

Fanning the Flames or Calming the Waters

Behaviors that escalate conflict:

- Negative labeling, insulting, or calling the other party offensive names.
Example: "You are a liar."
- Minimizing or ignoring the other's feelings.
Example: "Frankly, I don't care if you are upset!"
- Lying about, denying, or misrepresenting information known to the other party.
- Blaming the other for the problem with "you" statements.
Example: "You make me mad when you forget to lock the door when you leave the office!"
- Communicating condescension.
Example: "You mean to tell me that you are just now figuring that out?"
- Questioning the other party's honesty, integrity, intelligence, or competence.
Example: "How do you expect me to trust you this time?"
- Making offensive or hostile non-verbal expressions or gestures.
Example: rolling the eyes, loud sighs, laughing, "giving the finger," sticking one's tongue out at the other, or groaning when the other party speaks.
- Making interpretations of what the other party says based on stereotypes or prejudicial beliefs.
Example: "All you people ever think about is how you can avoid working!"
- Insisting that the other party "admit to being wrong."
Example: "This is not about my perceptions of what happened I saw you take my disk and you damn well better admit it!"
- Using sarcasm in addressing the other party.
Example: "Well, how nice of you to grace us with your presence. I'm shocked!"
- Making moral judgments about the other party.
Example: "The Lord will punish you for these sins!"
- Making threats to the other party.
Example: "You'd better stick to your word or I'm going to talk with the boss about your behavior!"
- Making demands of the other party.
Example: "I demand that you write me a letter of apology."
- Refusing to shake hands with the other party when he/she offers.
Example: at the beginning of the mediation session.
- Interrupting the other party when he/she is speaking.
- Shouting at the other party.

Behaviors that reduce conflict:

- Using "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.
Example: "I want to respond to your questions, but I need some time to calm down first."
- Conveying that the disputant has been listening attentively.
Example: "It sounds as if your biggest concerns are for your long-term job security and recognition for your accomplishments. Is that right?"

- Making "appropriate" eye-contact. Note: This one is extremely culturally dependent. The key issue is for Disputant A to make eye contact with Disputant B in a way that is comfortable for Disputant B.
- Expressing a desire to see both parties get as much of what they want as possible from mediation.
Example: "I'd like to see both of us walk out of here happy."
- Acknowledging responsibility for part of the problem whenever possible.
Example: "You know, I hadn't seen it before, but I think I did make some mistakes in the way I approached you."
- Acknowledging the other party's perceptions whenever possible.
Example: "I haven't considered this matter from that perspective before, but I think I can see how it looked that way to you."
- Identifying areas of agreement with the other party whenever possible - especially if he/she does not recognize that such areas of agreement exist.
Example: "You know, Conrad, I agree with you that we ought to make time management more of a priority for our office in the future."
- Allowing the other party to "let off steam." Note: This requires extreme self-control, but if the other party has not expressed him/herself previously, this can be extremely valuable.
- Avoiding assumptions.
Example: "Could you help me understand why having these specific days off is so important to you?"
- Indicating that the other party "has a good point" when he/she makes a point you believe has merit.
Example: "You're absolutely right about x."

(Adapted from "Resistance or Cooperation?" by Tom Sebok, University of Colorado, Boulder. Used with permission.)