

# managing conflict

Conflict can occur when a disagreement can't be easily resolved. Although conflict can be a normal part of our relationships and is 'healthy' if well-handled, it can sometimes escalate and become destructive.

We often feel strong emotions when a disagreement continues. It may be hard for you to keep a clear head while experiencing strong feelings. Listening to the other person's point of view may also be much harder.

It's normal for people to respond differently to conflict. Some people want to retreat and hide, physically or emotionally, when faced with conflict. Other people may become stubborn in their need to get their own way. To manage conflict in a healthy way, it's important to be aware of how you respond to conflict and ask yourself if you could handle it differently.

## How do you approach conflict?

- Do all people involved feel heard, including you?
- Is the conflict leading to compromise ('win-win') or a confrontation ('win-lose')?
- Is the communication respectful?
- Are you listening and thinking before responding; or just reacting?
- Does the communication have positive or negative outcomes?

When conflict escalates, it can become impossible to consider the other person's perspective. This might be the time to bring in a third person, such as a counsellor or mediator. MensLine Australia can refer you to agencies that offer these services in your area.

## Some issues to be aware of:

- No one has the right to abuse another person, and no one should accept it. Physical or emotionally controlling behavior is never OK.
- Physical violence against anyone is destructive and illegal.
- The responsibility for your communication lies with you alone. No one can make you say or do anything. You always have a choice in how you can react.
- Restricting or controlling another person's life is never acceptable. If this is what you are doing, or if this is being done to you, it might be time to talk to someone about it.
- If abuse, violence or controlling behaviours are a part of the conflict in your life, it's important to seek help immediately. Call MensLine Australia to speak to someone.

## Some useful tips for handling conflict:

- Listen to the other person's point of view and make sure you understand what they're trying to say.
- Respect the other person's point of view, even if it's hard to hear.
- Look for areas where you can compromise – what is the most important and least important thing to you?
- Try to keep your communication respectful. Avoid insulting or putting others down.
- Use "I" statements such as: "When you say that, I feel..."
- If things are heating up, ask for time out. Come back to the discussion when both of you are calmer.
- If old patterns of communication aren't working, try new ones.
- Try to communicate through a different medium, such as letters or email.
- Commit yourself to making positive changes to the way you handle conflict.

This tip sheet is part of a series of self-help tools for men. More tools can be found at [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au). For more information and assistance, call MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78.

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MensLine Australia is a professional telephone support, information and referral service for men, specialising in family and relationship concerns.

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