

About Resolving Conflicts and Preventing Violence

What can you do when you find yourself in a conflict that may lead to violence? How can you best behave to calm and resolve such a situation?

It helps to understand that everyone has three modes of behavior (some people say that we all have three parts to ourselves):

- Child Mode: Focused mainly on our needs and desires. Demanding. Can be very emotional. Easily hurt. May not stop to find out the facts of the situation. Acts impulsively.
- Parent Mode: We think that we know best. Judges. Tries to punish or scold.
- Adult Mode: Deals with situations as they really are. Tries to solve problems. Speaks quietly and calmly. Listens carefully to others. Empathizes—tries to see other point of view.

Usually, a potentially violent conflict results when both people are behaving in child or parent mode. The conflict can be resolved or diffused best when at least one person is in an adult behavior mode.

How Can I Tell When Someone Is On the Verge of Violence?

First, trust your instincts: If you are feeling frightened—even if you don't know why you feel frightened—it is good to be cautious. (Later, you can talk over your reaction with someone). Don't do anything to provoke the other person.

Specific signs of impending violent behavior:

Fixed stare	Muscles tense (clenched fists)
Short breath	Red face
Loud voice	Standing too close

How can I React without Provoking Violence?

Take a deep breath. Calm yourself. Avoid overreacting.

Speak quietly and calmly.

Listen carefully and considerately to the other person without interrupting. Hear them out. Keeping quiet allows the other person to explain more fully and to think about what they are saying with less pressure.

Respect the other person in your viewpoint and your language. Address the other person as "Sir" or "Miss."

Try to repeat back what you understand about the other person's viewpoint. Ask questions that reflect your understanding of their viewpoint and incorporate it in your question: "I understand that you need a letter from this office. Do I have that right?" This will help the other person feel understood and engage them in a rational discussion.

Suggest a calm, problem solving approach to the situation: "Miss, if we sit down together, I'm pretty sure that we can talk this situation out."

Be empathic. Imagine how you would feel in the other person's place—if you were in their shoes.

Try not to be judgmental. Don't do or say anything to embarrass or humiliate the other person. Don't accuse, punish, or scold.

Don't crowd the other person. Stand at least two or three feet from them. Respect their personal space. "Squaring off" with the other person (standing close, directly face-to-face) is too challenging and can lead to escalation. Stand to one side or at an angle.

Allow the other person to vent their feelings as much as necessary.

Ignore challenging, insulting, or threatening behavior from the other person. Redirect the discussion to a cooperative approach to the issue. Answering challenges promotes a power struggle.

Keep your body language, posture, gestures, movement, and tone of voice non-threatening. The other person is more likely to respond to these nonverbal aspects of your behavior than to the explicit content of your statements.

Try to avoid an audience. Onlookers can make it more difficult for people to "back down"—in some cases they can actually incite the other person to intensify the argument. Suggest that you go somewhere else to discuss the problem. (Don't go somewhere isolated where you would be unable to get help if you need it).

Keep your statements simple, clear, and direct. Avoid complicated, confusing explanations and big, obscure, or pretentious words.

Don't take anything personally. Understand that people say things that they don't really mean when angry.

If the other person becomes extremely hostile, try to have someone else available so that you are not alone.

You may not always be able to give the other person what they want, but offer them something that you can give. Emphasize what you can do for them.

If an argument becomes heated, put off your need to make your point or express your feelings until another time and place.

Don't rush. Take as much time as needed for the situation. Trying to hurry usually makes the situation worse.

Give the other person an exit. Don't back the other person into a corner. Leave the door open to discuss the problem further at a later time. Tell them that you will think it over. Don't insist on a final resolution immediately.

Use humor (but never at the other person's expense). Make fun of yourself, if you can.

Tell the other person directly that you don't want to fight—that you want to resolve the situation in a friendly manner.

Apologize for anything that you might have done which offended the other person (even if you don't think you did anything offensive).

If you would like more information about resolving conflict and preventing violence, come in and speak with a professional counselor in 0203 James hall. All services are free and confidential

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