

## What is conflict resolution?

Disagreements in the workplace can be common and can actually be a source of creative discussion. However, sometimes ideas evolve into aggressive, opposing views. If such disagreement or conflict is left unaddressed, it may damage individual and team performance. Conflict resolution helps people understand each other's interests and find mutually acceptable solutions. Given that the potential areas for misunderstanding are wide (e.g., from family arguments, to land disputes, etc.), learning to manage conflict is an important skill.

## How do you resolve conflict?

Resolution begins when groups begin to

1. understand each other's perspective,
2. understand why conflict arises, and
3. find common ground and empathy (sometimes outside the main issue).

**Note:** Conflict can arise due to misunderstandings, pre-judgment, biases, past events, different values, ignorance of another's perspectives and/or deeply held ideologies.

## Five steps to conflict resolution

Hold discussion(s) at an independent location - away from any one person's "home" site.

1. **Set guidelines.** An independent chair establishes guidelines for constructive communication, namely:
  - a. Keep comments brief. Note: the chair can ask a speaker to stop in the interest of time or process.
  - b. Base comments on the content of the discussions, not on the person.
  - c. Ask that participants actively look for resolution, compromise and for areas of agreement.
  - d. Keep a sense of humor.
  - e. Recognize that diversity of opinion is okay and note that conflict resolution does not always need win-win scenarios- participants may agree to disagree.
2. **Clarify perspectives.**
  - a. Define a set amount of time for each party to present their perspective on the key issue(s). The chair must insist that each party keep to time and topic.
  - b. Do not allow interruptions.
  - c. After each speaker is finished, check for clarity and understanding between
3. **Identify common areas.**
  - a. Help participants understand each other's interests. Look for and build on any common ground or areas of agreement. Note such common points (e.g., on a flip chart).
  - b. Keep discussion "grounded" and keep as far as possible from general ideologies.
4. **Identify the key conflict areas.**
  - a. It is not necessary to change all aspects of a group's perspective to be able to work together.
5. **Take breaks!**
  - a. If tempers mount, take a break.
6. **Identify change areas.**
  - a. Ask parties where they might modify their positions, moving closer to common ground.
  - b. Decide if parties can proceed or if further resolution is required.



Conflict resolution requires mutual respect and a willingness to understand the other person's perspectives

**Note:** Resolution may be extremely difficult in conflicts based on deeply ingrained beliefs.