

Lesson 2.4

Identifying Your Conflict Style



Rationale

Knowing how you tend to deal with conflict can be helpful in figuring out what you might do differently to manage conflict better or to find a more positive outcome. This activity gives students the opportunity to reflect on how they tend to respond to conflict and to explore the value of using different conflict styles in different situations.

Objectives

1. To identify various conflict styles.
2. To identify the advantages and limitations of each style.
3. To identify students' own conflict styles and to understand the value of knowing one's own style as well as being able to determine the styles of those with whom one is in conflict.

Standards

- ◆ Individual Development and Identity

Time: 80 minutes

Materials

- Chart paper & markers
- Overhead transparencies
- "What Do You Do When...?" Handout
- "What I'd Do When...?" Worksheet
- Conflict Styles Worksheet
- Conflict Styles Teacher Resource



80 minutes

Procedures

1. Tell students that they are going to think about how they respond to conflict. Share with students the following scenario:

“Your friends want to skip school, and you don’t know what to do. You want to go to school, but you don’t want your friends to make fun of you.”

Have students share some of the responses that they might make, and explain why they would choose each. Tell students that there is no right or wrong answer in this exercise.
2. List responses on the board. Remind them that there is a conflict here, and that conflict is itself neutral; it is how we choose to respond to it that can make it either constructive or destructive. Ask students to try to find similarities and differences in the responses.
3. Divide the class into five groups. Distribute the Handout “*What Do You Do When . . . ?*” Assign each group one of the scenarios and a piece of chart paper (groups will represent letters A through E). Tell the groups that their task is to read the scenario, write on the chart paper which of the responses on the handout is appropriate for their scenario, and act out or illustrate the scenario on the chart paper.
4. Have the groups of students share their responses and either act out the scenario or present their illustration of it. Post the pieces of chart paper around the room.
5. Distribute the “*What I’d Do When . . . ?*” Worksheet. Have students write their response, choosing from the list of responses on the Handout: “*What Do You Do When . . . ?*” Have them also write the letter of the response (only one response allowed per scenario) and have them write their reasons for choosing those responses.
6. Ask them to look at their responses and to note any patterns they see. Do they have a lot of A’s, a lot of C’s, or do they have a range of letters, one A, one B, 2 C’s, etc? Look at each of the responses on the handout and work with the students to come up with a word that captures each situation (try to elicit the five styles listed on the *Conflict Styles* Worksheet).
7. Distribute the *Conflict Styles* Worksheet. Go over the explanations for each of the styles. Emphasize that none of the styles is always ideal and that each has its advantages and limitations.
8. Give students a moment to reflect on the conflict style that most applies to them. Have them answer the question at the bottom of the “*What I’d Do When . . . ?*” Worksheet and consider their strengths and areas for growth in conflict situations. You might give a personal anecdote as an example.

Discuss the exercise using some or all of the following questions:

- ◆ How might the context of the conflict affect the style a person chooses to use, e.g., where it is taking place, or the level of conflict—international versus interpersonal?
 - ◆ How might your response change based on the person with whom you are having a conflict, e.g., you might feel more accommodating with family members than with strangers?
 - ◆ Why is it important to know your style?
9. Tell students that now they are going to work in groups to think in more detail about the specific style they are assigned. Have students return to the groups they were previously working in. Assign each group a style and have them complete the chart for that style (uses, limitations, and situations in which it would be good to use this style). See the completed chart

for teacher use. Have each group briefly present their responses for their assigned style.

You may choose to give students additional ways of thinking about each style. Tell students that three factors often help determine which style to use: **relationships** (how important maintaining the relationship is to you), the **issue** (how important the issue is to you), and **time** (how much time you have to manage the conflict—some styles take more time than others to use). When filling out the chart, have students think about their style in terms of these three factors, answering:

- ◆ How important are the relationship and the issue, and how much time do you have?

Alternate: To save time, you can complete this step by having a whole class discussion.

10. Debrief the lesson by leading a discussion using some or all of the following questions:

- ◆ Is one style better than another? Is it possible to use more than one style in a situation, for example, to move from confrontation to compromise?
- ◆ How can it be helpful to identify the style of the person with whom you are in conflict?
- ◆ How do different methods of responding to others' conflict styles lead to different results? In other words, if I notice that someone has a competing style, how will our interaction differ if I use an accommodating style rather than matching their competing style?

Assessment:

Conflict Styles Worksheet, small group work, and whole class discussions

Citation for Conflict styles charts (handout and teacher resource):

From "Conflict and Negotiation Process in Organizations" by K. Thomas, 1992. In M. D. Dunnette and L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (2nd ed., vol. 3, p. 660). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. Copyright 1992 by L. M. Hough. Adapted by permission.

Note: While the styles exercise illustrates personal tendencies, conflict styles can also be considered as negotiation strategies, choices to use in different conflict situations, including at the international level, depending on the context and factors mentioned above.

Extension Activity

1. Have students write down a conflict they have experienced. This could be personal, local, national, or international.
2. Have each student fold up the piece of paper and put it in a pile.
3. Chose one of the conflicts from the pile and read it to the group. Ask a few students (however many are necessary for the scene) to come up and improvise the conflict. After the conflict has been acted out, ask students to imagine another way one of the parties could have reacted which would have led to a different outcome. For example, if a student was in an argument with his/her mother, instead of yelling and walking away, what could the student have done? Have students act out multiple ways of dealing with the conflict and observe the results. One way to do this is to have an audience member raise his or her hand and jump into the scene.
4. Repeat this three or four more times depending on how much time you have in class.
5. Debrief the exercise with the following question:
 - ◆ How do different methods of responding to conflict styles lead to different results?

Lesson 2.4 HANDOUT: “WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN...?”

Directions: For the scenario that you were assigned, please list possible responses using the options below. Then create an illustration on the chart paper or prepare and act out a brief role-play.

Responses

- A. Walk away from the situation, ignore it, or deny that there is a problem.
- B. Do what others want, even if you disagree or if it’s not what you want.
- C. Find a solution that makes everyone happy.
- D. Make a quick compromise.
- E. Try to convince someone of your point or stand up for what you believe.

Scenarios

- 1. Your mother wants you to help her clean the house on Saturday night, and you want to go out with your friends.
- 2. Your best friend always borrows your things and never gives them back.
- 3. Someone is saying bad things about your friend. You’re angry because you know what they are saying isn’t true.
- 4. You think your teacher has been unfair in grading your test. You think your grade should be higher.
- 5. Your friend always wants to copy your homework, and it bothers you because it takes you a very long time to do your assignments.

Lesson 2.4 WORKSHEET: "WHAT I'D DO WHEN...?"

Directions: Thinking about the scenarios presented, indicate in the chart below the letter of the response (from the Hand-out: *"What Do You Do When?"*) that *you* would choose and why you would choose it.

Scenario	My Response, and Letter	Why
1. Clean the house		
2. Borrowing friend		
3. Gossip about friend		
4. Teacher grades unfairly		
5. Friend wants to copy		

What do my responses tell me about my conflict style?

Lesson 2.4 WORKSHEET: CONFLICT STYLES

Conflict Style	Behavior	Uses	Limitations	Situations
Avoiding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Denying a problem ◆ Pretending nothing is wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leaving a situation ◆ Holding back feelings and opinions 			
Accommodating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Giving in to another person's point of view ◆ Paying attention to others' concerns, not your own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Apologizing/ saying yes to end the conflict ◆ Letting others interrupt or ignore your feelings, ideas 			
Problem Solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Finding a solution that makes everyone happy ◆ Looking closely at the sources of conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Addressing your feelings, needs, and wants ◆ Listening to others 			
Compromising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Each person wins some and loses some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Interest is in finding a solution ◆ Show desire to talk about the problem. 			
Competing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Getting what you want, no matter what ◆ Some people win, some lose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Interrupting, taking over ◆ Ignoring others' feelings and ideas ◆ Loud tone of voice, sometimes physical violence 			

Lesson 2.4 TEACHER RESOURCE: CONFLICT STYLES

Conflict Style	Behavior	Uses	Limitations	Situations
Avoiding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Denying a problem ◆ Pretending nothing is wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leaving a situation ◆ Holding back feelings and opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When confronting seems dangerous ◆ When you need more time to prepare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The problem may never be resolved ◆ Emotions may explode later 	
Accommodating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Giving in to another person's point of view ◆ Paying attention to others' concerns, not your own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Apologizing/saying yes to end the conflict ◆ Letting others interrupt or ignore your feelings, ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When you think you've made a mistake or you don't understand the situation ◆ When "smoothing over" is important for keeping a friendship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ You may work hard to please others, but never be happy yourself ◆ Being nice doesn't always solve the problem 	
Problem Solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Finding a solution that makes everyone happy ◆ Looking closely at the sources of conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Addressing your feelings, needs, and wants ◆ Listening to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Can make someone who is stubborn move toward resolving a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ This requires time and good communication skills 	
Compromising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Each person wins some and loses some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Interest is in finding a solution ◆ Show desire to talk about the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When you need a fast decision on a small issue ◆ When nothing else works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ You may fix the immediate conflict but not the bigger problem ◆ Each person may not end up happy 	
Competing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Getting what you want, no matter what ◆ Some people win, some lose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Interrupting, taking over ◆ Ignoring others' feelings and ideas ◆ Loud tone of voice, sometimes physical violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When immediate action is needed ◆ When you believe in the absolute "rightness" of your action and don't see any other choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ This can make people defensive and can make a conflict worse ◆ It can make it hard for others to express how they feel 	