

RESOLVING CONFLICT

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Much of the anger that comes from our conflicts, can be eliminated by having a better understanding of what causes *conflict* and what we can do to resolve it.

CONFLICT ('kän-'flikt) *n.* **1.** A state of open, often prolonged fighting; a battle or war. **2.** A state of disharmony between incompatible persons, ideas, or interests; a clash. *Conflict* applies both to open fighting between hostile groups and to a struggle, **often an inner struggle**, between internal opposing forces.



*Either young woman, or old lady?
What's your opinion?*

Origin of Conflicts

Conflicts are **not** caused by differing opinions anymore than omelets are caused by chickens. Conflicts are caused by one person's **desire** to **change** another person's opinion. When people feel *pressured* into changing their opinions, they're liable to react *defensively* toward the person who is trying to do the changing. This is when the "back-and-forth", (attack and defend) pattern of conflict is likely to occur.

Different Person/Different Opinion

A difference of opinion is a natural and normal occurrence in human relationships. Differing opinions arise when two persons have opposing viewpoints about a given situation, problem, or issue. It's important to note that a difference of opinion does **not** cause a conflict.

The Key to Accepting Different Opinions

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, "*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.*" The key to that skill is **tolerance**.

TOL·ER·ANCE : The capacity to recognize and respect others' different beliefs and practices.

Tolerance vs. "Black and White" Thinking

"*Black and white*" thinking comes from the sweeping belief that **everything** is *either* right, *or* it's wrong. Therefore, there's only **one** *right* way to see any given situation, and *any other way* of looking at **anything** different is automatically *wrong*. Sometimes, being able to tolerate a person's different point of view can be a real challenge. With "black and white" thinking, such tolerance becomes impossible.

The Origin of “*Black and White*” Thinking

“*Black and White*” thinking is an early developmental stage for a child’s mind. In the simple logic of a child, everything is *either* right *or* it’s wrong, good *or* bad. And, since a child needs to know with certainty, which is which, this allows

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to *entertain* a thought, without having to *accept* it as your own.” -Aristotle

for clear and simple rules. So, “looking out for cars before crossing a street” is good. “Crossing *without* looking” is bad. This over-simplified thinking provides comfort for children soon facing a scary, uncertain world. However, without further development, *Black and White* thinking can become a source of unending conflict in adulthood.

Outgrowing The Need For “*Black and White*” Thinking

“For the closed-minded, there is no physician.”

When it comes to conflicts from differences of opinion, “*Black and White*” thinking can be the cause of arguments that can **never** be resolved (Imagine an argument over who’s right and who’s wrong between two people, one seeing *only* the young woman and the other seeing *only* the old lady). *Black and White* thinking is closed-minded yet useful, for children who need safety more than open-mindedness. But, there comes a time when maturing people need to outgrow their need for *Black and White* thinking to be their **only** way of thinking.

This self-limiting mentality is also a predictable pattern for alcoholics and addicts. A.A. talks about *open-mindedness* as being absolutely necessary for successful recovery. The ability to see things more than one way comes with growth and maturity, and that’s a process which takes time. There will always be situations when *Black and White* thinking is the best choice. It just won’t have to be the **only** choice.

4 Tips to Help Resolve Conflicts

1. When stating your opinion, use a “**Claimer.**” (The opposite of a Disclaimer)
Examples: (a) “In my opinion. ...” (b) “The way it appears to me is ...”
(c) “I could be wrong, but it seems to me that ...” (d) “It looks to me like ...”
2. Take responsibility for **noticing** your anger level. If it’s too high to be able to speak without being abusive, take full responsibility for *lowering* your anger level *before*, and *during* your conversation about the issue. It’s OK to walk away for awhile to calm down, if necessary.
3. Repeat the Tolerance Statement out loud to each other:

Tolerance Statement

“Obviously, you and I have different opinions about this subject. I want you to know that I truly believe your opinion is *as right for you* as my opinion is *right for me*. And I’m *not* asking you to change your opinion. -Please don’t ask me to change mine.”

4. **AFTER** you have *accepted* (rather than *rejected*) each other’s **point of view** as being valid, then you can work on negotiating a compromise of action.