



# Let's Talk

## Minimizing Conflict

Conflict can seem like an inevitable part of life. Yet, it doesn't have to be. There are some easy and effective ways to minimize conflict in your day-to-day life.

### BE PATIENT AND UNDERSTANDING

A big part of minimizing conflict involves maintaining your dignity while you allow the other person to maintain his or hers. This, of course, can take a bit of skill and a lot of patience, plus lots of empathy, so that you can relate to what the other person may be experiencing.

The skill comes in handy, especially when you're allowing the other person to offer his or her perspective. It's good to remember that some people have difficulty:

- Presenting their point of view
- Seeing others' perspectives
- Asserting themselves
  - Asking for what they want
  - Standing up for themselves
- Knowing clearly what they want

In short, what may seem quite simple and straightforward to you could be a rather complex experience for the other person.

Take, for instance, a situation involving a missed project deadline. The person who missed it may have trouble communicating what's been holding up the work. They may have trouble saying "no" to work-related requests, so they agreed to a deadline that was unrealistic for their schedule or workload. This person may legitimately feel sorry for missing the deadline, but have trouble explaining the extenuating circumstances.

### RAISE YOUR SKILL LEVEL

To be skillful at dealing with conflict:

- Slow down and have patience with

the other person—and yourself

- Communicate one-on-one, in a neutral space, if possible
- Practice "active listening"—just listening, without responding
  - Completely hear what the other person is saying
  - Don't jump to conclusions
  - Allow the other person the chance to get the full message out before forming a response

- Be empathetic—try to relate to the other person's experience
- Be aware of body language cues
- Practice self-awareness. Be open to the possibility that your perceptions might be wrong

### MAKING SPACE

Above all, take your time and have patience. Then make sure that you and the person you're working with are alone and that both of you have time to talk without distractions. Ideally, you want to be somewhere that feels neutral and safe for both of you.

This will allow you both to feel more at ease and be able to hear what each other has to say.

### A PLACE OF UNDERSTANDING

Minimizing conflict is not avoiding conflict. Sometimes it's necessary to deal with touchy subjects with your coworkers. Approaching them calmly and skillfully can help you get to a place of understanding. □



# Preventing Caregiver Burnout

In many ways, caregivers are like elite athletes. They pull off amazing feats for those they care for, but—like other athletes—they need to remember to take care of themselves by adding recovery and downtime to their schedules.

If athletes train all day without taking adequate time to rest, they can suffer from “burnout,” which diminishes their ability to perform. The same is true for caregivers; without adequate rest, “burnout” can diminish their ability to take care of others.

## SIGNS

Some signs of caregiver burnout include:

- Being more easily irritated than normal
- Feeling overwhelmed
- No longer getting enjoyment out of the things that used to make you happy
- Feeling down and blue
- Noticing a change in weight (heavier or lighter)
- Noticing a change in appetite (weakened or stronger)

- Noticing a change in sleep (more or less)
- Feeling unworthy
- Feeling like you want to hurt yourself\*
- Feeling like you want to hurt the person you’re caring for\*

\*If you feel like you want to hurt yourself or someone else, seek help immediately. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s toll-free number - 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The line is available to anyone 24 hours a day, every day of the year. All calls are confidential.

## PREVENTING CAREGIVER BURNOUT

You must be well—on top of your game—to help others. Take the time to help yourself by preventing burnout:

- Ask for help—when you need it, ideally before you need it
  - Read “*Lightening the Load: Caring for the Caregiver*” in Wellness-Fitness online ([www.foh.hhs.gov/WFNews](http://www.foh.hhs.gov/WFNews)) for some great tips on lightening your care-giving load
- Make time for yourself

- Bring in a secondary caregiver that can relieve you from your duties—even for a few hours a day
- Manage your stress by
  - Having daily periods of relaxation and meditation
  - Get relaxation and meditation tips on FOH’s Stress Awareness page ([foh.hhs.gov/calendar/april.html](http://foh.hhs.gov/calendar/april.html))
  - Be physically active
  - Take a walk
  - Go for a run
  - Play sports
  - Do yoga
  - Have regularly scheduled appointments to share your feelings with a friend, counselor, or spiritual advisor
  - Join a support group
  - Schedule a weekly night out

Like an athlete, slowing down and taking care of yourself can make the difference between wearing yourself out and being ready to perform. Ultimately, both you and the person you’re caring for benefit from these efforts. □



# Food and Mood

Certain things you eat or drink can affect your mood. The all-American cup of coffee is a prime example. For many people, it's their mood-lifting choice to start the day. But other foods and drinks can provide more subtle changes in mood. Have you ever felt the calming affects of a glass of warm milk, for instance?

## SUGARY PICK-ME-UP?

Large amounts of sugar can have the opposite effect of a glass of milk. It can initially make you feel slightly elated and energized, which is often followed by a dip in mood and energy as the body tries to bring itself back to balance by adding insulin to the blood. The insulin often overcompensates and can lower the amount of sugar in the blood too far, before the body returns to a more balanced state.

## CALMING "CARBS"

When we talk about "carbs" these days, we're usually referring to complex carbohydrates (simple carbohydrates are what we would call sugars, which we discussed above). Complex carbohydrates can often have a mood-lifting effect because they increase the availability of serotonin in the body. Choosing whole grains over refined "carbs" allows the sugars in the carbohydrates to be more slowly processed. This makes for a more sustained release of the sugars and can keep you on a more even keel.

## STEADY PROTEIN

Protein can have a stabilizing effect if you've had too much sugar or carbohydrates. It takes the body longer to process protein, so this can help slow the digestion and metabolism of sugars.

More important, protein-rich foods are a great source of amino-acids, including tyrosine, which helps make dopamine, nor-epinephrine, and epinephrine available to the body. All three of these can contribute to our feelings of pleasure and sense of well-being.

## CHOCOLATE

If you were worried that only "healthy" foods contribute to the good mood equation, then we have news for you. Chocolate has been shown to increase levels of mood-elevating dopamine in the brain. It also has some positive effects on health, like lowering blood pressure and increasing blood flow.

The trick is to avoid the detrimental effects of too much sugar and calories that usually come with a candy bar. So, choose the highest concentration of cocoa that you find palatable and have only a small portion (a little corner—an eighth of the bar, or so) to lift your spirits.

## GOOD HEALTH, GOOD MOOD

Ultimately, the best way to use food to get in a good mood is to feel good about what you eat. Choose those things that nourish your body the most, and enjoy the mood-lifting effects of good health! □



# TIPS FOR LETTING GO OF A HABIT

An effective way to get rid of a habit is to take a gentle approach. This process will require willpower, but it may give you longer-term success than aggressive attempts at quick fixes.

## LETTING GO

We often talk about “breaking” a habit, but “letting go” is probably a better way to look at it. You’re releasing the habit so that it’s no longer a part of your life, rather than using all your energy and willpower to “break” it.

## A WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

The first step to letting go of a habit is being willing to change. In fact, that can be your first affirmation in your journey to change. You can remind yourself repeatedly: “I’m willing to change now.”

## RECOGNIZING YOUR REACTION

Sometimes a habit becomes reflexive. Example: “After dinner, I want ice cream.” This response may have become so ingrained that—without your being aware of it—it can override other things that you truly want, like a healthier heart or thinner waistline.

## MAKING SPACE

When the habit comes up, give yourself space. Do not react immediately. Instead, breathe deeply to calm yourself, become aware of your feelings and consider how you will feel about responding differently. This can give you the clarity to see that you are finished with the habit and it’s time to let it go.

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When you find you’re ready to release the habit, you can use the affirmation: **“I’m letting go of this habit. I can cope fine without it.”**

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## SAVOR THE MOMENT

On the other hand, there are times when indulging yourself in a habit that’s relatively harmless may also bring clarity that helps you let it go.

Sometimes we can find ourselves doing things reflexively—“out of habit”—and we don’t realize that we are repeating the behavior in search of satisfaction. In such cases, since we’re not completely conscious of what we’re doing, the satisfaction is not fully appreciated. Before you know it, we’re doing it again. For example, you may find yourself heading for the freezer with an empty bowl and not even remember that you already ate ice cream.

But if you’re becoming more aware—making the space to truly savor the moment when you indulge yourself—you may find a deeper, more lasting satisfaction and no longer need to repeat the behavior habitually.

When we’re more conscious of our actions and we take time to experience the satisfaction we are seeking, sometimes that can help us move on. □



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