



Tips for De-Escalation

Being in conflict is a normal part of living with other people.

But when conflicts arise,

We often try to avoid dealing with the other person:

We give in, or we stonewall;

We become defensive or we bulldoze the other person.

Think of the times you've seen an argument escalate because of:

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Antagonizing statements | <i>(You're doing that again!)</i> |
| Blaming or accusing | <i>(It's your fault!)</i> |
| Insulting or belittling | <i>(You jerk!)</i> |
| Discounting feelings | <i>(Stop crying!)</i> |
| Judging and analyzing | <i>(I'm right, you're wrong!)</i> |
| Changing the subject | <i>(What about when you...!)</i> |
| Reacting to stereotypes | <i>(Just like a man (or woman) !)</i> |
| Ignoring and not listening | <i>(Huh! Yeah, yeah, yeah.)</i> |



WHAT GOES WRONG

Bob: Fix your fence!

Joe: It's on your property!

Bob: Your shrubs knocked it over.

Joe: I didn't plant the shrubs or build the fence. It's not my fault!

Bob: It's not my fault either!

WHAT GOES RIGHT

Bob: What are we going to do about the broken fence?

Joe: I don't know whose fence it is.

Bob: Looks like it's on my side, but those shrubs knocked it over.

Joe: Those shrubs could come out.

Bob: That would make room for a stronger fence.

What are the keys to turn arguments into problem-solving communication?

Listen to understand – this means listening without mentally judging, defending or arguing. Try to be quiet and patient, and don't interrupt. Listen with your eyes, ears, mind and heart. Listen for perceptions, assumptions or suspicions, intentions, values, needs and wants, and new information.

Listen with empathy – put yourself in the other person's shoes. Try to focus on them.

Validate and support the other person– Acknowledge their feelings, perceptions and the grains of truth in what they're saying. Let them know that the relationship is important to you. When you acknowledge the other person's needs and feelings, you help them feel understood by you. Then they're more likely to see you as intelligent, open and also worth listening to!

Clarify and summarize – Ask questions to improve your understanding and find out if you're being understood, too. Summarize what you think has been communicated up to that point.

Self-awareness can help a lot.

Being able to communicate in this positive way is easier if you're aware of the ways you generally react to conflict.

What do people do that makes you angry?

When are you likely to become defensive?

What biases do you have that affect your reactions?

What qualities and skills do you have that could be helpful in a conflict?

What skills and behaviors would you like to improve?

Are there positive ways to communicate an unpleasant or angry message?

Sometimes following these steps will help:

Briefly tell the other person you need to talk and ask if this is a good time. Be prepared to choose another time if it isn't.

Emphasize the value of this relationship to you. Make it clear that you'll give the other person an equal chance to talk and that you'll listen to them. Use phrases like, "I'm interested in your view on this, too" or "Correct me if I'm wrong, but...."

Be brief and specific by giving short “headlines” that reveal the heart of the matter. Speak about yourself:

“When ___(some event occurs)___,

I feel ___(how you’re affected)___ and

I wonder if ___ (your suspicions / assumptions)___.

I would like ___(desired future conditions) ___.”

Restate your willingness to hear what the other person has to say.

Listen carefully to understand their viewpoint. Acknowledge what you hear and support the other person.

Clarify each other’s understanding of:

Perceptions & values,

assumptions & suspicions,

intentions, needs & wants,

and new information.

Summarize – if you agree on what’s been said and feel understood, you’ll be able to seek solutions cooperatively.

If you’ve got a solution to propose, first check that you have a common understanding of the problem. Showing that you want to be fair and objective creates a common ground on which to consider your proposal.

Instead of arguing about the past, concentrate on what you’d like to have happen in the future.

Finally, recognize that both sides can gain by cooperating to find a solution that satisfies both of you. Concentrate on making their choices attractive and their decisions easy.

**If someone else has an unpleasant or angry message for you,
the same principles can help.**

Listen to understand perceptions, assumptions, suspicions, intentions, values, needs and wants, and any new information. Ask questions to clarify your understanding.

State your own positive intentions. “This problem is important to me and I want to understand it better.” Acknowledge the other person’s good intentions – “I appreciate your willingness to work this situation out.”

Talk about your own feelings and actions in the conflict.

Acknowledge the value of the relationship to you.

If for some reason, it isn’t a good time to hear about the problem, **agree to talk about it at another time that’s convenient for both of you.** Set a time and place.

In summary, the formula for effective communication is:

Listen

Empathize

Validate

Clarify

Summarize

By learning and practicing these principles, you may not reduce the amount of conflict you have to deal with, but you’ll probably find a lot of it can be resolved quickly and satisfactorily for everyone concerned.

Sometimes, though, a conflict may be too complex or too longstanding to handle directly by yourself. In these cases, remember that **Humboldt Mediation Services** volunteers can assist you.

Please call our office at **445-2505** if you have any questions or comments. Thank you for your interest in the peaceful resolution of conflicts in our community.

We gratefully acknowledge **Community Boards: Building Community through Conflict Resolution** (<https://communityboards.org/>) as well as Roger Fisher and William Ury, authors of **Getting to Yes**, Penguin Books (1981) whose ideas provided much of the material for this pamphlet.

