

What Is Conflict Management? (Elementary)

Have you ever had a disagreement with someone? Maybe you and your friends wanted to swing, but there weren't enough swings for everyone, and you argued over who was going to get to swing first. Or maybe when you were playing a game with your brother, you didn't think he was playing fairly. When we have disagreements, we feel big feelings, like anger or frustration. Everyone has big feelings sometimes, and everyone can choose what to do with those big feelings. Learning to talk through disagreements by calmly explaining our feelings, listening to others, and thinking of ways to solve the problem is called conflict management.

When we learn conflict management, we think about what to say and do when we disagree with someone. We use strategies like ***explore conflict responses, pause and ponder, and seek to understand perspectives*** to help us work through disagreements without hurting someone's feelings.

Explore Conflict Responses (Elementary)

Have you ever become so mad at someone that you shouted at them and said something you didn't mean? Or maybe someone hurt your feelings, and instead of explaining your feelings, you stayed away from them the rest of the day. When we spend time with friends, family, teachers, and others, conflicts are bound to happen. Even if we try to avoid disagreements, they still happen.

We can use the strategy ***explore conflict responses*** to explore what can happen when we react to conflict in different ways. There are five different ways you can respond to conflict. You can choose to act like a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox.

If you choose to be a shark, you try to get what you want, even if it hurts the other person's feelings. You might raise your voice, stomp your feet, and even say some mean words to the other person—anything to get your way. Sometimes it's okay to be a shark, like when someone is getting hurt or needs help immediately.

If you choose to be a turtle, you avoid the situation and hope it goes away. You stay away from conflict and don't try to solve the problem. Sometimes it's okay to be a turtle, like when you don't care about what happens next or if what you are disagreeing about isn't important to you.

If you choose to be an owl, you will find a solution where everyone wins. You explain your feelings and listen to others' feelings. An owl talks to the other person and tries to fix the problem so it's a win-win. It's best to be an owl when you care about the other person and when you care about the outcome of the conflict.

Choosing to respond to a conflict like a teddy bear means that you do what others want, not what you want. A teddy bear wants to be liked by everyone, and they avoid disagreements because they are afraid people won't like them if they disagree. They often fail to share their wants, needs, and feelings.

Responding to a conflict like a fox means that you work to find a solution so everyone wins and loses something. When you respond like a fox, you give up part of what you want and ask the other person to give up part of what they want to end the disagreement.

When we ***explore conflict responses***, we think about what it would be like to respond like each animal when we have a disagreement. We think about which one would be best for that particular situation. ***Exploring conflict responses*** will help us decide if we want to react like a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox.

Pause and Ponder (Elementary)

Have you and a friend ever had an argument, and you said or did something you wish you hadn't? Have you ever been so mad that you couldn't think clearly? When you have disagreements and big feelings, you can use the strategy ***pause and ponder*** to help you think about what you want to say or do instead of reacting in a way that would make things worse. Remember that we can't control others but we can control our own attitudes, our words, our actions, and our effort.

When you ***pause and ponder***, you know that you are in a conflict, and you make the decision not to react immediately. Instead, you pause and remove yourself from the situation by saying phrases like "I need to think about this for a minute" or "Let's talk about this later." When you ***pause and ponder***, you give yourself time to respond effectively instead of immediately reacting to the situation.

It's important to ***pause and ponder*** when **we** have big feelings like anger or frustration. It's also important to ***pause and ponder*** when you notice **the other person** experiencing those emotions. The next time you are in a conflict with someone, remember to ***pause and ponder*** and give yourself time to think through what you want to say and do.

Plan My Response (Elementary)

Has there ever been a time when you were in a disagreement with someone and you said or did something that made it worse? Have you ever wanted to explain your feelings but instead gave up and walked away? When we experience a disagreement, we choose how we respond to conflict. Choosing to act like a competing shark, an avoiding turtle, a collaborating owl, an accommodating teddy bear, or a compromising fox during a disagreement will affect what happens next.

The strategy **plan my response** will help you plan the best reaction for the situation and help you clearly communicate your perspective.

I used the strategy **plan my response** when my class was working on a project for parents' night. I was excited to work with my friend Amelia on the project, and we decided to draw pictures of our daily schedule to show parents. We were going to draw the math center, reading center, PE, and music. I told Amelia I would gather up the crayons and markers if she would get the paper. When I came back from getting the crayons, Amelia had already drawn each of the activities. I was so mad because I wanted to draw. I wanted to yell, "Why didn't you wait for me?" Instead, I remembered to **pause and ponder**. I took a deep breath and thought about my feelings. Why was I feeling so mad? It was because I felt left out and didn't get to help draw the activities. Then I used the strategy **plan my response** to think about what I wanted to say and do next. Did I want to be a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox? I imagined what would happen for each response. I knew that being a shark and yelling could upset Amelia. I knew that being a turtle and not explaining my feelings could result in Amelia doing the whole poster without me. I cared about helping with the poster, so I decided to be an owl—I explained my feelings calmly and listened to Amelia explain why she had started the poster without me.

I said, "I know you were excited to get started on the poster, but we should take turns drawing. When you drew each of the activities without asking me, I felt left out. Can we please talk about what to do next?" Amelia apologized and explained that she was afraid we would run out of time to draw the poster. She had tried to save time by getting started. I understood why Amelia started the drawings without me. By **planning my response**, I could respectfully explain how I felt and listen to Amelia. We understood each other and avoided an argument. We agreed to start over and take turns drawing each of the activities.

Using the strategy **plan my response** will help you think through feelings and actions and decide what you want to say or do.

Manage My Anger (Elementary)

When was the last time you felt really mad? Was it difficult to think clearly or explain your feelings? Maybe your friend didn't invite you to her party, or your sister made fun of you. Everyone gets angry, and it's okay to feel angry at times, but what we say and do when we feel angry is a choice.

You can use the strategy ***manage my anger*** to help understand and explain your feelings.

Managing your anger starts with knowing about anger. When you feel angry, you might feel warm and turn red, or your heart might start beating faster, but anger probably isn't the only feeling you have. You probably have other feelings inside, like hurt, frustration, or embarrassment. Anger is just the feeling that others see. When you start to feel angry, you can ***manage your anger*** by taking deep breaths, going for a walk, or drawing your feelings. Then you can use the strategy ***pause and ponder*** to think about the other feelings you are having. You might ask yourself, "What caused me to feel angry? What other emotions am I feeling?"

I used the strategy ***manage my anger*** when my teacher asked me to stay in from recess so she could help me with math. We had just learned how to add two-digit numbers, but I didn't really understand it. All my practice problems were incorrect. I wanted to go out to recess and play with my friends, but just as I was about to walk out of the classroom, the teacher called my name and said, "Let's take a few minutes to work on these problems. I know you will get it with a little more practice."

I started to feel my heart beat fast and cheeks get hot. I was so upset I felt like crying. I like my teacher, but I was so mad! I remembered the strategy ***manage my anger***. I took a deep breath and asked the teacher if I could go get a drink before we started working on the math problems. While I was taking a drink, I ***paused and pondered*** my feelings. I asked myself, "Why am I so angry?" I realized I was feeling disappointed and a little embarrassed. Disappointed because I really wanted to go to recess. Embarrassed because math was taking a long time to learn.

I took one more deep breath before I walked up to the teacher's desk and began to work on my math problems. I felt calm and was able to think more clearly as she explained the steps. After a few more practice problems, I was able to do the math correctly, and there was still a little time left for recess.

Managing my anger helped me choose to calm down instead of saying or doing something that I would regret and that would hurt my teacher's feelings. The next time you start to feel angry, use the strategy ***manage my anger*** to help understand your feelings and choose what to say and do when you have big feelings.

Uncover Reasons for the Disagreement (Elementary)

Have you ever said something to a friend, and they became really upset even though you didn't mean for that to happen? Maybe someone said something to you and didn't realize how hurtful it was. There are many reasons why a conflict happens, and it's often because of miscommunication and misunderstanding. When we miscommunicate, we say or do something that we don't really mean, or our words and actions come out differently than how we intended. Sometimes another person misunderstands our intentions.

Miscommunication and misunderstandings happen when we don't listen to each other or when we don't understand each other. When this happens, it can cause a disagreement. You can use the strategy ***uncover reasons for the disagreement*** to think about why a disagreement may have happened. You start by thinking about exactly what happened and where there may have been a misunderstanding. You think about your own words or actions and ask yourself, "What did I say and do that could have been confusing?" "What did they say and do which I may have understood wrong?" and "Is there another way to look at this?"

I used the strategy ***uncover reasons for the disagreement*** when I couldn't understand why my sister was so upset with me for borrowing her camera. Our class was going on a field trip to the aquarium, and I wanted to take pictures. Before leaving, I left a note on my sister's door that I had borrowed her camera. When I got home, she was upset with me and yelled, "I don't like when you borrow my things. You're so irresponsible!" She yanked the camera out of my hands and slammed the door in my face. I was so hurt by her actions I felt tears in my eyes. I couldn't understand why she would be so upset.

I decided to take a few breaths and use the strategy ***uncover reasons for the disagreement*** to determine why the disagreement had happened. I said to my sister, "I left a note explaining that I had borrowed the camera. Is there something going on that I don't understand? Was my note confusing?" She explained that she had read the note, but last year when I borrowed her soccer ball, I had lost it, and she was afraid I would lose or break her new camera too. I understood why she was upset, and I explained that I was very careful with the camera because I knew she was still frustrated that I had lost the soccer ball. She apologized for raising her voice and said that she would try to be more trusting the next time I needed to borrow something of hers.

You can use the strategy ***uncover reasons for the disagreement*** anytime you don't understand why a disagreement has happened. ***Uncovering reasons for the disagreement*** will help you think about what happened and where misunderstandings might have occurred.

Voice My Perspective (Elementary)

Have you ever felt hurt by something a friend said or did? Maybe your friend jokingly teased you, and it really hurt your feelings. You can use the strategy ***voice my perspective*** to help others understand your viewpoint.

Your perspective includes your thoughts, feelings, and ideas. It is the way you understand a situation based on what you have experienced in your life. Each person has their own perspective. For example, you might love Mexican food because you grew up eating it and your grandmother showed you how to make her special recipes, but your friend might think Mexican food tastes strange and can't understand why you like it so much. You have a different perspective than your friend because you have experienced different things.

When you ***voice your perspective***, you explain your feelings and the reasons behind them. Learning to ***voice your perspective*** will help others understand you, especially during a conflict. You can ***voice your perspective*** by saying, “I feel [blank] when [blank]” and “I think [blank] because [blank].”

I used the strategy ***voice my perspective*** when I got into a disagreement with my friend Andrew about how to build a volcano for our science project. I thought it was a good idea to build the volcano out of papier-mâché by cutting strips of paper and dipping them in glue. Andrew said that would take too long and would be messy. He said making the volcano out of clay would be better. We argued for a while over what material to use. Then I remembered that when there is a disagreement, it is important to ***voice my perspective*** so the other person understands me better. I ***voiced my perspective*** by saying, “I think building the volcano out of papier-mâché would be better because when my sister built her volcano out of clay last year, it took too long to dry. It was too heavy. She couldn’t carry it home.” Andrew said, “Oh, I never thought about it taking longer to dry and being heavy.” I had a different perspective than Andrew because watching my sister build a volcano gave me information that Andrew didn’t have. We agreed to make the volcano out of papier-mâché, and even though it was messy, we had fun doing it!

When others don’t understand your feelings or ideas, remember to respectfully ***voice your perspective*** by saying, “I feel [blank] when [blank]” and “I think [blank] because [blank].” It will help others understand you better.

Seek to Understand Perspectives (Elementary)

Do you and a friend have completely different feelings about something? Maybe you don't like to play the same sports or read the same books. You might even have a friend who thinks some of the things you like to do seem strange. The reason is that we all have different perspectives. When we have different perspectives, it can sometimes lead to conflict.

When you don't understand someone's actions or feelings, you can use the strategy ***seek to understand perspectives*** to try to figure out how the other person thinks or feels. You imagine things from their point of view. You can even ask them questions like "Can you tell me how you are feeling?" or "Is there something I don't understand?"

Everyone has their own unique way of perceiving things based on experiences they have had. ***Seeking to understand perspectives*** helps you think about someone else's background and experiences and how those influence their thoughts and feelings.

I used the strategy ***seek to understand perspectives*** when my friend Brandon and I got into a disagreement about the music program. Our teacher had just asked me to sing the solo. I was so excited! I rushed over to Brandon and exclaimed, "I get to sing the solo in our music program next week! I am going to invite all my family to come! Isn't that great?" Brandon shrugged his shoulders and mumbled, "I guess." I couldn't believe he wasn't excited for me, so I shouted, "You don't even care about me! At least you could be excited for me!" Then he just walked away.

Brandon was a good friend, so I couldn't understand why he was acting this way. I used the strategy ***seek to understand perspectives*** to help me understand the argument. I needed to hear his perspective about why he wasn't happy for me. I asked, "Is there something I don't understand? You're a good friend, so when you walked away, it confused me. Can you explain what you are feeling?"

Brandon explained that he had walked away because he had really wanted a solo and had even been taking voice lessons. He was disappointed that he didn't get the solo and felt a little jealous of me for getting it. I started to understand his perspective. I didn't know how much Brandon had wanted the solo. I told him that I understood his perspective, and he apologized for walking away. By using the strategy ***seek to understand perspectives***, I was able to understand why we had a disagreement, and I learned something new about my friend.

You can use the strategy ***seek to understand perspectives*** when it's hard for you to understand someone's thoughts or feelings. ***Seeking to understand perspectives*** helps you understand their point of view.

Listen and Summarize (Elementary)

Can you think of a time when you were upset with someone and it was really hard to focus on what they were saying? Maybe they tried to explain themselves, and you just kept thinking about what you were going to say back. During a disagreement, it's important to try and understand the other person's perspective by listening closely to them. When it's difficult to focus on what the other person is saying, use the strategy ***listen and summarize*** to help you focus and show respect for the other person. When you ***listen and summarize***, you:

- make eye contact with the other person,
- listen carefully to what they are saying, and
- use your own words to repeat back what they told you. You can use phrases like "It sounds like ... " or "In other words ... " to help you summarize what the other person has told you.

I used the strategy ***listen and summarize*** when I was upset at my mom for not letting me go to a friend's house after school. I was pretty mad at her, so when she started to explain why I couldn't go, it was hard to focus on what she was saying. I wanted to understand her reasons, though, so I made eye contact with her and listened closely to what she was saying. She wanted to check in with me after school and hear about my day before she had to leave for a meeting. She worried that I would already be in bed if she waited until after her meeting to see me. I summarized what she had told me by saying, "It sounds like you wanted to spend time with me because you have a late meeting and so you didn't want me to go to my friend's house." She said that she was glad that I understood, and I felt better about not being able to go to a friend's house. We enjoyed a little time together before she had to go to her meeting. By using the strategy ***listen and summarize***, I was able to better understand my mom's actions.

The next time you find it difficult to focus because you have big feelings, use the strategy ***listen and summarize*** to help you understand the other person and show them that you care.

Find a Solution (Elementary)

Have you ever been in a conflict with a friend, and you just kept arguing? Maybe you tried to explain your feelings, but they just didn't agree. When you want to end a conflict, you can use the strategy ***find a solution*** to negotiate what happens next.

Finding a solution means you work with the other person to decide how to resolve the problem. When you ***find a solution***, you take turns ***voicing your perspective***. Then both of you share ideas for ending the disagreement, and finally, you both choose and agree on what will happen next.

There are seven steps to ***finding a solution***, and you can remember them by thinking about the colors of the rainbow.

Steps to ***find a solution***:

- Step 1. Red: Partner A ***voices their perspective*** by explaining how they feel and what they think.
- Step 2. Orange: Partner B ***summarizes*** what Partner A has just said.
- Step 3. Yellow: Partner B ***voices their perspective*** by explaining how they feel and what they think.
- Step 4. Green: Partner A ***summarizes*** what Partner B has just said.
- Step 5. Blue: Partner A shares a few ideas for resolving the conflict.
- Step 6. Indigo: Partner B shares a few ideas for resolving the conflict.
- Step 7. Violet: Together, both partners decide what to do next and how to resolve the conflict.

I used the strategy ***find a solution*** when my friend and I were having a disagreement over what to do after school. My friend wanted to play basketball, and I wanted to play soccer. I started by asking her to explain why she wanted to play basketball.

She said, "I feel excited when I play basketball, and I want to practice so I can get better at it." I summarized what my friend had said to make sure I understood her feelings.

Then it was my turn to explain why I would rather play soccer. I said, "I feel disappointed when I play basketball because it's not my favorite sport. I want to play soccer because it makes me feel energized to play my favorite sport." My friend summarized what I had just said about wanting to play soccer.

Next, my friend shared her idea for resolving the conflict. She thought we could play basketball today and soccer tomorrow. Then, it was my turn to share my idea for resolving the conflict. I thought playing basketball for thirty minutes and then switching to soccer for thirty minutes would help resolve the disagreement.

Together, we decided that playing each sport for thirty minutes would be the best way to resolve the disagreement because we each got to play our favorite sport and we weren't sure if our parents would allow us to spend time together after school the next day.

When you need to ***find a solution*** to a disagreement with someone, remember that each step in the process is represented by a color of the rainbow. When you complete each step for ***finding a solution***, you work to resolve disagreements on your own.

Help Others Find Solutions (Elementary)

Have you ever had friends or siblings who couldn't resolve a disagreement and needed help? When your friends need help resolving a conflict, you can use the strategy **help others find solutions**. When you **help others find solutions**, you learn as much as you can about the problem, avoid taking sides, and help them listen to each other.

When you **help others find solutions**, you encourage each person to be honest and ask questions. It is also important to acknowledge each person's feelings.

There are seven steps to **finding a solution**, and your role is to guide them through the process. You can remember each step by thinking of the colors in a rainbow.

Steps to **help others find solutions**:

- Step 1. Red: Ask Partner A to **voice their perspective** by explaining how they feel and what they think.
- Step 2. Orange: Ask Partner B to **summarize** what Partner A has just said.
- Step 3. Yellow: Ask Partner B to **voice their perspective** by explaining how they feel and what they think.
- Step 4. Green: Ask Partner A to **summarize** what Partner B has just said.
- Step 5. Blue: Ask Partner A to share a few ideas for resolving the conflict.
- Step 6. Indigo: Ask Partner B to share a few ideas for resolving the conflict.
- Step 7. Violet: Ask both partners to work together and decide how to resolve the conflict.

I used the strategy **help others find solutions** when my friends Jason and Maxine were arguing over whose turn it was to be the librarian for our classroom library. I reminded my friends that it's okay to have disagreements and have big feelings. I told them I knew a strategy that would help them resolve their disagreement. I started by drawing a rainbow that had all seven colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

I pointed to the red band and asked Jason to **voice his perspective** by explaining how he felt and what he thought. He said, "I feel excited when I am the class librarian because I can help others. I want to be the class librarian today." Then I pointed to the orange band and asked Maxine to **summarize** what Jason had said.

After Maxine **summarized** what Jason had said, it was her turn to explain how she felt and what she thought. I pointed to the yellow band and asked her to **voice her perspective**.

After Maxine explained what she wanted to happen, I pointed to the green band, and it was Jason's turn to **summarize** what Maxine had said. When we got to the blue band, it was Jason's turn to share a few ideas for how they could end the disagreement. Then I pointed to the indigo band and asked Maxine to share her ideas for ending the disagreement.

Finally, I asked them to work together and agree on what they should do to end the disagreement. I asked Jason and Maxine to consider each other's ideas. After they talked through each of the ideas, they agreed to be co-librarians for the day.

I was able to help my friends **find a solution** to their problem by remembering the colors in the rainbow. The next time you have friends or siblings who can't agree on what to do, use the strategy **help others find solutions** to help them resolve the conflict.