

Healthy conflict in relationships

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

It is normal for differences of opinion or ways of doing things to cause conflict in our relationships. We often blame our difficulties with each other on our conflicts. However, it is how the conflict is handled that causes the damage.

In times of crisis our levels of stress are higher and difficult emotions seem to surface more readily. This can lead to more mismanaged conflict, which increases stress and emotional outbursts. It may also give rise to the feeling that our relationship is falling apart.

The following tips may help you manage conflict more effectively:

1. Have a helpful attitude

It is helpful to see a conflict as a discussion with a friend, rather than a war with an enemy. In a war we are trying to destroy the other person along with their perspective. But in a discussion, we are interested in their point of view and of finding ways to move forward together.

2. Manage emotions

When we feel as though we are at war with our partner, we become more defensive and our emotions become heightened. These reactions interfere with our ability to handle the conflict effectively. It is important to be aware of our emotional state and when things become difficult, suggest a 'time out'. Come back to the discussion when you both feel calmer, usually after at least 20 minutes.

3. Create safety in the conversation

It is important to create an atmosphere in which a constructive dialogue can take place. This includes speaking and listening with respect, reserving judgement and assumptions by maintaining curiosity, keeping the discussion on topic and allowing each party to speak.

4. Make and accept repair attempts

Most conflict discussions go off track and end in a quagmire of emotion. This can be avoided by making and accepting repairs. When we make repairs, we are taking responsibility for our part of the difficulty and are acknowledging our partner's point of view. When we accept repairs, we

acknowledge that we have heard and are willing to let go of the hurt and move forward.

5. Seek for a Win/Win

Once each person's point of view has been considered, it is time to work toward a solution. Ideally a solution can be found that meets each person's needs. This is not always possible and then the difference must be managed so that forward movement can occur. This management could include ongoing negotiation and compromise.

6. Keep conflict in perspective

It is vitally important that the feeling of friendship is maintained despite an ongoing difficulty. The issue is the difficulty and not the person that we are in a relationship with. In times of crisis we need all the support we can muster, let's keep our relationship conflicts quarantined so they don't overwhelm the feelings of trust and safety we have with our partner.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on [Healthy Conflict in Relationships](#), or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.