



# MODULE 8: DEALING WITH CONFLICT

**PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK**  
LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME



NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
**OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.**

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. What is conflict and why is it necessary? .....	3
3. Conflict styles .....	4
4. Resolve conflict in 6 steps.....	7
5. Case Study.....	9
7. My Action Plan.....	12
8. Recommended resources .....	13



For good ideas and true innovation, you need  
human interaction, conflict, argument, debate.

Margaret Heffernan

## Module outcomes


By the end of this session, you will:

- Have a better understanding of what conflict is
- Appreciate the risks of unresolved conflict
- Know more about the different conflict styles
- Understand a six-step process to deal with conflict
- Be able to apply a six-step process to deal with conflict

## 1. Introduction

Conflict is a normal part of life and cannot be avoided. Now if this is true, why do we try to avoid it in most situations? Perhaps because we do not know *how* to deal with it, or maybe we are afraid of what the other person will do when we confront him or her. It may also be that we have been taught that conflict is negative and nothing positive will come out of challenging others.

### ACTIVITY 1



# Task

**Think of the last time you experienced conflict. Describe the situation, the cause of the conflict, and the outcome.**

*Situation:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cause:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Outcome:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 2. What is conflict and why is it necessary?

Conflict refers to situations where there is a clash, fight, struggle, dispute, or disagreement that arises because of real or perceived differences within yourself, or between two or more persons, teams, organisations, or even countries. These differences can relate to thinking, interest, values, styles, options, beliefs, needs, and actions. Conflict can be internal or external to the person. Here are some examples:

- I really like the latest style of sneakers, but I'm trying to save money for my studies.
- Two waiters argue over who gets to serve the next customer.
- The board of directors cannot agree on next year's budget.

Conflict is not always negative. It can be healthy and can lead to positive outcomes when dealt with effectively:

- You can check your priorities when deciding between satisfying your desire for new sneakers or saving for your future.

- Clearer rules can be implemented that are fair for all the waiters and customer service will improve as customers do not have to wait while waiters decide who will serve them.
- Through discussions, the board of directors can explore new data and alternative scenarios, resulting in the best budget and strategy for the coming year.


When we don't deal with conflict, negative outcomes, such as the following, may occur:

Low energy and productivity levels.	Important information is withheld.	Time and resources are wasted.
Communication breaks down.	People become suspicious and trust breaks down.	Projects are delayed and people quit.
People feel disconnected from the job, team, and organisation.	Stress levels increase, leading to many other negative outcomes.	Personal, team, and organisational goals are not achieved.

### 3. Conflict styles

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann described five commonly accepted styles of dealing with conflict. Each style has its positives and negatives, but depending on the situation, one style may be more suitable or effective than the others. Before we look at the five styles, first think about the way in which you deal with conflict.

#### ACTIVITY 2



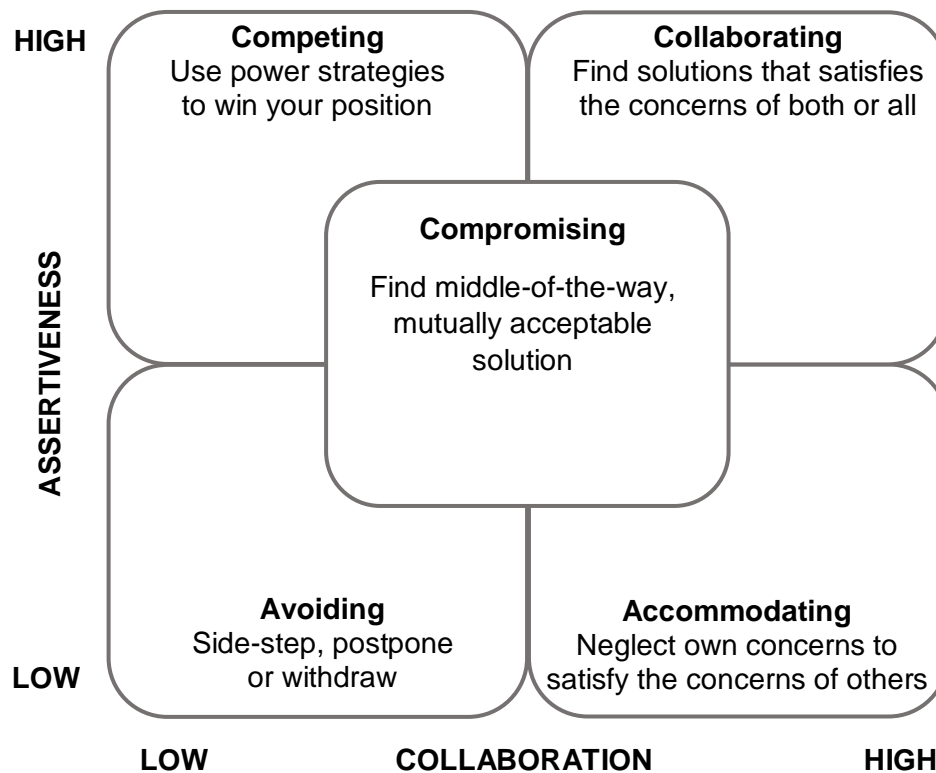
**Discuss the following with the person next to you:**

- Describe your behaviour and attitude when dealing with conflict.
- Why do you think this is your go-to approach when faced with conflict?
- Do you react differently in different situations or with different people?

You can assess your conflict style at home by completing an informal assessment available on: [https://isl.uga.edu/uploads/docs/4-Conflict\\_Resolution\\_Activity.pdf](https://isl.uga.edu/uploads/docs/4-Conflict_Resolution_Activity.pdf)

The five conflict styles each relate to an animal that has the same characteristics as the person using the specific style. In the next exercise, let's see if you can guess which animal represents which style. **Draw a line from the specific animal to the conflict style box below:**

### ACTIVITY 3



Each style can be useful, depending on the specific situation. Although you may have a natural tendency to use one of the styles more than the others, it is good to know when you must adjust your style to get the best results. Below is a short description of each style as well as when it is appropriate to use and when not.

<b>Competing shark:</b> You feel strongly about something and tend to compete with the other person(s) for power. This style is aggressive, often resulting in negative consequences and damaged relationships.	
<b>Appropriate to use</b>	<b>Not appropriate to use</b>
A quick decision needs to be made; very little time for discussion, e.g. in emergencies.	It is a sensitive issue and people are feeling vulnerable.
An unpopular decision needs to be made that no one else is willing to make.	There is no urgency to resolve the issue.
Someone is trying to take advantage of the situation and it would not be appropriate to allow this to happen.	

<b>Avoiding turtle:</b> When people ignore the conflict. People accept others' decisions without question, staying away or stop communicating with others, or delegating difficult decisions and tasks to others. This is a passive approach to dealing with conflict.	
<b>Appropriate to use</b>	<b>Not appropriate to use</b>
The issue is unimportant and would not be an effective use of your time.	The problem is important to you or those close to you, e.g. family, team.
The issue will be resolved on its own.	The conflict will get worse if not dealt with.
<b>Accommodating teddy bear:</b> People who use this style, tend to be passive in their communication and behaviour. They do not say what they think or what their needs are, resulting in them giving up on what they want.	
<b>Appropriate to use</b>	<b>Not appropriate to use</b>
Keeping the relationship is more important than your needs being met.	The issue is very important to you.
The issue is not that important to you but very important to the other person.	When accommodating will not fix the problem.
<b>Compromising fox:</b> This style is seen during negotiations; it is when each party gives up something, allowing the conflict to be resolved.	
<b>Appropriate to use</b>	<b>Not appropriate to use</b>
The situation is important but not urgent, there is time to reach a compromise.	A lot of important needs must be met.
Each person feels that resolving the issue is more important than having a "win".	One party holds more power than the other, therefore the compromise will not be fair.
The power between the people is equal.	The issue needs to be resolved urgently.
<b>Collaborating owl:</b> People work together to develop a win-win solution. They tend to be assertive, not aggressive, during their discussions resulting in effective communication.	
<b>Appropriate to use</b>	<b>Not appropriate to use</b>
The situation is not urgent, as it takes time for everyone to express their views.	An urgent decision needs to be made.
An important decision needs to be made that relies on accurate information being gathered.	The matter is unimportant to parties involved.
The conflict includes many people that need to express their options and agree on a solution.	

Now let's make it a bit more personal by doing the following task. Use the information in the table above to help you identify situations where the specific conflict style can lead to positive outcomes.

#### ACTIVITY 4

## Task

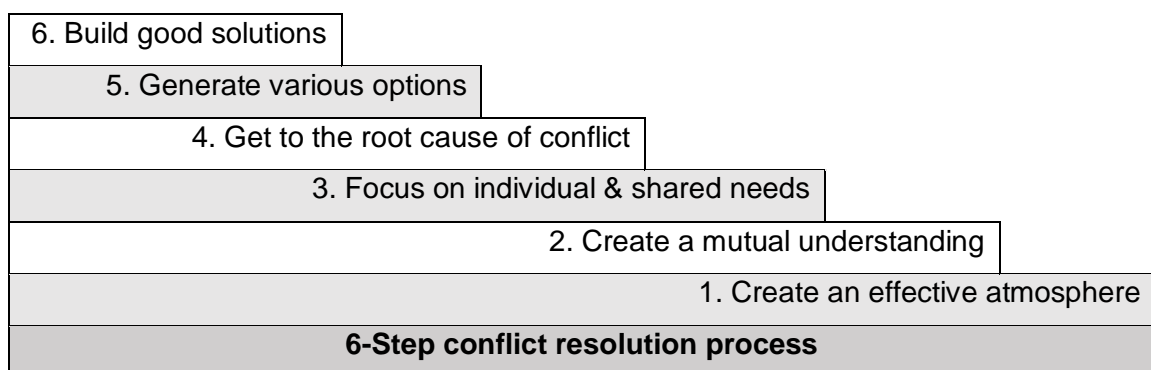


Provide your own example of when you would use each style or where you have used it before:

Style	Personal example
Accommodating	
Avoiding	
Collaborating	
Competing	
Compromising	

#### 4. Resolve conflict in 6 steps

Resolving conflict is very much the same as solving a problem or making a decision. Let's look at a six-step process for resolving conflict.



### Step 1: Create an effective atmosphere

With conflict comes a lot of emotions, such as frustration, anger, or disappointment. These emotions are not always helpful when you need to think and communicate clearly and may impact negatively on the conflict situation. The first step in dealing with conflict, is to create the most suitable environment so that people can reason and communicate effectively. This can be achieved by:

- *All parties agreeing* that they want to resolve the conflict or reach a solution.
- *Setting ground rules* to guide how the discussion will take place and what is and is not allowed.
- *Selecting the best time and place* to deal with the conflict.

### Step 2: Create a mutual understanding

To reach a win-win outcome, you need to understand why you disagree with the other person and what each person wants or needs the outcome to be. Once there is a clear understanding about this, you can start looking for where these may overlap and how the best solution can help meet all or most of the wants and needs.

### Step 3: Focus on individual and shared needs

Step 1 and 2 aim to finding common ground without losing focus on the individuals' needs. It also allows positive energy and emotions to enter the situation and hopefully calm the negative emotions. This means you move from being enemies to team members trying to solve the problem. Keep searching for common ground throughout the conflict resolution process. As more information is added, new opportunities can arise that lead to common ground.

### Step 4: Getting to the root cause

Establishing the true cause of the conflict is vital to solving the problem and implementing the best solution. If you don't know the real cause, you will be focusing on the incorrect issues and not truly resolve the conflict for good. By keep asking "why?" can get you to the root cause.



#### Key Learning

- Everyone must be open and honest;
- Everyone must respect everyone else's feelings;
- Everyone must be given the opportunity to have a say and be heard;
- Any point mentioned must be supported by specific examples;
- Make sure you send and receive assertively;
- Use active listening & questioning techniques: clarify, summarise,

### Step 5: Generate options

Now you are ready to generate possible options for resolving the conflict. This is the brainstorming stage; options need to be presented with no judgment. Sharing ideas on how to resolve the symptoms of the conflict as well as the root cause is necessary. Once you have a list of possible options, together evaluate each idea and keep exploring possible actions to resolve the issue.

### Step 6: Build a solution

Finally, we are at the stage where a solution is chosen, and the implementation is planned to resolve the conflict. Firstly, you need to come up with the criteria you will use to evaluate the options settled on in step 5. Then evaluate each option against the criteria to come up with a short list of options that meet the must have criteria. Next, one solution is chosen from the short list that all parties agree on. Finally, create an action plan with specific deadlines, roles, and responsibilities on how the solution will be implemented.

## 5. Case Study

### ACTIVITY 5

#### Story

**Please read the below case study and answer the questions that follow:**

Two groups of learners on a NYDA programme are joined to make one larger group. The first group consists of people who come from an IT background and all have some IT qualification. Their unofficial leader is Jabulani, a computer programmer. The group members are between 18 and 22 years old. The second group comes from accounting backgrounds and have bookkeeping, economics, or accounting qualifications. Their unofficial leader is Motswalle, who has a BComm (Accounting) degree. The group members are all older than 22. The two groups are joined for 6 months to do the Life Skills Programme and other technical skills courses.

The accounting group has become very close and have decided that when someone has a birthday, everyone gives R5 so that they can buy a cake, something to drink, and a small present if there is enough money. The IT group has not built strong relationships and doesn't even know when one of the group members has a birthday! A week after the course started, one of the accounting group has a birthday. Motswalle, who tends to be an aggressive communicator, asks the facilitator if she can speak to the group for a few minutes.

She tells everyone to give her R5 for Mpho's birthday the next day. She will buy two vanilla cakes and Sprite for the "party". She also thinks that R10 per person would be more realistic as the group is now bigger.

Jabulani and the IT group look shocked. Jabulani, who also tends to be an aggressive communicator, storms up to Motswalle, shouting and shaking his fist. "You idiot" he says, "what are you talking about? Do you think we are babies?" Chaos results in the room. Everyone shouts and jumps up and down.

1. Identify the type of conflict and all the potential factors and incompatibilities between the two groups. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What were Motswalle's and Jabulani's intentions? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. If no one intervenes or takes control of the group (i.e. no one manages the conflict):

What do you think will happen in the room?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What will the outcome be?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What will happen to the relationships between the two groups?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What will happen to the learning environment?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Who do you think should take responsibility for "managing" the conflict and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Dealing with conflict is hard work and time-consuming. For it to be effective all parties need to dig deep into the issues, discover unfamiliar ground, and remain focused on the real issue. Most times, resolving the true conflict is well worth the effort and has greater benefits to not only the parties involved but the community at large.

## ACTIVITY 6

### Story



**To end on a positive note,  
please read the following story:**

Thabang rushed past his co-worker and new team member, Lebo. Thabang's blood was boiling. He has just been told that he must work with Lebo on the new sales project. After a long debate with the manager, he agreed to, but had no intention to help Lebo. Over the coming days, Lebo watched Thabang's passive aggressive behaviour around the office, declining a meeting request to discuss the project and providing minimal input when replying to emails. Lebo decided it was time to stop this madness. If it continued the project would be a failure and the company would suffer a great loss.

A solution had to be found. Lebo spent some time thinking about what he wanted the outcome to be and why, as well as trying to understand Thabang's attitude and behaviour. With all this information, Lebo approaches Thabang with two cups of coffee in hand one morning. With a few kind words and acknowledgment of Thabang's skills, a positive and calm mood was set for Lebo to start the discussion on how they could work together in a productive and efficient manner. By the time the coffee was finished they had both voiced their options, thoughts, and feelings on the matter and started to agree on the ground rules for how to work together.

Lebo left Thabang's office in a positive mood, feeling like the project was going to be a success. Thabang also has a new fresh outlook not only on the project but working within a team overall.

## 7. My Action Plan

### Personal Reflection



Please take a moment to reflect on the value of this life skills module that you have completed now. Also think how you are going to apply what you have learnt to develop yourself as best as you can.

1. What was interesting and new to you in this module?

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2. What was the most valuable insight that you had today?

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3. How can you use what you discovered today?

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4. What will you do differently from now on as a result of what you learned today?

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5. What is the first step you will take?

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6. What are some of the obstacles you may encounter?

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7. What will be the best way to deal with them?

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8. How will you know that you have successfully applied your new knowledge and skills?

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## 8. Recommended resources

Christian, K. (2017). Finding confidence in conflict. TED Talk available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6Zq65eK9XU>

Canfield, C. (2016). The beauty of conflict. TED Talk available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55n9pH\\_A0O8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55n9pH_A0O8)

Feinauer, D. (2017). Why conflict is a good thing. TED Talk available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TF38pGE7GBg>

Heffernan, M. (2012). Dare to disagree. TED Talk available at [https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret\\_heffernan\\_dare\\_to\\_disagree#t-219999](https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree#t-219999)

Ladva, A. (2019). Conflict resolution. Free eBook available at: [https://www.itstimetomeditate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Aruna\\_ConflictRes\\_Upload-2-NEW-18-June-2019.pdf](https://www.itstimetomeditate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Aruna_ConflictRes_Upload-2-NEW-18-June-2019.pdf)

MTD Training. (2010). Dealing with conflict and complaints. Free downloadable eBook available at: <http://promeng.eu/downloads/training-materials/ebooks/soft-skills/dealing-with-conflict-and-complaints.pdf>



Peace is not the absence of conflict,  
but the ability to cope with it.

Dorothy Thomas

## Did you know?

We have many more modules that were specifically designed to help you develop those skills that are essential to function effectively in life and in the workplace. Ask your facilitator about the following modules:

1. Who am I?
2. Building my brand
3. Managing time
4. Be more resilient
5. Creative problem solving and decision making
6. Building interpersonal relationships
7. Effective communication
8. Dealing with conflict
9. Understanding the world of work
10. My personal development plan

For e-Learning and other resources, visit  
[www.nyda.gov.za](http://www.nyda.gov.za)

You cannot teach a man anything.  
You can only help him discover it  
within himself.

Galileo

