

# Strategies for dealing with conflict



## 1. Prepare yourself to deal with the conflict effectively.

In the heat of the moment, we are often not in the best head space to manage conflict effectively. Our emotions take over and we say things that we later wish we hadn't said, or do things that we later wish we hadn't done. Here are some steps to help you be in the best shape possible to manage your conflict effectively:

### STEP 1. Take time out.

It can be hard to walk away from a conflict but sometimes you need some time to plan and prepare a response rather than reacting in the moment. This could allow you to get better prepared to engage in the conflict sometime in the future. Taking time out can help you to think carefully about what you are going to do, when and how you are going to do it, and different possible consequences. Taking time out could mean that you tell the person you really want to have a conversation with them about the situation, but not right now.

### STEP 2. Calm down.

When we are highly emotional we tend to get confused and irrational and we can often cause more harm than good if we try to interact with someone in this state. Think about what helps you calm down when you are very emotional. Strategies that some people find effective include:

- Doing some physical exercise: go for a walk, go to the gym, shoot some hoops, ride your bike
- Have some "me" time: listen to some music, read a book, meditate, sit in the garden
- Talk to someone: call a friend, your mum or a family member, have an honest conversation with someone who cares about you
- Write it down: get your anger or frustration out on paper, write it down, screw it up, shred it to pieces and bin it, it might just help you get it off your chest in a safe way

### STEP 3. Get your facts straight.

When we are in the middle of conflict it can be easy to lose sight of the big picture and to get confused about what is going on. We often leap to conclusions based on what we have been told by other people rather than what we have witnessed ourselves.

Going into a conflict interaction and having your facts wrong can turn out to be quite embarrassing. Here are some ways to think about whether you have your facts straight:

- Think carefully about what you actually KNOW (what have you witnessed yourself) and what you are ASSUMING (what other people have told you), check whether you have good evidence on which to base your assumptions
- Write down everything you know about what has happened in chronological order
- Talk to someone about the situation and invite them to ask you questions to clarify details and missing information
- Think carefully about things that you might like to know, questions you might like answers to, information that might help you in this situation – and how you can find out these things (e.g. does anyone else have information that might help you like the lecturer, your tutor or your classmates. Can you find out more information yourself from the subject outline, university websites, relevant policies etc.)

### STEP 4. Get some expert support.

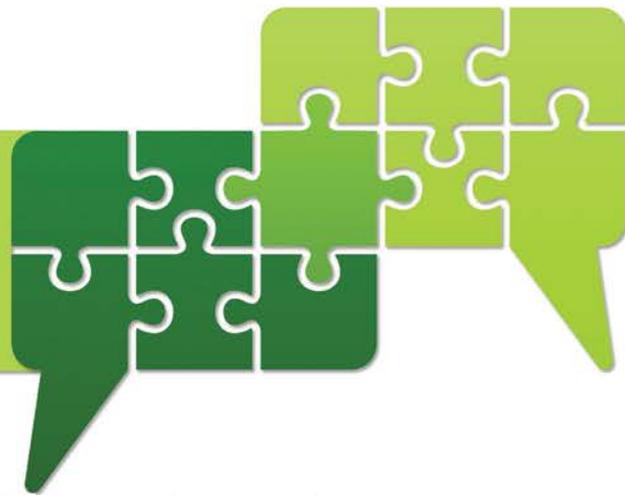
Talking with someone independent who is not involved in the situation and who has some expert conflict or communication skills can be useful. They can help you clarify what is going on, what your needs are, and what your options might be to manage the situation. Speak to someone at the student association, a counsellor or student support officer on campus. That's their job!

### STEP 5. Plan and prepare.

Script and practice what you want to say to the person you are in conflict with. Imagine the best case and worst case scenario for their response and practice what you will do in each of those situations. Think about:

- How can you incorporate any external advice you have received?
- Have you considered all your options?

# Strategies for dealing with conflict



## 2. Practice good communication

People in conflict tend to stop communicating effectively. In conflict, we often focus on what we need to tell the other person, but listening to what they have to say first can be really helpful.

It helps to be genuinely interested in hearing the other person's point of view to better understand why they might see things differently. Others are much more likely to listen to you if you have listened to them first. Also, the more you know about what is driving the other person's behaviour, the clearer you can see the bigger picture. This might help you to find a number of different ways to deal with the problem.



## 3. Be realistic

Be willing to negotiate. Have some room to move. Think outside the box and see if you can come up with creative outcomes that everyone can live with.

Remember that we can't always get everything we want. For you, it might seem like what you want is the fair and right outcome, but for others what seems fair and right might be different. Sometimes everyone involved might need to compromise. Occasionally the best choice might be to give up and walk away. There are lots of factors to think about in making these decisions, including:

- Will it affect your studies?
- What is the likely effect of continuing the conflict on future relationships with the people involved (e.g. your classmates, housemates, lecturers or tutors)?
- How much time and energy is required?
- What will you gain and what will you lose by continuing the conflict?



## 4. Look after yourself

It's important to look after yourself as conflict can be challenging. Give yourself space and time to refocus. Some examples might be:

- Exercise (walk, uni gym, think of ways to get moving)
- Engage in positive activities (meditation, keep a gratitude journal)
- Self-care (massage, socialising, alone time)
- Meet new people with similar interests and values (uni clubs and societies)
- Seek professional support (look at support services that your uni or community offers)
- Visit [www.thedesk.org.au](http://www.thedesk.org.au) (a website that supports Australian tertiary students to achieve mental and physical health and wellbeing)