



HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS

The King County Dispute Resolution Center has been helping residents and community groups settle disputes since 1987. We have learned a lot about conflict resolution in the process and we think that these suggestions can help you communicate better when you are trying to solve a problem.

1. **Talk directly** Assuming that there is no threat of physical violence, talk directly to the person with whom you have the problem. Direct conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on a wall, throwing a rock, or complaining to someone else.
2. **Choose a good time** Plan to talk to the other person at the right time and allow yourselves enough time for a thorough discussion. Don't start talking about the conflict just as the other person is leaving for work, after you have had a terrible day, or right before you have to make dinner. Try to talk in a quiet place where you can both be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes.
3. **Plan ahead** Think about what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.
4. **Don't blame or name-call** Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for him or her to hear you. Don't blame the other person for everything or begin the conversation with your opinion of what should be done.
5. **Share important information** Don't interpret the other person's behavior – "You are blocking my driveway on purpose just to make me mad!" Instead, give information about your own feelings – "When your car blocks my driveway, I get angry because I can't get to work on time."
6. **Listen** Give the other person a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Relax and listen; try to learn how the other person feels.
7. **Show that you are listening** Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear him or her and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.

8. **Talk it all through** Once you start, get all of the issues and feelings out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems too "difficult" to discuss or too "insignificant" to be important. Your solution will work best if all issues are discussed thoroughly.
9. **Work together to find solutions** Keep in mind, two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. Be specific. For example, "I will turn my music off at midnight" is better than a vague "I won't play loud music anymore."
10. **Follow through** Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working.

Our experience has shown us that these simple suggestions can really work. When people respect themselves, their neighbors, and their communities enough to work out disputes, everyone win.

Information adapted from the Community Boards of San Francisco and the Neighborhood Mediation Center of Portland, Oregon.