



# Conflict Resolution

## WVNG Coffey Break

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Welcome to the August 2010 edition of the WVNG Coffey Break, a monthly Wellness publication for all WV National Guard members and their families. The objective is to promote wellness, readiness and resiliency by providing information and resources on topics relevant to daily living.

This month's topic is Conflict Resolution. In many cases, conflict seems to be a fact of life. We've all been in situations where different people with different needs and goals have come into conflict. And we've also seen the often-intense personality animosity that can result. The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing. As long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. So please, take a few minutes to read the following article before hitting "Delete" on your computer.

**"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." ~Victor Frankl**



*"There are times when two people need to step apart from one another, but there is no rule that says they have to turn and fire."  
-Robert Brault*

The mission of the National Guard Psychological Health Program is to advocate, promote and guide National Guard members and their families by supporting psychological fitness for operational readiness. For contact information regarding the Director of Psychological Health in your state or territory or other resources, go to:

[www.jointservicessupport.org/](http://www.jointservicessupport.org/)

## Coffey Break



**Break (brāk)** definition  
*verb:* To interrupt or stop  
*break a habit; noun:* A respite  
 or brief pause *taking a break.*



### Understanding conflict

Most conflicts don't just arise out of nowhere. Studies have found that conflicts tend to develop in stages, even if these occur in a very a short period of time, such as the few minutes it takes you to react when someone takes a parking space or seat on a bus that you thought was yours.

Conflicts are usually easiest to resolve in the early stages, when we're more likely to manage and control our emotions. So a key part of handling conflicts is learning to recognize these stages and acting quickly to keep the situation from getting worse. Conflicts typically have at least three stages:

*The first, or "warning," stage.* You may sense that something is wrong but feel unsure of what it is or what to do about it. You may have noticed that a co-worker is cooler to you. At this stage, only one person may see that there's a problem. And you may be able to resolve the conflict simply by acknowledging the situation with a comment such as, "You usually return calls promptly, but I've noticed that you haven't returned my last two calls at all. I wondered if there's a reason for it."

*The second, or "out in the open," stage.* At this stage, both or all of the people involved know that something is wrong, and you'll need to sit down together and talk about possible solutions. At this point, you may feel uncomfortable and you may fear that talking about the conflict will only make matters worse. But avoiding the situation will only prolong or increase the tension. It's very important to be willing to take the first step toward easing the tension -- for example, by suggesting to a co-worker that you set aside time to "clear the air" and talk about ways to resolve your differences.

*The third, or "escalation," stage.* By the third stage of conflict, the people involved typically feel hurt or angry. They may be arguing often or intensely. One or both people may withdraw or "bottle up" their frustration. At this stage, you'll still need to talk about the conflict, but the conversation may be much more stressful and require help from a professional such as a manager or therapist.

Sometimes the stages of a conflict develop slowly over a period of weeks or months. But they can become more intense quickly if one person reaches a breaking point or suddenly has to deal with other stresses, too. That's why it's a good idea to deal with a conflict as soon as you sense that something is wrong. The best approach depends on the nature of the conflict and who's involved.

"Assumptions are  
 the termites of  
 relationships."  
 Henry Winkler

## 10 Conflict Resolution Mistakes to Avoid

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1. **Avoiding Conflict** – Some people bury their feelings rather than discussing them. This can either lead to an “explosion”, blurting out frustrations in an angry, hurtful way or internalizing them, leading to negative feelings about self. It’s much healthier to address and resolve conflict.
2. **Being Defensive** – Defensive people deny any wrongdoing and work hard to avoid acknowledging they are contributing to the problem. Denying responsibility may seem to avoid stress in the short-term, but may create bigger problems in the long-term.
3. **Over-Generalizing** - Blowing a situation out of proportion by using phrases such as “You always...” or “You never...” stands in the way of true conflict resolution.
4. **Being Right** – Don’t demand the other person sees the situation as you do and don’t take it as a personal attack if they have a different opinion. Look for a compromise or agree to disagree.
5. **“Psychoanalyzing”** – When you assume you know what another person is thinking or why they are behaving the way they are, you may be creating hostility and resentment based on faulty interpretations.

“Stubbornness does have its helpful features. You always know what you are going to be thinking tomorrow.” -

Glen Beaman



## Coffey Break

(Continued)



6. Forgetting to Listen – Some people roll their eyes or tune you out as you are speaking instead of truly listening to what is being said. Don't underestimate the value of listening.

7. Playing the Blame Game – Some people blame the other person for the situation. They think that admitting any responsibility on their part weakens their credibility.

8. Trying to “Win” the Argument – If you are focused on winning, you are headed in the wrong direction. The point of a discussion should be mutual understanding and coming to an agreement that respects everyone's needs.

9. Making Character Attacks – Some people take any negative behavior and blow it up into a character flaw. Remember to respect the person even if you don't like their behavior.

10. Stonewalling – When one person wants to address an issue and the other person refuses to talk, this shows disrespect, and in some situations, even contempt. Stonewalling solves nothing, but creates hard feelings and damages relationships.



### Effective Conflict Resolution Techniques

Acknowledge Your Feelings - An important component of conflict resolution involves only you -- knowing how you feel and why you feel that way. Sometimes we feel angry or resentful, but don't know why. Other times, we feel that the other person isn't doing what they 'should,' but we aren't aware of exactly what we want from them, or if it's even reasonable.

Improve Your Listening Skills – When it comes to conflict resolution, how effectively we listen is just as important as how we express our feelings. It's important to understand the other person's perspective, rather than just our own if we are going to come to a resolution. Unfortunately, *active listening*, is a skill that not everybody knows, and it's common for people to think they're listening, while in their heads they're actually formulating their next response, thinking to themselves how wrong the other person is, or doing things

“Without forgiveness, life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation.”  
~Roberto Assagioli

other than trying to understand the other person's perspective. It's also common to be so defensive and entrenched in your own perspective that you literally can't hear the other person's point of view.

Practice Assertive Communication - Communicating your feelings and needs clearly is also an important aspect of conflict resolution. The important thing to remember is to say what's on your mind in a way that is clear and assertive, without being aggressive or putting the other person on the defensive. One effective conflict resolution strategy is to put things in terms of how you feel rather than what you think the other person is doing wrong, using 'I feel' statements.

Seek a Solution - If you can get to the point where you understand the other person's perspective, and they understand yours, you can take the time to find a resolution to the conflict -- a solution you both can live with. Sometimes a simple and obvious answer comes up once both parties understand the other person's perspective. In cases where the conflict was based on a misunderstanding or a lack of insight to the other's point of view, a simple apology can work wonders, and an open discussion can bring people closer together. Other times, there is a little more work required. In cases where there's a conflict about an issue and both people don't agree, you have a few options: Sometimes you can agree to disagree, other times you can find a compromise or middle ground, and in other cases the person who feels more strongly about an issue may get their way, with the understanding that they will concede the next time. The important thing is to come to a place of understanding, and try to work things out in a way that's respectful to all involved.

Know When It's Not Working - Because of the impact that ongoing conflict can have on a person, sometimes it's advisable to put some distance in the relationship, or cut ties completely. In cases of abuse, for example, simple conflict resolution techniques can only take you so far, and personal safety needs to take priority. When dealing with difficult family members, on the other hand, adding a few boundaries and accepting the other person's limitations in the relationship can bring some peace. In friendships that are unsupportive or characterized by ongoing conflict, letting go may be a great source of stress relief. Only you can decide if a relationship can be improved, or should be let go.

### Next Month's Topic: The Power of Positive Thinking

*Feedback on this article is welcomed. As always, if you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact me. Services are free and confidential. I look forward to hearing from you. So.....Step back, take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!*

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