

# DEALING WITH CONFLICT

## THE HEALTHY WAY

SEPTEMBER 2023

Experiencing conflict with others is a natural part of being human. Each of us is different, and we all have our own opinions, ideas, and needs. There are healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with conflict. Find out how to manage conflict in ways that strengthen—rather than sabotage—your relationships. And learn to recognize if you are getting the respect you deserve in your relationships.

Think about how you would manage the conflict scenarios below. Then read the tips to learn what experts recommend.

### SCENARIO 1: THE SECRET GETS OUT

Amanda told Chloe she had a crush on Evan. The next day, her secret was all over the school and on social media. Amanda runs into Chloe in the hallway. Here are two different approaches Amanda could take to handle the situation. What approach would you take?

I TOLD YOU NOT TO TELL ANYONE I LIKED EVAN. NOW EVERYONE KNOWS. EVAN IS IGNORING ME, AND HIS GIRLFRIEND IS MAD AT ME. I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NOT TO TRUST YOU WITH ANYTHING PRIVATE. I STILL REMEMBER WHEN YOU TOLD SOMEONE A SECRET OF MINE WHEN WE WERE IN 6TH GRADE.

WHAT? I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO ANYONE.

OH, SORRY. MAYBE IT WAS SOPHIE. I TOLD HER TOO.

I DON'T KNOW WHO TOLD YOUR SECRET, BUT AT LEAST NOW I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT ME. I CAN'T BELIEVE I THOUGHT YOU WERE ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS.

Approach  
**A**

- Amanda is jumping to conclusions before giving Chloe a chance to talk.
- Amanda is labeling Chloe as a gossip.

By letting anger get the best of her before she could learn more about the situation, Amanda harmed her relationship with Chloe.

GUESS WHAT? THE WHOLE SCHOOL SEEMS TO KNOW I LIKE EVAN. NOW HE IS IGNORING ME, AND HIS GIRLFRIEND IS MAD AT ME. I CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW THEY FOUND OUT.

I HEARD. I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY FOUND OUT EITHER. I PROMISE I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

OK. WHAT DO YOU THINK I SHOULD DO?

I WOULD JUST IGNORE ALL THE ONLINE COMMENTS AND LET EVERYONE FORGET ABOUT IT.

## Approach B

- Amanda focuses on the problem at hand.
- Amanda calmly describes the situation and listens to what Chloe has to say.

By calmly describing the situation and giving Chloe a chance to respond, Amanda shows trust in Chloe and keeps her friendship. She even gets Chloe's support in dealing with the situation.

## TIPS

- In any situation, it's good to remember that you might not know everything that is going on. Give yourself a chance to **calm down before you react**. Gather your thoughts and **plan what you will say**.
- Then, **calmly and respectfully describe your concern**.
- To make sure you fully understand the other person's point of view, **listen actively** to what the other person says **without jumping to conclusions** or focusing on what you will say next.
- **Focus on the problem at hand without bringing up past mistakes or disagreements**.
- Even if the other person did do something wrong, remember to **separate the person from the behavior and avoid labeling them as a bad person**. By doing so, you could save a friendship and be treated with more empathy next time you make a mistake!

## SCENARIO 2: A NEW SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Summer recently started dating someone new. Her best friend Kai is happy for her, but Summer starts to spend more time with her significant other and less time with Kai. Kai confronts Summer about not spending as much time together as they used to. Which approach below would you take to handle the situation?

WE HAVEN'T SPENT MUCH TIME TOGETHER LATELY, AND I FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING MORE TIME WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WE SEE EACH OTHER ALL THE TIME. I DON'T GET WHY WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS.



YOU DIDN'T EVEN LET ME FINISH TALKING.

I ALREADY KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ACCUSING ME OF, AND I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WOULD SAY THAT TO ME.

FORGET IT, YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME ANYWAY.



Summer tries to smooth things over right away, but Summer isn't validating Kai's feeling by not allowing Kai to explain how he feels.

Summer becomes defensive and assumes Kai is trying to attack her, which makes Kai give up on having the conversation.



WE HAVEN'T SPENT MUCH TIME TOGETHER LATELY, AND I FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING MORE TIME WITH YOUR BOYFRIEND.

I'M SORRY WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO HANG OUT AS MUCH AS WE USED TO. WHAT CAN I DO TO FIX THIS?

THANKS FOR HEARING ME OUT. I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH YOUR NEW BOYFRIEND, BUT IT BOTHERS ME WHEN YOU CANCEL OUR PLANS SO YOU CAN HANG OUT WITH HIM. IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE YOU DON'T VALUE ME AS YOUR FRIEND.

I'M SORRY KAI. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT IT WOULD HURT YOUR FEELINGS. I CARE ABOUT OUR FRIENDSHIP, AND I PROMISE TO BE A BETTER FRIEND.

## Approach B

By asking a clarifying question and allowing Kai to explain how he feels, Summer shows that she truly cares about Kai and their friendship. Summer acknowledges Kai's hurt feelings, shows an interest in learning more, and remains humble throughout the conversation.

Because Summer listens attentively and communicates in a respectful way, she learns how she can change her behavior to resolve the conflict.

## TIPS

- It can be tempting to try to ignore a problem, smooth things over quickly, or pretend that something is not a big deal if you're involved in a conflict, but it's important that you **respect the other person's feelings** and hear them out.
- It's also important to **resolve conflicts as soon as possible**.
- You might feel hurt or attacked when someone approaches you about a conflict, but **keeping your own feelings in check and not getting defensive** can help you resolve the situation through a productive and calm conversation.




## SCENARIO 3: FEELING INVISIBLE

Tanya is working on a group project with a student who keeps dominating the conversation and dismissing her ideas, which she finds frustrating. How should Tanya handle the situation?



I'M TIRED OF ALL MY IDEAS BEING DISMISSED!  
YOUSSEF KEEPS SHUTTING THEM DOWN,  
IS NO ONE NOTICING THIS?!



THAT CAME OUT OF NOWHERE!  
SHE SURE IS OVERREACTING.

Approach  
**A**

Tanya lets her emotions get the best of her and strains her relationship with her classmates.

HEY, EVERYONE. I NEED TO SAY SOMETHING BEFORE WE GET STARTED. I THINK THE IDEAS YOUSSEF SHARED YESTERDAY ARE REALLY CREATIVE. I WAS A LITTLE FRUSTRATED, THOUGH. I MADE SOME SUGGESTIONS, BUT IT SEEMED LIKE NO ONE WAS LISTENING TO ME. I FEEL LIKE WE ALL SHOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROJECT.



OH! I'M SORRY I MADE YOU FEEL THAT WAY. I GUESS I GOT CAUGHT UP IN THE EXCITEMENT OF HOW GREAT OUR PRESENTATION IS GOING TO BE AND FOCUSED TOO MUCH ON MY OWN IDEAS.

THAT'S OK. I GET IT. HOW ABOUT WE GO AROUND THE CIRCLE AND MAKE SURE WE'RE LISTENING TO EACH PERSON FROM NOW ON?



## Approach B

Tanya is frustrated, but she keeps her cool while she figures out how she will react.


Tanya gave herself a chance to think about how she would handle the situation. She showed respect to her classmates even though she had been frustrated by their actions. She also respected herself because she spoke up about her feelings. When her classmate apologized, she forgave him and moved forward.

## TIPS

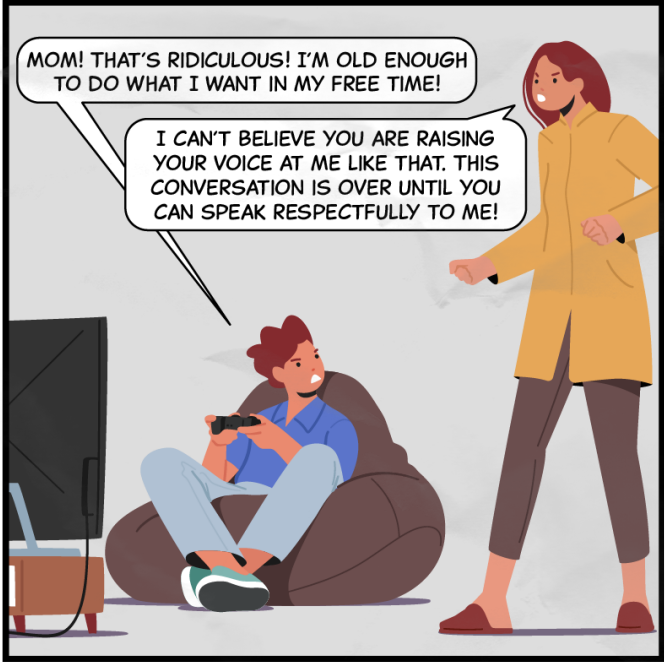
- It's important to **wait to discuss an issue until you are calm and know what you want to get out of the conversation.**
- You might even **talk about the situation** with someone you trust before deciding how to handle the conflict or **role play what you will say.**
- **Be open and honest** about what you are feeling. To learn some strategies for managing big emotions, check out [8 Healthy Habits for a Mindful Life](#) at [We Think Twice™](#).
- Once the conflict is resolved, try to **forgive and focus on the future** by **agreeing on how to handle the situation going forward**—and don't forget to **apologize for any role you had in the conflict.**

## SCENARIO 4: TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Tony's mom is upset because he plays a lot of video games and watches YouTube gamers in his free time. She wants to make sure he does his schoolwork and helps around the house. One day, his mom confronts him. How would you react if you were Tony?



I'M WORRIED ABOUT HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPEND GAMING. I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GETTING ADDICTED TO IT AND NEGLECTING YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES. I'M GOING TO KEEP THE CONTROLLER AND WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN YOU CAN USE IT.

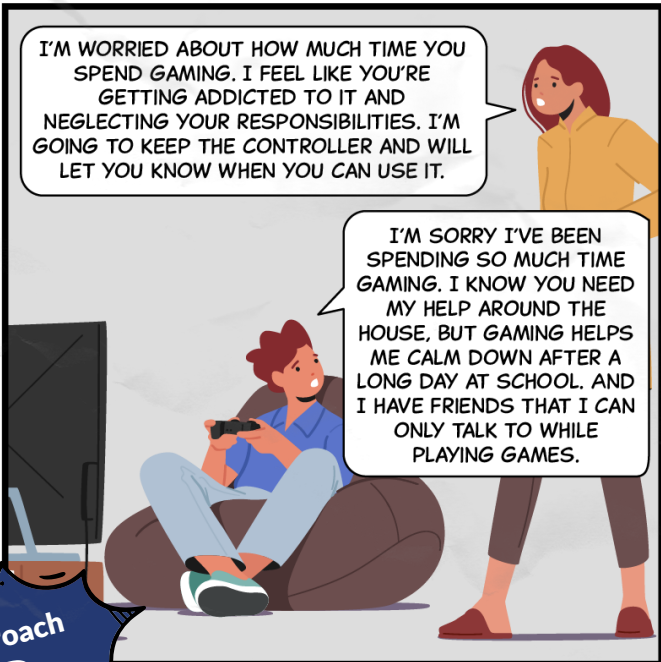


MOM! THAT'S RIDICULOUS! I'M OLD ENOUGH TO DO WHAT I WANT IN MY FREE TIME!

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ARE RAISING YOUR VOICE AT ME LIKE THAT. THIS CONVERSATION IS OVER UNTIL YOU CAN SPEAK RESPECTFULLY TO ME!


Approach  
**A**

Tony reacted angrily and missed out on a chance to have a productive conversation with his mom.



I'M WORRIED ABOUT HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPEND GAMING. I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GETTING ADDICTED TO IT AND NEGLECTING YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES. I'M GOING TO KEEP THE CONTROLLER AND WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN YOU CAN USE IT.

I'M SORRY I'VE BEEN SPENDING SO MUCH TIME GAMING. I KNOW YOU NEED MY HELP AROUND THE HOUSE, BUT GAMING HELPS ME CALM DOWN AFTER A LONG DAY AT SCHOOL. AND I HAVE FRIENDS THAT I CAN ONLY TALK TO WHILE PLAYING GAMES.



I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM, BUT I THINK WE NEED TO SET SOME LIMITS.

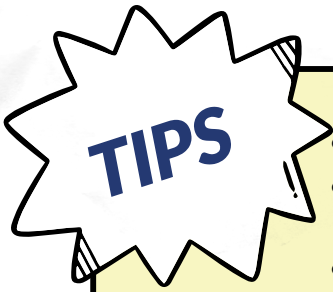
WHAT IF I WAIT TO GET ONLINE UNTIL MY CHORES AND HOMEWORK ARE DONE?

OK, LET'S TRY THAT. YOU CAN KEEP YOUR CONTROLLER, BUT I NEED YOU TO PROMISE ME THAT YOU'LL DO WHAT YOU TOLD ME AND ALSO GO TO BED AT A DECENT TIME.

Approach  
**B**

Tony focuses on understanding his mom's concerns while explaining his own perspective, which helps him find a solution that works for both of them.





- Solving a conflict often involves **give and take on both sides**.
- Remember to **put yourself in the other person's shoes** so you truly understand their point of view and **find the root of the conflict**.
- Then, **show up to the conversation prepared to negotiate and compromise** if necessary.

**Remember:** You deserve to be treated with respect, even if you disagree with someone. Although it's usually best to make an effort to work things out, sometimes you just need to walk away. If you don't feel comfortable or safe expressing yourself, if you feel threatened, or if you have other concerns about a relationship you're in, talk with a parent or another adult you trust. If you need additional help, speak with a trained peer advocate at [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org). Remember, although it's important to look for ways to compromise, you should never be required to compromise your beliefs or morals in a healthy relationship.

Think about any conflicts you have struggled with in your own life.

How can you use these scenarios and tips to build and maintain strong and healthy relationships in the future?

List 3 strategies you will use:

1)

2)

3)

## Resources on Conflict Resolution for Teens

- *We Think Twice*™: [Conflict Resolution 101](#) (video)
- Stopbullying.gov: [How to Deal with Haters](#)
- loveisrespect: [How to Set Boundaries](#)

This tip sheet was developed by RTI International under contract GS-00F-354-CA/75ACF122F80038 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.