



Five Conflict Response Styles

1. Avoiding

Ignoring or not addressing the conflict; picking your battles; choosing not to engage in the conflict; attempts to change the subject or divert attention away from the conflict; may be an attempt to smooth things over and "keep the peace."

Advantages:

- Times when you need to withdraw from a heated situation
- You decide it is not a high priority issue for you
- Waiting for a more appropriate time to deal with conflict
- Concerned that confrontation may be damaging to the relationship
- You feel powerless or lack authority to address the issue

Disadvantages:

- Important decision may occur without your input
- You may have information or a perspective that has not been addressed
- Underlying interest or issues that are really important to you and may not be addressed or resolved
- Over time, you begin to feel your opinions don't really matter

2. Competing

Being aggressive or assertive; pursuing individual concerns that are sometimes at the expense of others; standing up for your beliefs.

Advantages:

- Issue is important to you and your values and beliefs
- Someone needs to take charge
- Quick decision must be made in an emergency
- An unpopular course of action needs to be implemented

Disadvantages:

- Generally sets up "win-lose" situation
- Difficult to promote creative problem-solving with this style
- Others may feel their interests were not addressed
- Frequent use can escalate anger and conflict among the group
- People may develop negative view of you if used frequently

Adapted from Developing a Forced-Choice Measure of Conflict-Handling Behavior: The "Mode" Instrument. Ralph H. Kilmann, University of Pittsburgh, and Kenneth W. Thomas, University of California, Los Angeles. Used with permission.

Adapted from Understanding Conflict PCL Module 7, 2008, University of Vermont and PACER Center (PCL: Parents as Collaborative Leaders; PACER: Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights)

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3. Accommodating

Putting others' interests ahead of your own; attempting to be cooperative; conceding to wishes of others; attempt to make peace; easy/quick way to resolve conflict.

Advantages:

- The issue is not that important to you
- You want to demonstrate that you are reasonable or you realize that you were wrong
- It is important to preserve harmony or avoid disruption
- You build a sense of cooperation, which may be beneficial with the group over time

Disadvantages:

- The underlying cause of conflict may remain unaddressed
- Resentment may occur on the part of all involved
- May deprive you of the influence, respect, and recognition you deserve
- Your professional growth may be slowed

4. Compromising

Attempting to find some middle ground; splitting the difference; balance between standing up for what is really important to you (assertiveness) and being willing to yield on an issue less important to you (cooperation); willing to listen to others and explore ideas.

Advantages:

- Some of the issues being discussed are at least moderately important to you
- People involved realize that resolution is more important than to "win"
- There is a sense that it is possible to reach a "fair" or temporary settlement
- A quick middle-ground solution makes sense
- At least a partial satisfaction may result for all involved

Disadvantages:

- Overuse may result in climate of constant negotiation or "game playing"
- Personal cost if you give in on values and beliefs that are very important to you
- Compromises may ignore the real issue
- May lead to future power struggles

5. Collaboration

Going beyond your own interests and ideas for solution that creates something new; asserting your own interests while at the same time respecting and cooperating with interests of others; attempting "win-win."

Advantages:

- Finding a solution that meets needs and does not compromise anyone's critical beliefs, values, or outcomes

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- Using a team approach in which you are trying to equalize power, gain commitment, and merge insights
- You have time to work toward a true collaborative solution
- You have authority to implement the solution

Disadvantages:

- Requires a substantial investment of time, energy, and hard work
- Issues may not be resolved quickly
- Team members must have a sense of trust and respect for each other
- Team members must have a sense of shared participation and power
- All members need to feel heard and included to avoid feelings that only a few are resolving issues while others fall into accommodating or avoiding roles

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