

The Healthy
Conflict
Guidebook



Human Resources, Training & Development
Consulting Firm

Welcome!

Why this Guidebook

You may have chosen this guidebook because, like many people, you feel uneasy or even intimidated when faced with the possibility of conflict. Perhaps, instead, you're someone who prefers to have a range of tools and resources on hand for any situation. Regardless of your motivation, this guidebook is designed to support you. The pages ahead provide a resource to begin your personal journey toward healthier, more constructive conflict.

Understanding conflict in modern life

Conflict is often perceived as an overwhelming and distressing influence in our lives. Our daily exposure to conflict—especially through our digital devices—intensifies this perception. Sensational displays of anger and outrage are amplified by digital algorithms, capturing more attention and further skewing our perceptions of disagreement. This environment diminishes our capacity to understand and accept each other's emotions and needs, particularly when disagreements happen face-to-face.

The Impacts of conflict

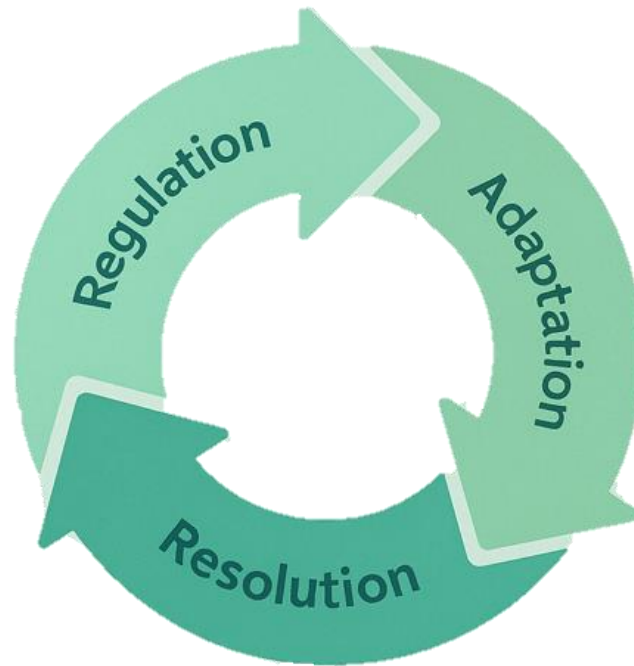
Given these circumstances, it's understandable that many avoid conflict; life can feel unsafe, and as societal tensions rise, the stakes in everyday conflicts seem higher. However, healthy conflict is possible when we intentionally choose it. This choice involves engaging in the tough conversations we may otherwise avoid. It requires stepping away from our devices, self-reflecting, connecting authentically with others, and being willing to hold space for difficult topics. Developing these skills demands practice, especially because genuine learning happens when we have the courage to immerse ourselves and work with our emotional responses and our own intrapersonal conflict. By working within, we develop and evolve our own internal mediator.

Our framework: The Internal Mediation Model

To support your growth, our framework, grounded in emotional intelligence, has been created to support you. This approach is designed to help you create safe environments where healthy conflict can occur. The Internal mediation emphasizes not only recognizing and owning our own contributions to conflict but also reconnecting with the humanity of others to resolve disagreements at the root. It is hoped that this guidebook helps you in fostering these essential skills and practices.



The Internal Mediation Model



“Awareness is the key. Do you see the stories that we are telling ourselves?” – Jon Kabat-Zinn

The Three Components

Regulation

Self-regulate

Self-regulation is an element of emotional intelligence. It is our ability to control our feelings. Self-regulation is the first step to being able to resolve conflict effectively. When you become aware of and can regulate your emotions and nervous system you are more in control. When we are easily dysregulated, we are readily influenced by others’ behavior, which in conflict, becomes a quick escalation. The best way to start this is by keeping track of and understanding your own feelings.

What emotions did you experience throughout your day?

How did these emotions physically manifest?

What triggered them?

“You have to label it to regulate it”– Marc Brackett, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

The next step is to start integrating practices that help you take pause. One reason it is hard for us to act on the conflict resolution skills we have learned is when an emotion is activated, it can engulf us. Taking pause allows us to rationalize and make more logical decisions. Remember, emotions are information, and they should not be pushed aside. Taking three deep breaths, going for a walk, counting to ten are all great ways to take pause and acknowledge the emotion.



Pro tip: practice self-regulation outside of conflict as well. Practice when you experience disappointment, joy, embarrassment. The more we integrate this into our day-to-day, the easier it is to enact when conflict arises.

Co-regulate

Co-regulation is supporting someone else’s self-regulation of emotions. We are constantly being influenced by others’ emotions. When in conflict, using our ability to co-regulate and influence emotions in a calming manner can be healthy way to de-escalate a conflict.



Exercise: Whole-body listening.

Ask the person, especially when that person is very emotionally escalated, to slow down so you can better understand the problem. You can use whatever phrasing that feels like your own voice; the goal is to convey caring and the desire to listen and understand. Listen without interrupting. Take notice of the whole scope of communication that is being used. Albert Mehrabian, known for his communication model of the 7%-38%-55% rule, asserts that 93% of how we communicate is nonverbal whereas only 7% is verbal. Whole-body listening is paying attention to what is being said and not said in body language, tone and verbal inflection*.

Questions that might help you improve your listening:

What might this person need right now?

Example question: What do you need to help you work through this?



Where can I help guide their emotions?

Example question: Can you tell me more about what you're feeling right now?

What can I say or do to help validate their emotions around this conflict?

Example: I can see how angry this had made you. I understand why you would feel that way given what's happened.



Pro tip: Don't listen to fix things, listen to understand and seek ways to collectively problem-solve.

*In online exchanges, how can you continue to be curious when you don't have the full picture? Ask the person to take the conversation offline if you can. If it stays online, ask more questions and check your assumptions.

Adaption

Self-adaption

The idea of self-adaption is to review your own values, needs and the stories you have been telling yourself about the conflicts you are in. This is especially true when the conflict is virtual because there is so much more space for us to create a narrative. When communicating with someone in person, most people more apt to pick up on tone, facial expressions, and body language cues that indicate your safety in that interaction; without that context, our minds naturally start filling it in. No matter the environment in which your conflicts are playing out, you can practice the following exercises to enhance your own self adaptation and to ensure you're approaching the conflict with facts and in an observational manner. By doing these exercises, you can stay out of exaggeration and set yourself up for calm collected responses, instead of reactions.



Exercise: *Listing your core values.* Is it a need or a value? Often the root of conflict comes from either a need not being met or a value being threatened. However, there is often a tension between the two, creating an inner conflict. We must know where the core of our own conflict comes from to reach resolution.

What are some of your core values?

Examples of values: Honesty, kindness, respect, growth, integrity, compassion, forgiveness, appreciation, discipline, courage, creativity, adaptability



List some of your core values. Knowing what your core values are also helps guide you in your own behavior around conflict.

Value 1.

Value 4.

Value 2.

Value 5.

Value 3.

Value 6.

Examples of needs: Safety, health, peace, autonomy personal power, connection, respect, support, to contribute.

List the needs that might not be met in this conflict

Need 1.

Need 2.

Need 3.

What feels threatened to you right now? A need? A value? Or both?

What stories have you told yourself about this conflict?

What have you assumed?

What are the facts?

Co-adaption

Now that you have an idea of what your beliefs are in conflict, let's think about the others involved. Co-adaption is about helping see the duality of perspectives. When we can start to empathize with multiple views, that is when we start to build up our own internal mediator and help others see the alternatives with us. The internal mediator broadens our awareness and helps us seek new pathways to resolution.



Exercise: Build your internal mediator. Reflect on the following questions to help you see new perspectives on the conflict.

What do you think their needs are?

1.

2.

3.



What do you think their values are?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What stories do you think they believe about this situation?

What questions can I ask to help me understand their perspective?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Is there a common thread or a potential alternative to their thinking you can relate to?

Are there any unrealistic expectations or standards you're holding them to?

What are some statements you can make to help them see your perspective? Ground these statements in your values, needs and facts.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Resolution

Self-resolution

Now that you have regulated and adapted your approach to the conflict, it's time for resolution. If you have done all the previous work, you might find resolution is easier to find, or maybe it's already happened. Think of the following questions and exercises to ensure wherever you are with resolution, its lasting.

What are your goals?

What are you willing to compromise on if anything?

What solutions might be meaningful to you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Co-resolution

Consider what you understood and heard from the other person and think about the following.

What are the shared goals?

What do you have in common?

How can this be a win-win?

List three potential solutions that meets the needs of yourself and others involved.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Next Steps

We hope you have found this guidebook helpful. Healthy conflict is a constant practice, and we encourage you to practice as much as you can. Conflict resolution is never something that we will be perfect at, but what makes us good at conflict, is our willingness to try and reflect on our attempts.

If you would like more coaching on digital conflict or more conflict coaching and training for your teams, reach out. We are excited to work with you!

