

# Establishing norms for managing conflict

Discuss standards for conflict management with your educator team.

**Time required:** 1 hour for a team of four educators; add about 5 minutes for each additional educator

**Space and material requirements:**

- A quiet space
- A timer
- Computer or pencil and paper

“ Conflict can be healthy and unhealthy. Healthy conflict brings group members closer to each other and contributes to strengthening the work or product they’re focused on. Unhealthy conflict does the opposite. It erodes trust among teammates and distracts the group from their goals and objectives.”

**Elena Aguilar**

*The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools*

This activity is an opportunity for educator team members to work together to agree on standards for healthy conflict. It is adapted from the processes described by Elena Aguilar (2016) in *The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools*.

## ▶ Getting organized (5 minutes)

1. Identify a facilitator who will move the team through the activity and a recorder who will capture team standards.
2. Preview the activity as a team.

## ▶ Reflecting on healthy conflict (5 minutes)

3. Respond independently to the following prompts. These questions are intended to facilitate reflection on the need for and benefits of healthy conflict. If you prefer to type responses to the questions, [click here](#) to create your own digital copy.

**When might conflict happen? Why might healthy conflict be beneficial?**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>What are some times when conflict will naturally arise for our educator team?</p>  |  |
| <p>What are some of the benefits of sharing our ideas and opinions with each other constructively, even when we disagree?</p> |  |

## ► Sharing reflections on healthy conflict (10 minutes)

4. Share individual responses prompt by prompt. Then discuss similarities and differences.

The purpose of sharing is to generate an understanding of the importance of embracing healthy conflict.

## ► Reflecting on individual preferences for managing conflict (5 minutes)

5. Respond independently to the following prompts, which are designed to surface your individual preferences for managing conflict.

**What are my individual preferences for managing conflict?**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>What does acceptable behavior look and sound like in discussion and debate?</b>   |  |
| <b>What does unacceptable behavior look and sound like in discussion and debate?</b> |  |

## ► Sharing individual preferences (10 minutes)

6. Share individual responses prompt by prompt. Then discuss similarities and differences.

## ► Agreeing on norms for healthy conflict (20 minutes)

7. As a team:

- Discuss collective preferences around healthy conflict with special attention to achieving consensus in areas of difference.
- Agree on standards related to healthy conflict to which all team members can agree. The recorder should note these in a document to be shared with the team.

### Example A

- We assume the best intentions.
- We speak respectfully to each other.
- We allow each other space to make mistakes.

### Example B

- We embrace healthy conflict.
- We resolve conflict calmly and in private.
- If we cannot resolve a conflict on our own, we seek out a mediator.

## ► Discussing next steps (5 minutes)

8. Discuss and determine:

- How will we keep these standards “alive” in our work together? How will we hold each other accountable?
- Are there key points in the year when we should revisit and refresh them?