

Defuse conflicts

Running into conflict is inevitable. The pivot point is how you respond. If you habitually withdraw, you're not giving your best. If you feel you've got to win every time, you're creating resentment. Adapted from our paper in JAMA.

Step	What you say
1. Notice the conflict	<p>This is an internal step—you might notice that you feel irritation, anger, boredom; or you might notice body language like eye rolling or a sideways glance.</p> <p>You can ignore conflict, but you run the risk that it will reemerge later.</p>
2. Find a non-judgmental starting point	<p>"Could we talk about what's happening here?"</p> <p>Find a way to raise the issue without attacking.</p> <p>You need to pause before you rush to judgment, and you need to create space for the other person.</p>
3. Listen to their story first	<p>"Tell me your perspective on this."</p> <p>Give the other person your full attention.</p> <p>Don't start mentally preparing your arguments.</p>
4. Identify what the conflict is about, and articulate it as a shared interest	<p>"Here is my take on the issue."</p> <p>"It seems to me that we are both interested in ___ [the patient's well-being]."</p>
5. Brainstorm options	<p>"Could we list a couple of options, then spend a minute talking about the pros and cons?"</p>
6. Look for options that recognize the interests of all involved	<p>"I see how this meets your interest in ____."</p> <p>"Perhaps we should consider ___ to be a good marker of whether we are going in the right direction?" [proposing a trial of something for a defined period of time may be worthwhile]</p>
7. Remember that some conflicts cannot be resolved	<p>We talk about defusing because not every conflict has a solution that everyone feels good about. Sometimes you need to agree that you don't agree.</p>