**Collaborative Conflict Resolution: One Strategy**

**Prenegotiation**

1. **Decide to Resolve Conflict**

Identify the problem and prepare for the encounter.

Let the other person know you would like to talk to them, and preview the topic, so they will also have the opportunity to prepare.

Make your preview simple and nonthreatening.

Unconstructive fights often start because the initiator confronts a partner who isn’t ready. Make sure you allot time for the other person to digest and respond. During this stage, you also want to figure out your goals for the interaction by reviewing your instrumental, relational and self-presentation goals.

“I’ve noticed that we’ve been arguing a lot about who does what chores around the house. Can we sit down and talk tomorrow when we both get home?”

**Opening Stage  
2. Create an Effective Atmosphere**

Communication climate: The emotional tone of a relationship as it is expressed in the messages that the partners send and receive.

Creating positive communication climates:   
-avoid judgmental statements: Don’t make “you” statements, such as “You don’t know what you’re talking about” and “You smoke too much,” which are likely to cause defensiveness and escalate conflict.

-Use “I” language: Statements such as “I get frustrated when you interrupt me” focus on the speaker’s thoughts and feelings instead of judging the listener. The best “I” statements are specific.

-Avoid attempts to control or manipulate the other person: be careful not to impose your preferences without regard for the other’s needs or interests.

Open the negotiation by making small talk and move into the issue at hand.

At this stage, set the tone for the interaction.

Be cooperative and pleasant – it will open the door for collaboration.

1. **Affirm What Works in the Relationship**

Establish common ground by bringing up overlapping interests and using \_\_\_\_\_\_ language.

Set a good tone and establish common ground.

“We both put a lot of work into setting up and decorating our space, I really appreciate that we have been good roommates.”

**Exploration Stage**

There should be a high level of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at this stage.

The overarching goal at this stage is to get a panoramic view of the conflict by sharing your perspective and listening to the other person.

The information you gather here may clarify the situation enough to end the conflict and cease negotiation.

1. **Clarify Goals**

Describe your problem and needs. Your partner can’t possibly meet your needs without knowing why you’re upset and what you want. It’s up to you to describe your problem as specifically as possible.   
It’s essential that you express yourself in ways that don’t cause other person to feel judged and defensive.

“Now that classes have started, I’ve noticed that we’re really busy and some chores are not getting done. I’d like to discuss if we can set up a cleaning schedule.”

1. **Actively Listen**

After you’ve made your position clear, it’s time to find out what your partner needs in order to feel satisfied about this issue.

1. **Re-Clarify / Re-Listen**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ about your partner’s needs and confirm that you have understood each other clearly.

**Bargaining stage**

1. **Establish Plan for Change**

Generate as many solutions as possible with your partner.

The discussion should be informed by what you learned in the exploration stage.

Evaluate the alternative solutions. Talk about which solutions will work and which ones won’t.

Pick the one that looks best to everyone. It’s important to be sure everybody understands the solution and is willing to try it out.  
Make sure your opening proposal is reasonable and not presented as an ultimatum.

“When dishes are left in the sink too long, they stink and get gross. Let’s not leave any dishes in the sink overnight.”

Instead of

“I don’t ever want to see a dish left in the sink.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is important: you may have to revise your ideal outcome and bottom line based on new information.

**Settlement Stage**

1. **Revisit the Resolution**

Summarize and ask for confirmation.

“So, it looks like I’ll be in charge of the trash and recycling, and you’ll load and unload the dishwasher. Then I’ll do a general cleaning on Wednesdays and you’ll do the same on Sundays. Is that right?”

1. **Recognize Irresolvable Situations**

Follow up on the solution to make sure it’s working for both parties.   
Conflict management is an ongoing process. You can’t be sure the solution will work until you try it out. After you’ve tested it for a while, it’s a good idea to set aside some time to talk over how things are going. You may need to make some changes or even rethink the whole problem.

Some Conflict Scenarios

#1 You suspect your co-worker has been saying things about you and your work “behind your back.” This has brought strain to the relationship at work. Attempt to resolve conflict.

#2 You feel your co-worker is not “pulling” his share of the load at work. You feel you’re doing his work for him. You are resentful. Your co-worker feels you are always on his back. Attempt to resolve conflict.

#3 Your boss is giving you too much work. Some of it is not in your job description. Your boss keeps saying, “You can do it! You can do it!” You are frustrated, scared and angry.

#4 A co-worker seems to use staff meetings as a forum to complain about you and your work. He/She doesn’t speak to you directly but in public settings brings up situations and occurrences that obviously are about you.

#5 Your file cabinet is broken. The files keep falling down; you’ve reported it several times, but it never gets fixed. You’ve mentioned it to your boss, but he/she trivializes it. This situation is frustrating your work. Resolve the conflict.

#6 Your co-worker is making sexually oriented statements to you or in your presence. You are good friends, and you wouldn’t really call this sexual harassment; nevertheless these remarks make you feel uncomfortable. Resolve the conflict.

#7 Your boss has been acting different lately. He/she appears cold and distant. You think maybe you’ve done something to cause this but are not sure. Resolve the conflict.

#8 Your boss has been calling too many meetings lately, and they are too long. You’ve talked with your co-workers, and they feel the same way. You have too much work to do; you’d like shorter, less frequent and more productive meetings. Resolve the conflict.

#9 You are on a committee of three people assigned to develop a new assessment form for clients. Two of the members fool around and are not carrying their weight. You feel as if you are doing all the work. Resolve the conflict.

#10 You have set up a recycling program throughout the building. One department consistently does not recycle appropriately. You’ve put up signs and instructed individual staff. When you mention this to your boss, he/she says he’ll do something about it, but nothing changes. You take your job seriously; this situation really annoys you. You feel dismissed. Resolve the conflict.