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


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)
• 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


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)

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE