



November 4, 2022

Surviving Relentless Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is a natural occurrence when people live, work, and even play together. Conflict can be beneficial when it results in better decisions and identifies common ground, and can even improve relationships. However, unresolved conflict can have a negative impact on our health and the connection to those around us.

Principals and Vice-Principals deal with conflict regularly, and many have well-honed skills. For those who would like to 'brush up' on their general conflict resolution knowledge and skills, we recommend the following:

[Different types of personal conflict, and tips to address it](#)

[Causes of workplace conflict](#)

[Tips to resolve workplace conflict](#)

[A great six-step framework to address workplace conflict](#)

Carmen Eberle, BCPVPA Director of Member Support Services, recommends Marli Rusen's book and workshops. [Check out Marli's website.](#)

Coping with Unresolved Conflict with Challenging People

We know from working 'in the field', and from the research over the past two years, that folks are struggling to cope. There is an increased prominence of strained mental health, an added strain that often amplifies psychological conditions that include anxiety and personality disorders. In turn, this can result in challenging behaviours that may lead to ongoing, unresolved conflict.

Unresolved conflict can lead to chronic stress, which can cause certain physical conditions, including:

• Acne • Anxiety disorders • Burnout • Depression • Diabetes • Digestive issues (such as diarrhea, constipation, ulcers)	• Hair loss • Heart disease • Hyperthyroidism • Insomnia • Obesity
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[According to this article](#) conflict can often result in anxiety, depression, stress, or insomnia for the following reasons:

Unresolved conflict can be very expensive – financially or emotionally – especially if investigators or lawyers are involved.

The result can sometimes be unpredictable. You can never predict what an investigator or judge will decide, and it's often not clear whether a negotiated settlement is desired by the other side.

Sometimes parties are unreasonable and will not change their position, especially when dealing with those who may present personality disorders, such as a narcissist.

Conflict is scary. You'll know this if you have faced a violent party, or somebody who acts or speaks aggressively.

Conflict makes you feel vulnerable, especially if the conflict is with someone who you once trusted.

Conflict can change how you view the world. You can experience feelings of loss relating to a relationship; a conflict can change how you view the future, and it can also distort your view of the past. This can be very difficult to accept.

Mitigating the impact on your health!

You may normally pride yourself on having advanced conflict resolution skills, but then be perplexed and struggle when your approach does not work with certain individuals. An example of this may be when you are faced with someone who has narcissistic tendencies.

According to this article (<https://the-conflictpert.com/2019/05/09/surviving-conflict-with-a-narcissist-six-tips-on-staying-sane-and-keeping-your-cool/>), in your conflict dealings with a narcissist, you can expect:

- **Insults**, aggression, threats, shouting, lies, gaslighting, and sometimes violence. The intention is to degrade, humiliate, hurt, and undermine you, and they are common narcissistic argument tactics;
- **The silent treatment**. This is another way to control you, with confusion;
- Blaming you and failing to take responsibility;
- **Using your insecurities** and vulnerability against you, despite you confiding in them to build intimacy;
- **No empathy**, no recognition that you may be hurt too, or have needs;
- **No self-awareness**. This is just too painful for a narcissist, and so trying to get them to negotiate, cooperate, or back down gracefully is extremely unlikely.
- **Conflict considerations** will not include the value of the relationship unless it serves their interests only. This makes it difficult to reason with them, as the needs of their ego will be more important than legal costs or mental health.

Trying to operate within these relationships is often in direct conflict with how we behave, rationalize, or manage our expectations of interpersonal interactions, including our desire to save the relationship. Simply put, regular tactics do not work, and we will always feel like we are 'giving in' to the narcissist. This can be very damaging, and there are many articles published about the trauma experience of those in relationships with narcissists.

[Here is a short read](#) that teaches us about narcissistic argument techniques, why people use them, and ways to protect yourself in how you respond to a narcissist in an argument.

Andrea McComb, BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning and Development, recommends further reading on the topic of detachment.

[According to Psychology Today](#), detachment can be described as a process of letting go. It allows you to release difficult situations and, sometimes, difficult people. By detaching from past experiences and future expectations, you can look at your relationships – both personal and professional – more objectively, which gives you greater clarity.

Detachment does not happen through anger and blame; in fact, this may even strengthen attachment! Detachment requires the absence of prejudice or bias. When a discussion gets heated, and you notice yourself trying to take control, it's best to take a break and do something else, somewhere you feel safe.

Check out these [5 Steps to Detaching for a Happier Life](#).

If you are struggling in a relationship or a scenario where the ongoing conflict is impacting your health, reach out for help from a physician or a counsellor. If it is work-related conflict, reach out to me rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca and I can connect you to our Early Intervention Program.

Next week: Forgiveness

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.