



IMELO PROJECT



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Conflict Management and Assertive Communication

Toolkit for youth workers

Target group

This toolkit has been developed for youth workers to help them acquire effective conflict management and assertive communication techniques for their work with young people.

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Why is this important to you?

Does this situation sound familiar?

We all encounter conflicts in our daily lives...



Arguments with
parents



Misunderstandings
with friends



Problems at work

What can you lose if you handle it badly?



Deterioration of
relationships



Decreased self-esteem



Missed opportunities



Constant stress

What can you gain if you handle it well?



More stable
relationships



Greater self-
confidence



Win-win solutions



Personal growth

Conflict Is Not the Enemy – The 5 Steps

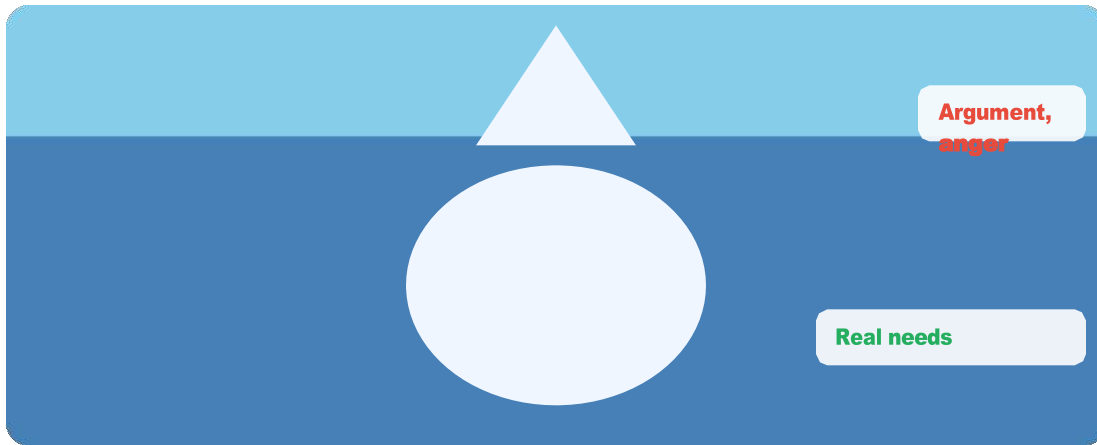
✘ Misconceptions about conflict

"Conflict is bad" • "There are no arguments in good relationships"

💡 New definition

Conflict = an opportunity for growth and deepening relationships

The Iceberg Model



Only the argument is visible on the surface, but the real needs lie beneath

The 5 Steps of Conflict Management

1 Interpretation and understanding

2 Communication

3 Empathy

4 Negotiation and mediation

5 Resolution and integration

Where do you stand now? - Conflict Management Styles

According to the Thomas-Kilmann model, there are five different conflict management styles, which are positioned along the axes of assertiveness and cooperation. Each has its place and time.



Competitive

Assertively pursues their own interests, regardless of the needs of others.

- ✓ For quick decisions In crisis situations
- ✓



Avoiding

Avoids conflict by procrastinating and backing down.

- When dealing with
- ✓ insignificant problems
 - ✓ To calm down



Adaptive

Putting one's own needs aside, accepting the interests of others.

- ✓ Gathering social capital
- ✓ When it is more important
- ✓ to others



Seeking compromise

Both parties give up certain needs in order to reach an agreement.

- ✓ Equal strength of parties
- ✓ When time is short
- ✓



Problem solving

Seeking a solution that is satisfactory to both parties with a thorough understanding of their interests.

- ✓ For a lasting solution In important relationships
- ✓

Interactive task

Quick self-assessment test: Which style do you use most often? Which do you use least often?

The Battle of Communication Styles



Passive

Body language

- Head bowed
- Avoids eye contact Quiet, uncertain voice

Characteristics

- Giving up one's own needs
- Putting others' needs first Avoiding conflict

"It's fine if it's better for you... I don't mind."



Aggressive

Body language

- Threatening posture
- Intense eye contact
- Loud, commanding voice

Characteristics

- Imposing one's own demands
- Disregarding the rights of others
- Dominance

"You always mess everything up! Do as I say!"



Assertive

Body language

- Straight posture Calm eye contact Firm, clear voice

Characteristics

- Respect for one's own rights
- Respect for the rights of others
- Honest communication

"I understand your point of view, but I have a different opinion. Let's find a solution together."

The 2 main elements of assertiveness



Self-assertion

Standing up for ourselves



Attentive listening

Listening to and understanding others

The Assertive Rights Manifesto

YOUR ASSERTIVE RIGHTS

- ✓ You have the right to say no
- ✓ You have the right to change your mind
- ✓ You have the right to make mistakes
- ✓ You have the right to say: I don't know / I don't understand
- ✓ You have the right to ask for help
- ✓ You have the right to express your feelings

Interactive task

Which right is the most difficult for you to accept and practise in your everyday life?

Saying no

Changing my mind

Making
mistake
s

Asking for help

"Assertiveness is not about always getting what you want, but about being able to express what you want."

— Randy J. Paterson

The Art of I-Messages

You-messages vs. I-messages

You-message:

"You're always late! You can never be counted on, you're completely unreliable!"

I-message:

"I worry when you're late because I don't know what happened to you. I'd like you to let me know next time if you're going to be late."

Advantages of I-messages:

- They do not blame or judge They reduce defensive reactions They take
- responsibility for feelings They focus
- on specific behaviour
-

The 3-part "I" message model

1

Describe the problem

Describe the situation or behaviour objectively, without judgement.

2

Effect on me

Describe how the situation makes you feel or what consequences it has for you.

3

Suggested solution

Suggest a specific, positive solution to the situation.

Example

Problem: "When you are 30 minutes late for our meeting..." **Effect:** "...I become worried and uncertain about our plans..." **Solution:** "...I would appreciate it if you could let me know next time you are going to be late."

Exercise: I-messages Mastery

Now that you know the structure of I-messages, let's practise using them in different situations!

Situation #1

Your friend is always late for meetings, and you've been waiting for them for 30 minutes again.

Situation #2

Your boss gives you extra work on Friday afternoon that you have to finish that same day.

Situation #3

Your flatmate listens to loud music while you are trying to study.

Situation #4

In a group project, one member is not doing their share of the work.

Tips for effective "I" messages:

- 💡 Avoid using the words "always" and "never"
- 💡 Focus on specific behaviour, not personality Use a calm, balanced tone of voice
- 💡

Pair Exercise

- 1 Form pairs and choose a situation card.
- 2 One person plays the role of the person exhibiting the problematic behaviour.
- 3 The other person formulates an I-message based on the 3-part model. Swap
- 4 roles and try another situation.

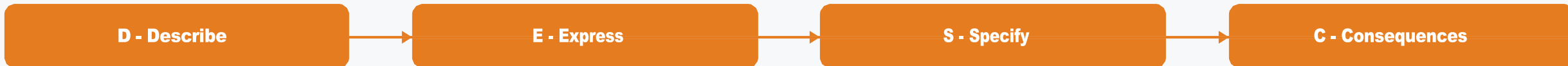


Example of an I-message for situation #1:

"When you are 30 minutes late for a meeting (**problem**), I feel frustrated and that my time is being wasted (**effect**). I would like you to let me know next time you are going to be late (**solution**)."

The DESC Model - Structured Feedback

The DESC model is an effective communication tool that helps you express your thoughts in a structured and assertive manner in difficult situations.



The 4 Steps in Detail

- D Describe**
Describe the specific situation or behaviour objectively, without judgement or generalisation.
- E Express**
Express how the situation makes you feel or what thoughts it brings to mind.
- S Specify**
Specify exactly what change you would like to see. Be specific and realistic.
- C Consequences**
Outline the positive consequences that will result from the change for both parties.

Example of Applying the DESC Model

Situation:

A colleague regularly interrupts you during meetings.

- D Describe:** "During today's meeting, you interrupted me three times while I was speaking."
- E Express:** "When that happens, I get frustrated and feel that my ideas are not valued."
- S Specify:** "I would like us to let each other finish our thoughts before responding."
- C Consequences:** "This way, we would both understand each other's point of view better, and our cooperation would be more effective."

How to Say No Confidently?

⚠️ The Difficulties of Saying "No"



💔 Fear of hurting others

👤✖️ Fear of rejection, of losing the relationship

😞 Fear of appearing selfish

🗣️ Fear of conflict and confrontation

🔧 Three effective techniques

💖 Empathetic No

Acknowledge the other person's needs while saying no.

"I understand that this is important to you, but unfortunately I can't help you."

🕒 Time-buying No

Ask for time to think about it if you can't give an immediate answer.

"I need to think about this request. I'll give you an answer tomorrow, OK?"

⚖️ Elvi No

Refer to your principles or rules that make you say no.

"My principle is that I do not lend money to friends."

The Stuck Record Technique

What is the stuck record technique?

Definition

The stuck record technique is an assertive communication method in which we calmly but firmly repeat our request or position.

When to use it

- When someone does not accept your refusal
- When someone is pressuring you
- When someone tries to manipulate you

How to use it

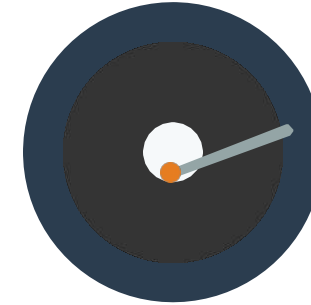
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2

1 State your position clearly and simply

2 Repeat the same sentence calmly

3 Do not explain yourself or deviate from your original message

4 Maintain eye contact and a calm posture



Situational example

Telephone salesperson:

"We have a fantastic offer for you! Only now, with a 50% discount!"

You

"Thank you, but I'm not interested in the offer."

Telephone salesperson:

"But this is a unique opportunity! You won't find an offer like this anywhere else!"

You (stuck record) 

"Thank you, but I'm not interested in the offer."

Fogging - The Antidote to Manipulation

What is defusing?

Defusing is an assertive communication technique that helps neutralise manipulative criticism without causing conflict.



When should you use it?

- In cases of manipulative, generalised criticism
- When someone tries to pressure you with exaggerated statements
- When you don't want to get into an argument, but you don't want to give in either

How to use it

1 Acknowledge part of the criticism

Without agreeing with it, acknowledge that there may be some truth in it.

2 Remain calm and neutral

Do not defend yourself or attack back, keep your cool.

3 Use the conditional tense

"It may be that...", "It may seem that...", "It is possible that..."

Practical examples

Situation: Generalised criticism

Criticism "You never listen to what I say!"

Fogging: "Maybe sometimes I don't listen enough. What would you like me to listen to now?"

Situation: Exaggerated

Criticism "You're always late, you're completely unreliable!"

Fogging: "It has indeed happened that I was late. What can we do today to use our time effectively?"

Situation: Exerting pressure

Criticism "If you really cared about me, you would do this for me!"

Reflection: "I understand that this is important to you. Regardless, I can't do it right now."

Conducting Difficult Conversations

What makes a conversation difficult?

Definition

Difficult conversations are interactions that involve strong emotions, differing points of view, or sensitive topics and have the potential to lead to conflict.

Steps for conducting a difficult conversation



1 Preparation

Clarify your goal, gather facts, and plan the framework for the conversation.

2 Initiation

Create a safe environment and describe the problem without judgement.

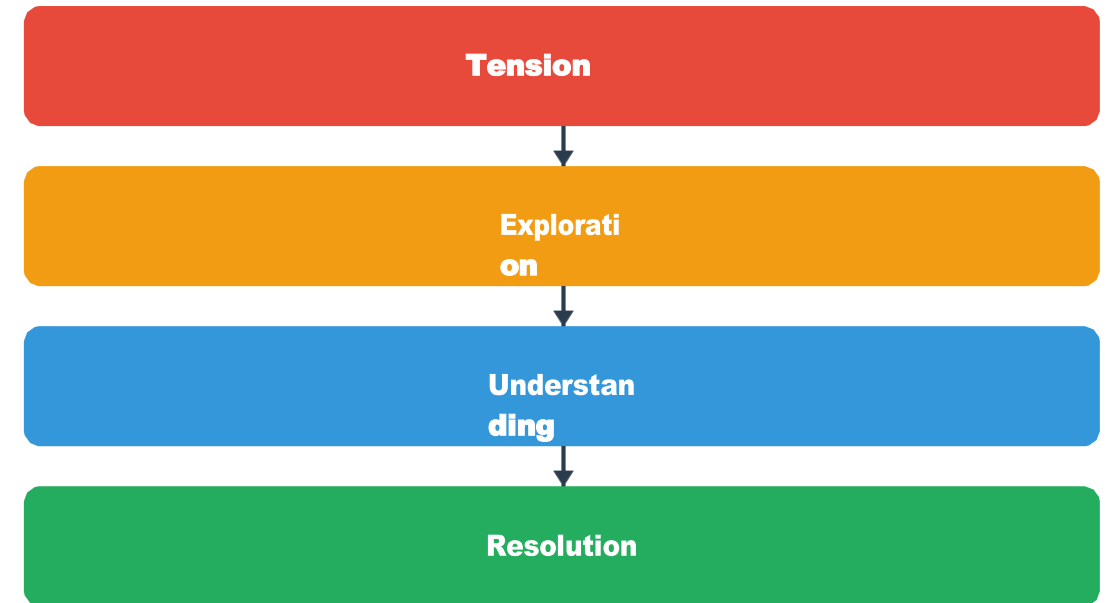
3 Exploration

Listen to the other person's point of view and share your own with "I" messages.

4 Find a solution

Work together to develop an acceptable solution and determine specific steps.

The dynamics of difficult conversations



Practical tips

- ✓ **Timing:** Choose an appropriate time and place when you are both calm.
- ✓ **Active listening:** Use feedback, paraphrasing, and open-ended questions.
- ✓ **Managing emotions:** Recognise and name emotions, but do not let them take control.
- ✓ **Common ground:** Look for shared interests and values that you can build on.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** Be open to compromise and alternative solutions.
- ✓
- ✓

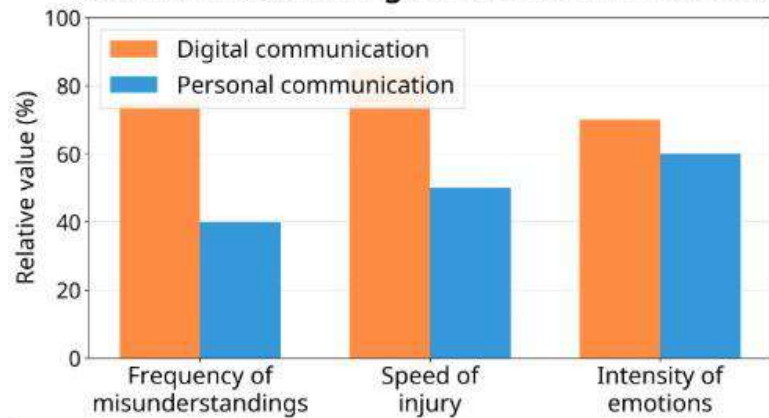
Conflict management in the digital age

Characteristics of digital conflicts

How are digital conflicts different?

Conflicts in the digital space have specific characteristics that can make effective communication and conflict management difficult.

Characteristics of Digital vs. Personal Conflicts



Lack of non-verbal cues

Written communication lacks intonation, gestures and facial expressions, which can lead to misunderstandings.

Immediacy and impulsiveness

The ability to respond quickly often leads to ill-considered, emotionally charged reactions.

Online disinhibition effect

The feeling of anonymity often leads people to say things they would not say face to face.

Digital assertiveness and generational differences

Assertive communication techniques can also be used in the digital space, but the specific characteristics of the platform and generational differences must be taken into account.

Digital assertiveness strategies



Delayed response: Give yourself time to respond, especially in emotionally charged situations.



Switch channels: If text-based communication is not working, switch to a video call or face-to-face meeting.



Clarifying questions: Ask about the intention before responding to a potentially offensive message.



Explicit communication: Be clear in your wording and use emoticons to indicate your mood.



Generational differences



Generation Z

- Communicating on multiple platforms simultaneously
- Visual communication (emojis, GIFs, memes)
- Preference for quick, short messages
- Rapid change in social norms

Older generations

- More formal communication style
- Longer, more detailed messages
- Use of fewer platforms
- Preference for text-based communication

Active Listening - The Art of Understanding

What is active listening?

Definition

Active listening is a communication technique in which the listener focuses their full attention on the speaker, understands the message, provides feedback, and responds without judgement.



1 Full attention

You put aside your own thoughts and focus all your attention on the speaker.

2 Non-judgement

You do not evaluate the other person's thoughts, feelings or actions.


3 Patience


You allow the other person to finish their thoughts without interrupting them.


4 Feedback


You show that you are listening and understand what the other person is saying.


Active listening techniques

 Paraphrasing: summarising what you have heard in your own words

 Clarifying questions: asking questions to aid understanding

 Summarising: summarise the main points of the conversation

 Reflecting feelings: you reflect the other person's emotional state

 Affirmation: show that you are listening with verbal and non-verbal cues

Example conversation

Speaker:

"I am very frustrated because this is the third time I have had to do this report again, and no one is telling me exactly what they want."

Active listener:

"You seem frustrated because you haven't received clear instructions about the report."

Reflecting feelings

Speaker:

"Yes, and it has already taken up a lot of my time. I don't know what they expect from me."

Active listener:

"So you've already invested a lot of time in this, and you'd like to know exactly what the expectations are. Can I help clarify these?"

Paraphrasing

Mediation and its areas of application

What is mediation?

Definition

Mediation is a conflict management process in which a neutral third party (mediator) helps the parties find their own solution to their problem. The mediator does not make decisions, but facilitates communication and understanding.

Steps in the mediation process

1
2

Introduction: The mediator explains the process and the rules

2

Sharing positions: Each party states their point of view

3

Exploring interests: Identifying the real needs behind surface positions

4

Possible solutions: Brainstorming possible solutions

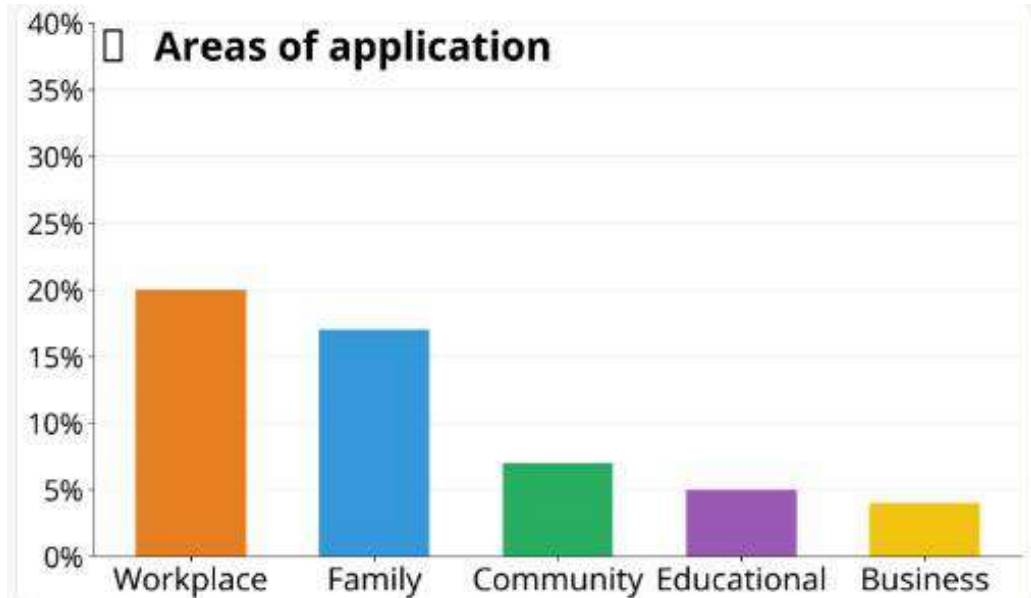
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Agreement: The parties jointly select the best solution



Advantages of mediation:

- Faster and more cost-effective than legal proceedings The parties themselves shape the solution
- Preserves and often improves relationships
- Confidential and flexible process
-



Workplace mediation

Conflicts between colleagues, disagreements between bosses and subordinates, handling team conflicts.



Family mediation

Resolving divorce, child custody, inheritance disputes, and generational conflicts.



Community mediation

Neighbourhood disputes, school conflicts, disagreements over the use of community spaces.

Practical example

A conflict arose between two colleagues due to unclear responsibilities within a project. With the help of a mediator, they identified the real problem: both wanted recognition for their work. The solution was a new task allocation system that took into account the strengths of both parties.

Toolkit - What to bring with you

Conflict Management and Assertive Communication Tools

Communication Tools

- ✓ **I-messages:** Expressing your feelings and needs without blaming others
- ✓ **DESC model:** Structured feedback in difficult situations
- ✓ **Active listening:** Genuinely understanding and giving feedback to the other party

Assertiveness Techniques

- ✓ **Repetition:** Repeating your position under pressure
- ✓ **Defusing:** Neutralising manipulative criticism
- ✓ **Assertive refusal:** Respecting your boundaries

Conflict Management Strategies

- ✓ **Thomas-Kilmann Model:** Choosing the Right Style for the Situation
- ✓ **Conducting difficult conversations:** A structured approach to sensitive topics



Personal Action Plan

- 1 Which 3 tools would you most like to practise in your everyday life?

1. ...

2. ...

3. ...

- 2 In what situations will you use these tools?

E.g. in workplace meetings, family discussions...

- 3 How will you evaluate your progress?

E.g. Keeping a diary, asking for feedback...

Personal Action Plan

How to create a personal action plan?

1 Identify areas for improvement

Consider in which conflict situations or communication situations you feel least confident.

2 Choose specific techniques

From the methods you have learned, choose those that you would like to practise and incorporate into your everyday life.

3 Set measurable goals

Formulate specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals.

4 Plan opportunities to practise

Determine in which situations you will practise your new skills and how you will track your progress.

Reminder: Techniques learned

I-messages

DESC model

Stuck record

Fogging

Assertive rights

Saying no

Difficult conversations

Personal Action Plan Template

Fill in your own action plan!

1. Area for improvement:

2. Techniques to be applied:

3. Specific goal (SMART):

4. Opportunities for practice:

5. How do I measure success?

Commitment

I commit to following the action plan above for the next 30 days and consciously working on developing my conflict management and assertive communication skills.

Sign

Help and resources

Further learning opportunities

Recommended reading

Marshall B. Rosenberg: Nonviolent Communication

The Basics of Empathetic Communication

Roger Fisher: Yes! How to Negotiate Effectively?

Harvard Negotiation Method

Manuel J. Smith: When I say no, I feel guilty

Developing assertiveness

Thomas-Kilmann: Conflict Mode Instrument

Conflict management styles

Useful applications



Headspace
Mindfulness



Calm
Relaxation








Sanvello
Mood tracking







MindShift
Mindset shift

Help options

Resources in Hungary

-  Mental Health First Aid Service: 116-123 (free, 24 hours a day)
-  Hungarian Psychological Association: +36 1 201 3688
-  Family Support Service: local authorities
-  Mediation Council: info@mediacio.hu
- 

Romanian resources

-  Child Helpline: 116 111 (free, 24 hours a day)
-  Psychological Counselling Centre: local centres
-  Mediation Council: office@cmediere.ro
- 

Emergency assistance

In case of crisis, call:

Hungary: 112

Romania: 112