

Conflict Styles Card Game*

For educators to use with upper elementary, middle and high school students.

Rationale: Knowing how one tends to deal with conflict can be helpful in figuring out what one might do differently to manage conflict better or to find a more positive outcome. This activity gives students the opportunity to reflect on how they tend to respond to conflict and to explore the value of using different conflict styles in different situations.

Objectives:

1. To understand the value of knowing one's own conflict style.
2. To understand the value of being able to determine the styles of those with whom one is in conflict.

Time: 40 minutes

Materials:

- Enough cards for 8 cards per student, plus extras
- *Conflict Styles Descriptions* Handout
- Chart Paper

Procedures:

1. Explain the rationale for the exercise.
2. Tell students that you will deal 8 cards to each them. On each card is a statement that relates to different ways of handling conflict. When they receive their cards, they should read each statement and think about which ones best fit their approach to conflict- this can be a conflict at school, home, with friends, in their personal life, when working with groups, etc... They should keep the cards that reflect their approach. If they think none of the cards reflect them, they should keep the cards that *most closely* reflect their approach. (5 minutes)

**This exercise was adapted from an onsite workshop model for students at the U.S. Institute of Peace. For additional educator resources on conflict styles and other global peacebuilding concepts and skills, or to arrange an educational program at the U.S. Institute of Peace for your students, please visit www.usip.org/public-education.*



3. Tell them they can try to trade the cards that don't reflect them, getting rid of cards that don't fit their style for those that are a better fit. There is also a pile in the middle of the room that they can change with, if none of their peers have cards they want. (Be sure students mingle before going to the pile in the middle). Allow 10 minutes for mingling and trading. (10 minutes)

4. After 10 minutes of trading, have students look at the predominant color of the statements in their hand. If they have an even number of more than one color, for example three cards for two different styles, then they should pick the color they feel most represents them. Have students gather in similar predominant color groups. If you have many people in one group, you can subdivide them into multiple groups of about 5 people. Distribute the *Conflict Styles Descriptions* Handout to each group. (5 minutes)

6. Have them read the description of their style. Give each group a piece of chart paper and have them write the following (15 minutes):

- Conflict situations in which it would be useful to use this style.
- One thing you would like the others to know about your style.

7. Have each group share their one thing with the whole group.

Debrief:

1. What was this activity like for you?

2. What did you learn about yourself from the activity?

3. How might the context of the conflict affect the style you choose to use?

4. How might your relationship with the person with whom you are in conflict affect your response?

5. Is one style better than another? Is it possible to use more than one style in a situation, for example, to move from confrontation to compromise? How might this happen?

6. Why is it important to know your style?

7. How can it be helpful to identify the style of the person with whom you are in conflict?

8. How do you think conflict styles can be useful in international conflicts?



Conflict Styles Descriptions

COMPETERS

Competers are known for being persuasive and direct. They know the result they want in a conflict situation, and they go for it. Their strengths are that they are often passionate about their views and dedicated to pursuing their convictions. Competers are good at making quick decisions, and tend not to waste time, which is especially helpful in the time of crisis.

Weaknesses: Sometimes Competers wind up with unequal relationships with others, and feelings of others can be hurt or overlooked with their decision-making style.

PROBLEM SOLVERS

Problem Solvers tend to want to discuss all the details of a problem and work through it together so that everyone gets what he or she wants and is happy in the end. Their strengths are that they tend to welcome differences, build high-levels of trust and mutual understanding in relationships. There is also the potential to learn from creative problem solving.

Weaknesses: When time is a factor, it is difficult to spend the energy and time needed to process the way Problem Solvers tend to. There is also the potential for burnout from over-processing.

COMPROMISERS

Compromisers approach conflict with the goal of compromise. They tend to think about what they are willing to give up and what they are willing to hold on to, and try to gear communication to focus on this give and take for all parties. It is a good way to promote cooperation. It can be done fairly quickly when both parties are engaged.

Weaknesses: Sometimes neither party really winds up with what he/she wants. It can also be viewed as a band-aid approach that doesn't really get to the root of a conflict.

AVOIDERS

Avoiders tend to step away from conflict. They often keep their opinions to themselves in conflict situations so as not to continue or escalate the conflict. They are often admired for having a calming, quiet presence in the face of crisis.

Weaknesses: Avoiders sometimes keep their feelings bottled up and then aren't able to meet their own needs. This can result in a frustrating build up of emotions.

ACCOMMODATORS

Accommodators have a harmonizing approach to conflict. They often focus on supporting others in a conflict situation and are adept at placating people in uncomfortable situations. Accommodators often gain strong appreciation from others involved in a conflict.

Weaknesses: Accommodators may build up resentment from denying their own needs. It also may be difficult for those who want to get to the root of the problem to work with Accommodators who tend to focus on making others happy.



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I know what I want and I go for it.

I like to resolve problems through compromise.

I try to convince others that I am right.

I am willing to give up some things I want in exchange for others.

I try to get what I want.

I prefer a “give and take” approach to problems where both sides make adjustments.

I push to get what I want.

I try to find a way for different sides to meet half way in a conflict.



I make sure others know my views.

I try to work with the other person to find a compromise.

I try to convince people of the strengths of my positions.

I prefer to figure out what the fairest outcome would be from everyone's perspective.

I try to make sure others understand my reasoning and why I am right.

I take an approach in which all sides figure out what we can agree on and what we are willing to give up.

I try to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed.

Occasionally I hold back and let others take responsibility for resolving a conflict.



I always try to work together to solve problems.

I try to avoid uncomfortable situations when possible.

I like to discuss all problems openly so that they can be worked out right away.

I do what I can to avoid tension.

I share my thoughts and ask others to share theirs.

I try to stall in order to take some time to think about problems before approaching them.

I try to discuss all problems with others right away.

Sometimes it is not worth focusing on differences.



I prefer to talk about problems directly.

At times I keep my views to myself in order to avoid conflict.

I try to make sure everyone gets what they want.

I aim to focus on similarities rather than differences in views.

I tell others when something is wrong so that we can work together to make it right.

I sometimes aim to make the other person feel better and make sure our relationship isn't damaged.

I'm willing to give up what I want so the other person gets what they want.



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I try to make sure the other person does not get upset.

I allow others to maintain their opinions without objecting if it makes them feel better.

I try to pay attention to what the other person wants when we are working out problems.

I try to please others if it seems important to them.