

# YMEMBERNEWS

Tips for Transforming Conflict

Source: Search for Common Ground (Washington DC) [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

When conflicts arise, many of us automatically fall into adversarial ways of thinking. Search for Common Ground, whose mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, advocates a cooperative approach to conflict resolution—where the parties involved understand and respect differences and work to find a mutually beneficial solution based on shared interests. So, whether it's at work, at home or on the playground, how do we move from an adversarial approach to a cooperative or “common ground” approach? By shifting our attitude and behavior.

## Some suggestions:

- Accept that conflicts are a natural part of life: Conflict is neither positive nor negative—it is normal and a natural result of diversity in our culture. We all have different Points of view, needs and beliefs.
- Treat conflict as an opportunity: Conflict provides a chance to both voice your own and listen to the other side of the story. Our greatest power comes when we make conscious choices. It is the way we choose to deal with the situation that determines the consequences.
- Be aware of your initial reaction and take a deep breath: We all have automatic responses to conflict. We may want to run away, put up our defenses or dig in and fight. Instead of reacting quickly, take your time to think before reacting.

## Choose your approach:

There are always choices in a conflict. In choosing a win-lose approach, one person “gets their way,” while in a win-win approach, we choose to solve the problem together in an effort to preserve the relationship. The best choice depends on the circumstance.

## Listen and learn:

Conflicts are often based on assumptions and lack of information. In order to get a better understanding, we need to ask questions and listen. Paraphrasing, or restating what you heard the other person say, can often bring greater clarification to their perspective.

## Discover what's important:

While there is frequently a lot of “hot air” expressed in a conflict, there are basic core issues at the heart of every disagreement. These may range from hurt feelings, unmet needs or a change in the relationship. Getting to the root of the conflict will help bring you closer to finding a resolution.

**Respect each other:** Conflicts can be very emotional. Whatever happens, we must show respect despite anger and hurt feelings. Stay away from name calling and blaming. To avoid creating lasting resentment and anger, try using “I feel” statements to express your feelings.

**Find common ground:** Often, when people compromise, the needs of both parties are unmet and the conflict reignites over time. Work to create a new “highest common denominator” by negotiating a resolution that is acceptable to both parties. Be creative as you brainstorm solutions.

A final point...We can each make a difference. By working together to find positive resolutions to conflict, we are choosing to create a place where it is safe to disagree—away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.

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