

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Honing Conflict Resolution Skills

When handled poorly, conflict results in tense work relationships, broken friendships and long-simmering feuds.

However, if dealt with appropriately, conflicts can improve our understanding of others and ourselves and reinforce relationships. Resolving conflict amicably supports health by banishing stress and worry.



Keeping your cool when it comes to conflict isn't a cake walk, but it can be accomplished. Dr. Gravesen has gathered techniques from experts to help you perfect your conflict management skills.

What Does Conflict Resolution Have to Do With Your Spine?

When conflict triggers stress, the body responds in turn with emotional, physical and chemical alterations. The result may be a condition called **vertebral subluxation**. Vertebral subluxations are areas in the spine where motion is restricted or spinal bones are slightly out of alignment. The condition is linked to a host of maladies, from backaches and neck aches to carpal tunnel syndrome.

Dr. Gravesen combats vertebral subluxations by: 1) providing patients with cutting-edge research about how to prevent all three causative factors of vertebral subluxation (physical, chemical and emotional) and 2) eliminating vertebral subluxations through specialized maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

Dr. Gravesen teaches patients that negative emotions — such as anger and holding grudges — bolster stress. Consequently, unsuccessfully managed conflicts may be considered emotional causes of vertebral subluxations. Persistent stress is linked with increased risk of chronic, long-term illnesses, such as stroke, heart disease, cancer, depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

Left unresolved, feelings such as anger and frustration affect the central nervous system like an amphetamine drug — eventually producing a “crash-like” depression. The solution is to peacefully resolve conflicts.

How Do You Manage Conflict?

Do you get angry easily and express it, but with little control? Or do you stockpile complaints, only to act out angry feelings in passive ways? Do you view criticism or disagreements as an attack you have no control over?

Experts suggest that first analyzing your response to conflict is essential to making positive changes. Take a few moments to review and jot down your current approach to conflict. As you read on, go back and make notes on how your current conflict management skills may be enhanced.

Is It a Real Problem?

We all have varying levels of sensitivity to stress. Sometimes people “fly



off the handle” — not because a topic troubles them, but because they are troubled by an unrelated issue.

If you feel steam building up, take a step back and assess the situation. Are you having a tough day, and is your reaction influenced by your mood? Or is the other person's behavior part of a pattern that requires addressing? Is this an authentic issue, or are you “making a mountain out of a mole hill”?

Don't downplay your feelings, but be sincere with yourself. If you remain unsure of the genuine source of your emotional reaction, find an outlet to reduce stress, such as exercise, before deciding to confront the other party.

Fighting a Fair Fight

Fair fighting involves a few basic guidelines. First, avoid accusations. Accusations tend to force others into a defensive outlook.

For instance, use “I” rather than “you” statements to express how someone's actions affect you. For example, “I felt upset when you said...” is far better than “you don't care how your words upset me.”

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Stick With the Truth

Stick with the facts and your honest feelings. Don't exaggerate to prove a point. (Psychologists call this catastrophizing, which leads to a lack of credibility.) Be specific about what is vexing you. Don't generalize. Avoid terms like "never" or "always."

Set a Discussion Date and Time

Resist the temptation to spring into a confrontation without preparing the other party. A surprise attack will likely provoke him or her to be defensive.

Avoid addressing a problem the moment you first learn of it. Unless it is an emergency situation, schedule time for a discussion after you've cooled off.

Set a time to meet that's as soon as possible but accommodating to both schedules. Avoid scheduling conflict discussions during a hectic time when you're likely to be under stress.

If you encounter resistance to scheduling the discussion, explain that your goal is to determine a mutual solution, not berate the other party.

Outline a Game Plan

To stay on track, create a game plan for the discussion. Pinpoint exactly what's bothering you, what you'd like the other person to do or not do and the overall goal of the discussion. Determine possible outcomes that would be acceptable to you. Write these down.

Resolve to Resolve One Issue

It's tempting to "throw in the kitchen sink" during conflicts. Address only one issue at a time. Don't introduce another topic until the previous one is fully discussed.

Listen First

It's natural to want to explain your side first. However, experts warn that this approach is likely to escalate discord. Remember, the goal is not to

"win," but to develop a mutually satisfying resolution.

If you encourage others to explain their side first, they will be more apt to listen to yours. To start, quickly identify the conflict in a way that doesn't criticize. (Again use "I," not "you," statements.) After doing so, ask the other party for thoughts on the issue and explain that you value his or her opinion on the subject. Commit to active listening without cutting him or her off.

Throughout the exchange, do as much, if not more, listening than talking. Attempt to view the situation through the other person's perspective. Resolve to "put yourself in their shoes." Even if you don't agree, the opposing viewpoint may make sense.

And Show You're Listening

Reassure the other person that you're listening by using active body language. Use direct eye contact, lean forward if seated and nod if you agree with any statement. Make sure not to cross your arms, furrow your brow or shake your head.

Paraphrasing back what the person is saying will reassure him or her that you do understand, even if you don't agree. For instance, form sentences with "It sounds like you are saying ... have I got that right?"

Stay Calm

By remaining calm, you're more apt to cover all salient points and arrive at a peaceful resolution. If you resort to yelling, name-calling or other disrespectful behavior, it's unlikely you'll be taken seriously.

If either you or the other party begins to lose composure, suggest a relaxation break. Go on a walk, listen to soothing music, practice breathing exercises or play with a pet until you calm down.

Win-Win Solution

Many people assume that one person has to lose for the other to win — that

differences can only be solved competitively.

The goal is to find a resolution that satisfies both needs — a win-win solution where no one loses. While the best solution for your ego may be to "win," the best solution for the relationship is usually a compromise.

The ideal solution may not emerge automatically. Evaluate several possible solutions prior to discussing them. Ask the other party to propose solutions as well.

Implementation Strategy

Immediately following agreement on a solution, discuss how to implement it. Be specific. Who will do what and when? Write down specific action steps with deadlines. If you foresee difficulty in implementation, schedule a follow-up meeting. Both parties should be willing to revise decisions and agree on all changes to the solution.

Think Long-Term

Giving in and withdrawing from a conflict may seem easier, but this type of passive behavior can wreak havoc on emotional well-being. It's true that more skill, effort, commitment and initial stress are required to face a conflict. However, resolving difficulties together reduces long-term anxiety and boosts confidence and connections with others.

If you feel that you need additional help managing conflicts, ask the doctor for a referral to a health professional in the community who specializes in conflict resolution strategies. We're your partner in your quest for optimal physical health, which is inseparable from emotional well-being.

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