

# Dealing with Conflict in Your Personal and Work Life: Understanding conflict

*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 first in a six-part series of articles on dealing with conflict.**

## Understanding conflict

Conflict is part of everyday life. At different times, you may have conflicts with family, friends, acquaintances, or co-workers, and your disagreements may play out online or offline or both. You may also have conflicts with people you don't know, such as customer service representatives or people who cut in front of you in line at the store.

Most conflicts don't just arise out of nowhere. They may develop slowly over a period of weeks or even years and are often the result of a disagreement or misunderstanding. You may have a conflict with a sibling about something that happened ages ago or with a co-worker about something that happened last week. Some conflicts develop quickly—someone reaches a breaking point or overreacts. We're more prone to having conflicts with others when we're dealing with other life stresses and are short on patience or sleep, though neither is an excuse for losing your temper. Studies have found that conflicts tend to develop in stages, even if these occur over a very a short period of time, such as the few minutes it takes you to react when someone takes a parking space you thought was yours.

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The longer a conflict goes on, the more hurt, angry, and entrenched in their positions people are likely to become. Conflicts are usually easiest to resolve in the early stages, when we're more likely to be able to manage and control our emotions. That's why it's a good idea to deal with a conflict as soon as you sense that something is wrong. The best approach to easing the tension depends on the nature of the conflict and who's involved. But it's always important to be willing to take the first step toward resolving differences with someone.

**This is the first in a six-part series of articles on dealing with conflict. Read the next in the series, "[Handling and resolving conflict](#)."**

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