving out of the looking good mindset

- Stop placing so much emphasis on looking good
- Be able to identify when a peer is absorbed by looking good
- Be able to identify these individuals' fear response and have compassion for those unsure of their purpose
- Value authenticity



3. THE STRATEGIC AND HELPFUL MINDSET

- **Be the thermostat, not the thermometer**
 - A thermostat assesses, while a thermometer plunges in to get the temperature
 - Maintain your self-esteem, confidence, and empathy
- **Keep the mind in a curious stance vs. being defensive**
 - Instead of being reactive, “set the temperature” for others to match
- **Identify the strengths in others**
 - See your assets as well as the strengths of your colleagues
 - Focus on developing long-term relationships through trust and credibility
- **Practice self-awareness and self-care**
 - Give yourself credit and have compassion for yourself and others

SUMMARY



- Conflict will happen; it can even be positive
- Our conflict management style reflects our experience, goals, and investment in the relationship
- When working through conflict, it helps to stay mindful of tone and each other's vested interests
- Self-management in conflict requires self-awareness, acceptance of others, patience, the ability to think through the options, and the willingness to engage non-defensively

RESOURCES

Articles

- Kilmann Assessment Overview
 - kilmanniagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilman-conflict-mode-instrument-tki
- The Four Horsemen and How to Stop Them
 - gottman.com/blog/the-four-horsemen-recognizing-criticism-contempt-defensiveness-and-stonewalling
- Workplace Conflict
 - forbes.com/sites/hvmacarthur/2020/03/09/workplace-conflict-part-one-minding-your-mindset/#146da8d07c49
- Conflict Over Parenting Styles
 - childmind.org/article/conflicts-over-parenting-styles
- Resolving Family Conflict
 - healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/healthy-homes/resolving-family-conflict
- The Gottman Institute Research
 - gottman.com/about/research

Podcast

- Overthinking Conflict
 - overthinkingconflict.com

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