



Responses to Conflict

“Conflict is energy... energy that has to be managed.”

Conflict is defined as any situation in which people have incompatible interests, goals, principles or feelings. Conflict exists whenever one person’s needs and interests appear to be blocked by the needs and interests of another party.

Considering situations in which you have been involved, which column, in general, best describes your approach when facing conflict?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Avoid the conflict or walk away	Appeal to fairness and values	Argue or persuade with facts	Bargain or trade-off	Look for the best mutual solution	Clarify all self-interests
Keep quiet; don't provoke things further	Give something to preserve relationships	Fight for the solution you want/think is best	Go +/- your limits in return for something	Clarify common needs and goals	Commit to clear principles
Let others handle it; bring in a mediator	Reduce tension with humour	Take over, make demands or the decision	Give in on a demand in return for another	Work hard to find a long-term solution	Aim for the maximum gain for each party
Refer to rules or to a 'higher authority'	Make a concession	Use sources of power to get your way	Offer to 'split the difference'	Think creatively	Apply objective criteria
Minimise negative consequences	Preserve harmony above all	Protect own interests over others	Ensure equal concessions	Build trust in the face of conflict	Seek multiple options

Yes, each situation is different, but some people favour one approach over others. For example, some don't like to express or witness strong emotions, others want to win at all costs, some feel they are not powerful enough or cannot reason, argue or talk as fast as others, whilst some just hope the situation will fix itself.

The six colour coded columns can be summarised as:

- 1. **Avoid or stay out** 2. **Accommodate/give in** 3. **Compete/take over**
- 4. **Compromise/trade-off** 5. **Collaborate** 6. **Negotiate**

Do you excessively use one response over another? If so, think about the consequences, and the advantages of experimenting with alternative responses.

Each response can be appropriate depending on the situation. Even 'avoiding' can be useful, for example when the issue is minor or temporary, when something is impossible to change or when others are in a better position to handle it.

For a real life, current conflict situation that you're facing, decide on which response is most likely to lead to the best outcome(s), and plan accordingly.