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# LESSON 10: DEALING WITH CONFLICT

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Misunderstood by Allyson Blythe



## **Dealing with Conflict**

Conflict can be difficult to manage and few people are just naturally good at handling it with ease. It tends to be a skill that is learned, practiced, and reinforced. Sadly, for some, it is a skill that is never learned at all.

Knowing how to handle difficult situations or difficult people is one of the most important skills you can have. Typically, people are on one side of the spectrum or the other - either more passive or more aggressive. Being passive means to accept or allow whatever is happening or what others are doing without speaking up or taking action. An aggressive approach is more confrontational or attacking. Perhaps you struggle with finding the “sweet spot” of assertion which means to be direct, assured, and confident in your approach to conflict or difficulties. Landing that middle ground can take some practice.

What was role modeled for you when the adults in your life had conflict? Did family members scream, fuss, and rage at one another or was there cool disregard and the silent treatment? Did people talk behind each other’s back or hold one each other in high regard? Were things swept under the rug until eventually everything blew up? Was there avoidance, denial, or suppression? What was reinforced in your culture? Were you subjected to bullying or intimidation at school or in your neighborhood? Did religion play a part in shaping your worldview?

The ways you learned to manage conflict, feelings, tension, and disagreements are critical in your adult functioning. Perhaps those old messages were further influenced by things such as gender, generation, culture, and even birth order. Take the time to identify these patterns.

**In my family, conflict was handled in the following ways:**

1.

2.

3.

**To me, conflict means:**

**I consider self to be:**

Passive

Assertive

Aggressive

## Water vs. Weapon Words

As you start to set boundaries, find your voice, and practice finding your sweet spot of assertion, you may notice that you will swing from one side of the spectrum to the other in your approach to conflict. Learning to mind your own business, manage your own needs and feelings, and taking responsibility for yourself may take a little practice. Watch for the following patterns.

### Watering Down

If you're worried about "being mean" or what others may think, you could be at risk of watering down your message. These are words or phrases that you use to soften your point. Maybe you're concerned that someone is going to be mad or that you'll hurt their feelings. Perhaps you're trying to avoid conflict or stay in their good graces. The risk with watering down is that it dilutes your message because it implies flexibility, weakness, and permission. There is hinting and passivity in statements like these as you try to get agreement and cooperation from others rather than standing firmly behind your point.

#### Examples:

Any time you add okay to the conversation, you are seeking permission or approval. For example - "I'm leaving at 10:00, okay?" has now become a question rather than a statement such as "I'm leaving at 10:00." Clear, concise statements such as these provide information and clarity, not authorization and consent.

"If you don't mind..."

"Is it ok if..."

"If it's not too much of a bother..."

"What if..."

"I prefer..."

"I would rather..."

"I really don't like that, but..."

"It kind of bothers me that..."

"How about if..."

"I was thinking..."

"It would be great if..."

Hopefully, you can see that statements such as these seem more like requests, suggestions, proposals, or recommendations. Consider wisely if you are trying to deliver a firm point or if there is wiggle room in the matter. Do you want their input and approval or are you delivering information? Your tone of voice and how you phrase something makes all the difference.

**5 ways I water down my message:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**I tend to water down with:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**I do this because:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### **Weapon Words**

These patterns tend to be rigid, reactive, and extreme, coming from a very heated emotional place. They are fighting words that evoke hostility, defense, and arguing. Perhaps you've waited too long to speak up and now you've reached a boiling point. If you find yourself threatening, using sarcasm, name calling, labeling someone (lazy, stupid, selfish, alcoholic), or comparing

Weapon words can be very damaging because they are attacking and reactive. They also erode your character and focus far more on the other person's side of the street than your own. They tend to be aggressive, intimidating, and threatening. Certainly they may work on some level by getting the other person's attention or compliance, but at what cost to both of you?

#### **Examples:**

"You'd better..."

"You'd better not..."

"You can't..."

"You have to..."

"If I have to tell you again..."

"You're not allowed..."

"That will never happen."

"I dare you."

"There's something wrong with you."

"I don't have to put up with your crap."

"A real (wo)man would..."

"What is your problem?"

"You can't treat me like that."

"That's not true at all."

"You better not do that again."

"You're just like you're father."

"Maybe if you weren't such an alcoholic we wouldn't be having these problems."

"Go ahead and act like an asshole, let's see how far that gets you."

**Some people or situations I resort to weapon words with:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Why has it come to that?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Here's your chance to nail the sweet spot of assertion. List three responses you can offer for the scenarios below, watch for weapon vs watering down. Your response can be verbal or behavioral.

**Your friend is notoriously late. He calls and asks if you want to meet for Happy Hour at 5:00 on Friday.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**A family member has been charged with their second DUI and is unable to drive for six months. They ask if you will take them to work the next few months.**

1.

2.

3.

**Your sibling complains about your spouse every time you are together.**

1.

2.

3.

**In spite of two prior requests, a co-worker hasn't completed their portion of a project, therefore delaying your contribution. Your boss calls and asks for an update.**

1.

2.

3.