



5-2-8 Information Sheet: Resolving Conflict instead of Escalating It A Take-Home Resource for Staff, Parents, and Kids

If someone does something upsetting to you, the circle of pain initially includes you and possibly your loved ones. If you decide to hurt that person back, then the circle of pain expands to include that person and his or her friends. This escalates the conflict and brings more people into it. Escalation can also refer to emotional intensity, such as when irritation evolves into anger, and then rage. The goal is to STOP the cycle. First, practice self-compassion to comfort yourself. After your impulsive anger subsides, you can make a plan for how to resolve the conflict instead of escalating it.

Step One: Stop! Use Self-Comforting Techniques to Calm Down

Where does Superman go when he is facing a big problem and he needs to think it through? The Fortress of Solitude! Superman knows that if he acts impulsively, his immense power could cause unintended harm. He goes to the Fortress of Solitude to get away from everything and lower his stress level.

Think about it: “What are some things you can do to comfort yourself in moments of anger or distress?” Here are some suggestions:

- Take a deep breath.
- Listen to music.
- Exercise or take a walk.
- Play a video game. Write in a journal. Read a favorite book.
- Talk to a trusted adult. Go for a walk with your dog. Take a hot bath or shower.
- Eat a good meal. Watch a favorite show.
- Do some sensory-inputting activities – chew gum or eat something chewy like dried fruit; use a fidget such as a paper clip or squeeze or stress ball; stretch, do push-ups or sit ups, dance

Step Two: Thinking Through the Conflict: Was There an Inciting Event?

Look at the conflict from both points of view. If you were in the other person’s shoes, how would you tell the story of the conflict?

Resolving a conflict requires you to understand why you are upset. In the case of a friend breaking your confidence, there was clearly an inciting event, and you need to talk it through.

But sometimes there is **not** an inciting event. If you have the urge to hurt someone, and that other person has not actually done anything to you, it is likely that you are experiencing feeling internal conflict.

For example, you may want to write something mean on social media about a friend simply because you are jealous of that person, even if they didn't specifically do something to harm you. In those situations, your best strategy is to work on self-comfort, as discussed previously, and try to stop comparing yourself to your friend. Hurting others won't elevate you.

Step Three: Choosing Wise Strategies for Discussing the Conflict

If there was indeed an inciting event, it is important to know how to talk about the specific behaviors that occurred.

- Use “I” sentences to describe how you were affected by your friend’s actions, and avoid using names or labels. For example, it is better to say “I felt hurt and embarrassed when you told my secret” than to say “I felt hurt and embarrassed because you are a bad friend and a liar.”
- Stay focused on the current issue. For example, if you are talking to a friend who has shared a secret of yours, do not bring up all the other things your friend has done to anger you. It’s too overwhelming.
- Resolve conflict without an audience present. Do not use social media as a forum for resolution, and do not rely on a friend to be your messenger. Talk directly in a private, live conversation.
- If you did something to upset your friend, focus on repairing the harm instead of defending your own actions. Restoration is much better than justification. Ask, “How can I make it better?”