



# Handling Workplace Conflict

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# Agenda

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Define workplace conflict, its causes and consequences.

Discuss the benefits of healthy communication when in conflict.

Explore types of communication.

Discover coping strategies to prevent unhealthy conflict.

Define compromise and how to use it.

# What is workplace conflict?

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Workplace conflict is any form of disagreement or opposition between employees or supervisors because of different beliefs, personalities or ways of doing things.



# Causes of workplace conflict

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- Unclear communication and expectations of employees
- Differing opinions on how a task should be completed
- Discrimination based off gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.
- Unhealthy office politics
- Poor emotional regulation of employees or supervisors
- Problems outside of the workplace that employees or supervisors bring with them

# Healthy vs. unhealthy conflict

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- **Healthy conflict:** Focuses on addressing the topic being disagreed upon in a calm and respectful manner without demeaning or belittling others on the opposite side of the conflict.
- **Unhealthy conflict:** Can involve anger, blame, or manipulation when disagreeing with someone, or avoiding the problem altogether.

# Consequences of unhealthy conflict

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Besides the general discomfort and frustration of working in a place where your voice isn't heard, poor workplace communication can lead to a variety of negative effects on the workplace and its employees.

These include:

- Work disruptions
- Decreased productivity
- Increased absences
- Increased turnover
- More frequent terminations

# Unhealthy communication styles

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## Passive Communication

- Placing another person's wants, needs, or feelings above your own due to a fear of upsetting the other person.
- *Example: Greg feels overworked but doesn't speak up about it.*

## Aggressive Communication

- Bullying others through destructive criticism or humiliation to get your own needs met.
- *Example: Don yells at his employees for poor productivity numbers this month*

# Healthy communication is assertive communication

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## **What is assertive communication?**

Assertive communication is a type of communication where the emphasis is placed both on standing up for yourself and listening respectfully to the other person or persons. The goal is to work toward a compromise in a way where all parties feel heard and respected.

*Example: Natalie pulls Brett aside to discuss why he's falling behind on his paperwork.*



# How to use assertive communication

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Assertive communication is all about speaking up for how you feel and what you want while at the same time empathetically listening to the opinion of the other person in the conversation. This can be done through the following techniques:

- **I statements:** Used to address how we're feeling and what we need in a situation without blaming the other person.
  - *Example: "I feel overwhelmed with the number of responsibilities I have on my plate. I would appreciate more help from you on some of these assignments."*
- **Reflective listening:** repeating back what you heard the other person say in your own words as a way of expressing understanding.
  - *Example: "It sounds like you're having a difficult time keeping up with everything and would like me to assist you."*
- **Compromise**

# I Statements vs. You Statements

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# Reflective Listening

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# How to know when to communicate

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If you want to have an effective conversation, it's important to be aware of if you or the other person are in the proper headspace to have such a conversation.

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell, even for ourselves, but the best way to do so is to be aware of our body's warning signs (i.e. muscle tension, increased heart rate, increased body temperature, etc.)

# Tools to use before communicating

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Identifying that you aren't in the proper headspace to have a conversation is only half the battle. Once we step away, we need a healthy way to calm our emotions and process what we want to say. Although everyone has their own unique ways of doing this, here are some of the ones that I teach in counseling:

- Deep Breathing
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Technique

# What if these techniques don't work?

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Sometimes we can use all these techniques perfectly and the other person still isn't willing to meet us halfway or change their style of communication. If this does end up being the case, here are other options you can explore:

- Talk with your supervisor
- Talk with employee relations: <https://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/employee-relations/contact-us/>
- Reach out to the Office of the University Ombuds: <https://www.ombuds.ufl.edu/>
- Reach out to the Employee Assistance Program: <https://eap.ufl.edu/counseling/on-campus-therapists/>



# Thank you

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