

Six Steps for Negotiating to Resolve a Conflict

The following is a six-step process for negotiation adapted from *Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers* (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

1. Describe what you want.

What is your side of the disagreement? What do you want? Be assertive (not aggressive), and keep your statements specific and brief.

2. Describe how you feel.

Start with “I feel,” “I’m frustrated,” or another “I” statement to help you accurately express what you’re feeling about the situation. (Refer to *Assertiveness Lesson 3: Understanding Yourself*—especially the *Feeling Words Wheel*—for additional guidance on helping students identify and understand their emotions).

3. Describe the reasons behind your wants and feelings.

This is the time to share your thoughts and reasons about *why* you feel like you do and want what you want (refer to *Assertiveness Lesson 6: Assertive Statements* for guidance on assertive communication).

A classic example of this concept is the *orange negotiation*, demonstrated in this video:

<https://youtu.be/CcW5A1c3-Fc>. In this scenario, both people have expressed their wants but not the *reason* for their wants. So, instead of both getting the full benefit of what they want, each person walks away with half. Watch the *orange negotiation* video with students and discuss. Ask students if they have been in a situation like the one illustrated.

4. Listen to the other’s perspective and summarize your understanding of what the other person wants, how the other person feels, and the reasons underlying both.

Give others the opportunity to express themselves the same way that you did, listening closely without interrupting. Listen to what others want without judging them or their side of the disagreement.

After others express themselves, do a perception check to make sure that you are on the same page (refer to *Assertiveness Lesson 5: Showing That You Understand Others* for a listening/paraphrasing strategy that might be helpful for this step):

- Describe/paraphrase what you think the other person is feeling and thinking;
- Ask if you got it right; and
- Avoid expressing approval or disapproval at others’ feelings/positions.

5. Come up with three possible solutions to the conflict that benefit everyone involved.

When creating a list of possible options, try to do the following:

- Remember that there isn’t just one right answer, and don’t be afraid to get creative;
- Wait until all of the ideas are on the table before making judgements about any of them;
- Keep the *orange negotiation* video in mind and remind yourself that solutions don’t have to be “the less for you, the more for me.” In the *orange negotiation* video, both sides could have gotten exactly what they wanted because the solution had multiple parts. In other words, the “piece of the pie” each person wanted was taken from a different pie.

6. Together, choose the wisest course of action and state the agreement verbally.

For the agreement to be valid, everyone involved needs to feel that the decision is fair and needs to agree to stick with the decision. Each person verbally agrees to the decision.

Caution

If you know something is illegal, is inappropriate, will hurt other people, or would violate your principles, you can and should say no. Compromise isn’t possible in those situations.