

What are your options?



Consider, what could you do that would change the situation? You always have options! At the very least you have the option to do nothing, the option to do something and the option to seek assistance. Even if you don't like these options – they are still choices you can make.

So how do you determine what the best course of action is for you?

This is an exercise to think about your best options for your conflict scenario. Take out a pen and paper or open a word document on your computer and consider the following:

1. Miracle question

If you could wave a magic wand and everything would be perfect: what would that look like?

Consider

- What would be different?
- How would you feel?
- What indicators would there be for you that the conflict had been resolved or was being managed well?

Now, think about if things changed in a way that wasn't perfect, but a scenario that you could live with: what would that look like?

Consider

- What small changes would be an improvement on the way things are now?
- How would you feel?
- What indicators would there be for you that these changes had successfully occurred?

2. Prioritise

Look at what you have listed above. You have a best case scenario and a small positive change scenario.

Consider

- What have you listed that you would like to be different?
- How important are these changes?

Prioritise your list by numbering each change down the side of the page.

Your priorities may change over time or be different depending on your mood but it is good to have a clear indication of what you feel is most important to change at this stage.

3. Action steps

Next, consider:

- What steps could you take to assist that change?

This is where you can think outside the box and brainstorm all the possible combination of actions that could lead to your achieving the change you desire in the situation.

TIP: It is important to make informed choices. Is there any other information you need before you can decide what is best for you to do?

What are your options?



1. Do Nothing

You always have an option to avoid a conflict or give in to the other person. Doing nothing can be a good choice, at least in the short term, however often doing nothing means that the conflict gets worse.



Avoiding

Avoiding a conflict is when you try to steer clear of situations where conflict might exist, physically leave a situation where you feel uncomfortable or change the topic so you don't have to talk about it.

Avoiding a conflict can be a good choice in situations where you think that:

- You need time to calm down, gather information or speak to other people before deciding what to do
- It's really a minor issue and you can just drop it and forget about it
- Interacting with the people involved would impact upon your studies (e.g. if it is close to exam time)
- The conflict is likely to disappear in the near future (e.g. because the other person is about to leave the university) and there's no benefit in dealing with it before then

However, avoiding a conflict might not be a good option if:

- You are simply trying to pretend that the conflict does not exist
- The conflict is likely to get worse
- There could be future harm or cost if the situation goes unresolved (e.g. it could harm your studies)
- You go to a lot of trouble and inconvenience (e.g. missing classes) in order to avoid someone



Giving in

Giving in is when you agree to an outcome or simply accept what the other person is offering in the hope that they will be happy and the conflict will go away, even if the outcome isn't particularly good for you.

Giving in might be a good option if:

- Keeping the other person happy (e.g. your housemate or lecturer) is more important

to you than whatever you're in conflict about.

- If it doesn't seem like a conversation will help the conflict or it could even make it worse
- The other person is likely to reciprocate in the future, so they get what they want this time, but with the understanding that you get what you want next time (e.g. in a group work situation you understand that if you take the minutes of group meetings this week someone else will do it next week)

However, giving in is not the best choice if:

- You are sacrificing something that you really want or need
- You are going to be resentful in the future about having to give in
- The other person does not understand that you expect them to reciprocate by letting you have what you want next time a conflict arises (e.g. the group will expect you to take minutes again next time)

Things to consider if you are thinking about doing nothing

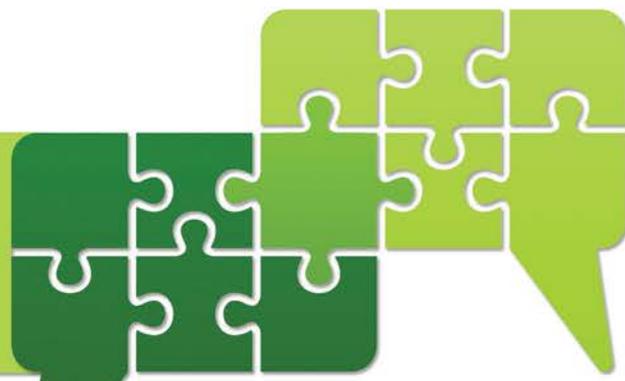
Some conflicts may work themselves out if left alone, but other situations require some action. Consider what you expect will happen in your situation if you do nothing.

Some things to think about include:

- What impact will doing nothing have on your relationship or future interactions with the other person (in the short term and in the long term)?
- Are you giving up the chance to get something you really need?
- Will avoiding the conflict now lead to more conflict in the future?
- Will avoiding the conflict hurt you personally due to frustration or not feeling free to talk openly about how you feel?

If you routinely do nothing in conflict situations you could be missing out on the opportunity to try different ways to work things out and practice becoming more comfortable and skilled in conflict situations.

What are your options?



2. Have a Conversation

Conflict often requires you to talk with someone to try to change the situation. Trying to work it out by having a conversation with the other person is often the best way to resolve a conflict.



Trying to work it out

A conversation might lead to both people reaching a compromise (with a bit of give and take from both sides) or even result in an outcome that works really well for everyone involved. At the very least, if the conversation goes well, you will both understand each other a bit better.

A conversation with the person you are in conflict with is a good idea when:

- You have to have an ongoing relationship with them (e.g. they will be in other classes with you in the future, or you will be living in the same share house)
- Both of you could benefit by hearing each other's side of the story and sharing information

Trying to work it out by talking with the other person may not be the best option if:

- You are worried about your safety during an interaction with that person
- You are really emotional and you might say something you will regret later
- You're concerned it will have a negative impact on your mental health, well-being and your study progress at uni

Things to think about if you are planning a conversation

Trying to work it out by having a conversation can be difficult. There are many different ways that you can choose to approach a conversation.

Some things to think about include:

- Be clear about what outcome are you hoping to achieve by having a conversation
- Think about how the other person could react if you talk to them about the conflict
- Will having a conversation now help the conflict?
- If you don't have a conversation now, what other options are available to you?

Conflict that occurs in a university setting provides learning opportunities to practice and develop skills that will assist you in the future, with colleagues in your workplace and with your friends and family. Trying to work it out by having a conversation can often lead to a much better resolution than doing nothing.

Remember: How you manage a conversation (e.g. whether you are calm and in control or aggressive) can make a significant difference to the outcome.

Be careful not to turn the conversation into a confrontation. Confronting someone can often turn into an unpleasant verbal, or even physical fight and make the conflict worse.

During a confrontation people tend to:

- Make demands and appear unreasonable. This can make the other person become equally unreasonable in return
- Get angry and stop listening to the other person. This will often escalate a conflict
- Blame and criticise, forcing the other person to defend themselves and fight back

3. Seek Assistance

There are many services available at university to assist you if you want help dealing with a conflict. Circumstances in which you may consider seeking assistance from other people or services include:

- If a conflict persists after you've had a conversation with the people involved
- You feel that someone's behaviour breaches university policy
- You feel unable to approach the person you're in conflict with personally about the issue
- You would like to have a conversation with the person you're in conflict with but would like some advice before you do
- You would like to find out more information

Please see the handout [Seek Assistance](#) for more information and the university specific handouts outlining assistance available at your university.