

Dealing with Conflict in Your Personal and Work Life: Conflict with acquaintances and others

How you handle conflict affects your relationships with others and your overall wellbeing. This series includes tips on how to handle conflict with friends, family, co-workers, and others.

This is the fifth in a six-part series of articles on dealing with conflict which starts with ["Understanding conflict."](#) Read the previous article, ["Conflict with friends."](#)

Conflict with acquaintances and others

Occasionally, most of us have conflicts with people we don't know well. Here are some ways to handle these:

Check in with yourself. There may be times when you get angry with people you don't know, such as a salesperson or customer service rep. This often happens because you are already angry about something in your own life. For instance, you may be justified in expecting better or faster sales help, but before your emotions get the better of you, be sure your anger isn't being misdirected.

Try to deal first with the person directly involved in the conflict. If you didn't get the service you expect, try to work the problem out with the person who provided the service. Ask to speak with the person's supervisor only after you've made a good-faith effort to work out the conflict between the two of you.

Put your concern in writing if you still have a conflict. Explain clearly what the problem is and what you would like to have done about it. Save emails or send letters by registered mail so that you'll have a record of what you requested.

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Follow up. Be persistent if you can't resolve a conflict by having a short conversation or sending a letter. Most businesses, for example, know that it is much more expensive to make a new customer than to keep an old one.

Consider hiring a mediator or another professional to help if you have a serious conflict you can't resolve. Mediators usually cost less than lawyers and are trained to help people work out their differences peacefully, so they can be very helpful if you have a big conflict with someone you don't want to alienate, such as a close neighbor. To learn more about the process, visit the mediation section of the site for the [American Arbitration Association](#). Your employee assistance program (EAP) may also be able to give you information.

Look into community dispute resolution services. Many communities have free or low-cost mediation services that can help you resolve conflicts with a neighbor, merchant, vendor, or other resident. These services are often called community dispute resolution or alternative dispute resolution (ADR) programs because they are an alternative to hiring a lawyer. To learn more, call your city or town hall or mayor's office and ask if these services are available where you live.

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