JIMMY AND ROSALYNN CARTER SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
George Mason University

Conflict Styles

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Overview:

This interactive activity introduces students to the concepts of interpersonal conflict and conflict resolution while reflecting on their own default responses to conflict. Using a short slide presentation and discussion-heavy activity, facilitators define key terms and introduce the five common conflict styles: Avoider, Competitor, Accommodator, Compromiser, and Collaborator, including the strengths and limitations of each approach.

The majority of the class is a movement-based activity where they are given a hypothetical conflict scenario. Students physically position themselves in the space representing the style they believe they would use, and facilitators guide discussion as students explain their reasoning, explore how they interpreted the conflict, and consider alternative responses that reflect other styles.

The session emphasizes dialogue, self-awareness, and flexibility in responding to conflict, creating a safe space for students to explore how conflicts can be de-escalated and addressed constructively.

Learning Outcomes:

- Define Conflict and conflict resolution
- Understand that conflicts are dynamic – no one solution will solve all conflicts.
- Identify the 5 conflict styles along with their strengths and weaknesses
- Demonstrate increased empathy and perspective-taking by listening to how peers interpret and respond to the same conflict scenario differently.
- Feel empowered to approach future conflicts intentionally, knowing that no single conflict style is inherently superior and that they have multiple options for responding.

Resources for Instructor:

- Before class starts: Print out the first two pages of the Conflict Styles Assessment, and a piece of paper for each other the conflict styles. Tape up the conflict styles in different parts of the room for the movement-based activity.

Time / Materials Needed:

Typically takes 1 hour (dependent on the size of the class)

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Instructions for Activity:

- Use the attached slide deck to define “Conflict” and “Conflict Resolution.”
- Give students the printed Conflict Management Styles Assessment so they can learn what conflict style they more naturally use.
- Explain the 5 different Conflict Styles (Avoider, Competitor, Accommodator, Compromiser, and Collaborator) described in the slides, along with their strengths and weaknesses. Use comparisons to characters in popular movies or books to help solidify how that style is implemented.
- Give students a prompt, and ask them to stand next to the areas previously designated as the different styles. Students should move to the style they think they would use in that situation.

    1. Your roommate's boyfriend keeps coming over and cooking in your shared kitchen. He cooks enough for you to have some if you want, but he never cleans up his mess and never does the dishes. What do you do?
    2. A co-worker has been asking you to cover her shifts. Normally, you both cover for each other, but recently she has been asking you to cover almost double what you normally do. You have something coming up this Friday, so you text her asking her to cover your shift, but she responds, “I am so sorry, but I really need some time to rest this Friday.” What do you do?
    3. Let’s pretend you’re married and you’re in an argument with your significant other. They want to have the kitchen cleaned every night, but you always feel tired after cooking and just want to watch TV. What do you do?
    4. (This one requires some explaining.) You’re still married, and your significant other regularly goes to a religious ritual (ex: church, synagogue, mosque, temple, etc.) that is different from what you believe in. When your child turns 6, your partner wants to take them to their religious ritual but you don’t feel comfortable with your child being told something different. What do you do?
    5. You’re in a metro car, and two grown men are in a very loud and aggressive argument… and it looks like it’s about to get physical… what do you do?
    6. (If students are mature enough, then you can say the same example above, but change 1 element.) What if it’s not two grown men but a woman and her 10-year-old son?

- Starting with the avoider, make your way around the room asking students to explain why they chose that style and what they were thinking the conflict entailed (students will fill in the blanks on the situation which explains their response). Facilitators might need to help a student find the correct style for their response or think of other situational responses that fit that style. This is the bulk of the activity, by letting students engage and discuss the best way to de-escalate conflicts.
- Reiterate learning objectives: 1) No conflict style is superior (especially like to emphasize this point with collaboration as a solution to the metro scenario). 2) No one was stuck in one corner, always using one conflict style. Students should feel empowered to know they have options on how to respond the next time a conflict arises in their personal lives.

teach.conflictresolution.gmu.edu

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Possible Applications: suggestions as to how this activity might be incorporated into history, geography, psychology, economics, government, or other social science curricula.

- This activity is very versatile and applicable to students of *any* subject since interpersonal conflict will arise in all students' lives and in all career sectors.
- Recommended for classes focused on leadership and psychology. Other classes include: AVID, student government, civics/social studies (diplomacy, governance), history, English/language arts (communication), career readiness, health (relational), science (with emphasis on group projects), and business (negotiation).
- Aligns with SEL (social-emotional learning) competencies

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