

for  
immediate  
use...



## The Cooperative Communication Skills CONFLICT EMERGENCY KIT

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The URL of this document is <http://www.newconversations.net/emergency.htm>

*Introduction: Many conflicts get worse than they actually need to be because the participants lose control of themselves and retreat into self-reinforcing patterns of attack and counterattack. Here are some suggestions, drawn from the literature of conflict resolution and psychotherapy, that can help you navigate your way through everyday collisions of needs and come out still liking yourself and able to work with your "partners-in-conflict."*

**1. Calm yourself down by breathing very slowly and deeply.** While breathing, think of a moment of great happiness and peace in your life. Doing this will help you from feeling totally swallowed up by the current situation.

**2. Think about what you really need.** What is best in the long run for your mind, your body, your spirit, your workplace, your family, your community? Don't allow yourself to get distracted from your own goals and needs by what you may see as someone else's misdeeds. Think about what your long-term interests are in the situation, and rank them by priority, so that you stay focused on negotiating the issues that really matter to you.

**3. Imagine your partner-in-conflict as a potential ally.** Imagine that you are marooned on a desert island with your partner-in-conflict, and that the long-term survival of both of you depends on the two of you cooperating in some sort of creative way that will meet more of both your needs.

**4. Begin by listening to the other person and affirming anything that you can agree on.** Look carefully for areas where your interests and needs might overlap with the interests and needs of your "partner-in-conflict."

**5. Acknowledge and apologize for any mistakes you may have made** in the course of the conflict. Others may do the same if you get the ball rolling. Make an accepting space for your partners-in-conflict to start over. Letting go of defending past mistakes can allow participants in a conflict to see their situation from fresh angles.

**6. Summarize the other person's needs, feelings and position** as fairly as you can, and do this first, before you present your own needs or requests. When people feel heard, they are more likely to listen. Summarize to let people know that you have understood how the situation

looks to them, not to argue with their view.

**7. Focus on positive goals for the present and the future,** no matter what you and/or your partner-in-conflict may have said or done in the past. Punishing or shaming someone for past actions will not put that person in a frame of mind to meet your needs in the present. The present and future are all you can change.

**8. When positions collide, focus on principles and potential referees.** For example, if you can't agree on a price for something, see if you can agree on a fair rule to set the price. If you can't agree on a fair rule, focus on finding a referee who could help you and your partner-in-conflict define a fair rule.

**9. Request specific actions / explain overall goals.** Request specific actions that another person could actually do, rather than for changes in feelings or attitudes. (If you want a change in attitude, what specific actions would embody it?) Explain how the requested actions will help you meet your overall goals, so that the other person feels powerful and respected in complying with your request.

**10. Use this conflict as a motivational stimulus** to get yourself started studying more effective and compassionate ways of resolving conflicts. Four good books to start with are:

*Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton (Penguin Books, 1991);

*Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way From Confrontation to Cooperation*, by William Ury (Bantam, 1991);

*Resolving Conflict* by Gini Graham Scott (New Harbinger, 1990); and

*The Seven Challenges: A Workbook and Reader About Communicating More Cooperatively*, by Dennis Rivers. Available free of charge in PDF format at [www.newconversations.net/workbook/](http://www.newconversations.net/workbook/)

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