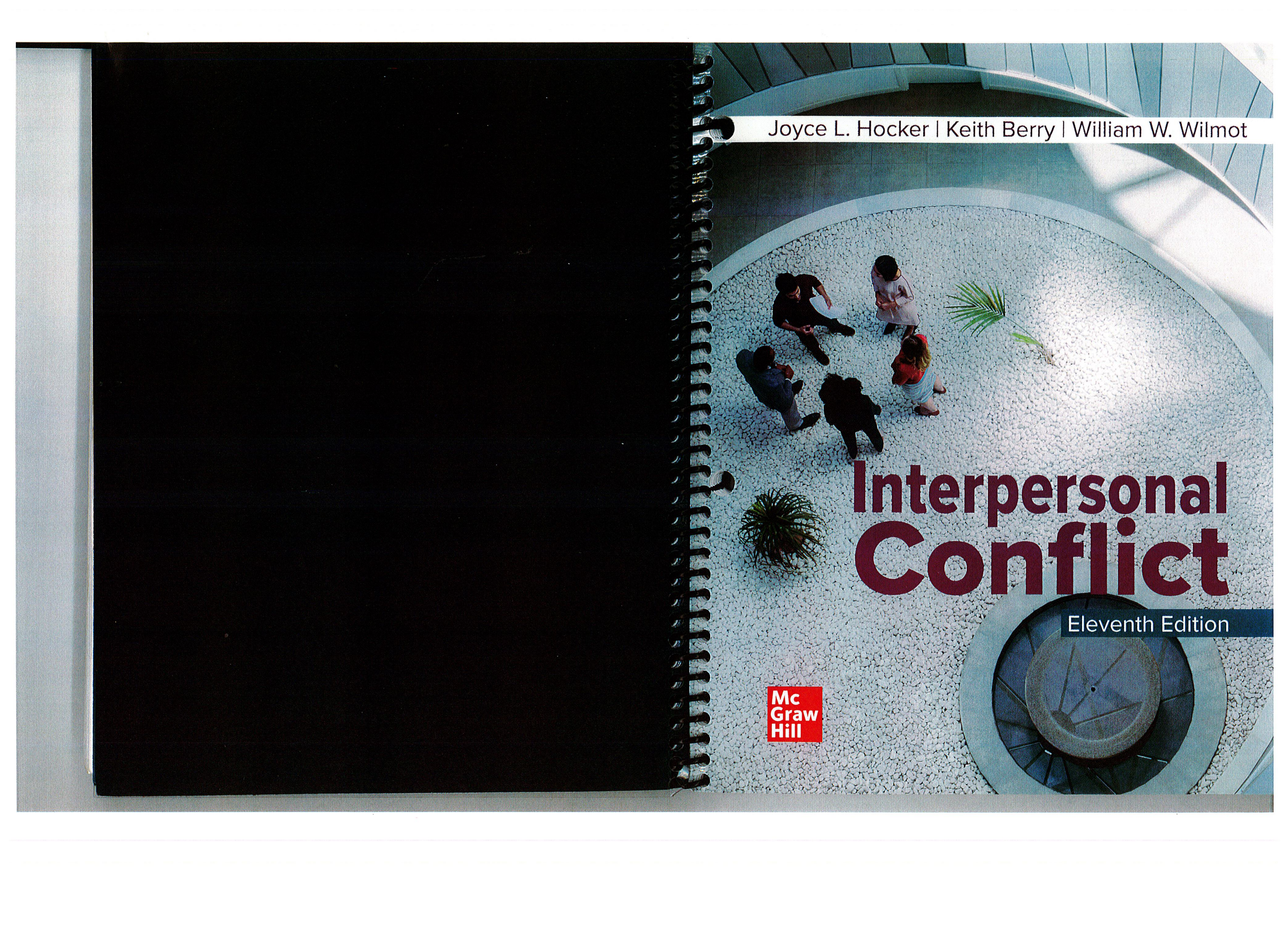


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Interpersonal Conflict

Eleventh Edition

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Graw
Hill



Emotions in Conflict

Introducing Emotion

Most of us associate strong emotions with conflict. This chapter will help you prepare ahead of time for the inevitable storms of feeling that sweep through your conflicts. Conflict always takes place on the *emotional dimension* (Jones 2000). Human beings might be called *Homo emoticus*, (Shapiro 2016) rather than merely *Homo sapiens*. To be in conflict means you will feel some emotional charge. Part of the reason conflict can be so uncomfortable is due to the accompanying emotion (Bodtker and Jameson 2001). Can you recall a genuine conflict situation that did not involve feelings?

A modern theory of emotions rests on Darwin's evolutionary research (Nesse and Ellsworth 2009). When humans feel safe, we are much more likely to employ constructive conflict management approaches than when we are filled with fear. Darwin (1872/1965) recognized from his research that evolution shaped humankind's mental responses and behavioral repertoire just as much as natural selection shaped physical characteristics of organisms. Just like other animals, when we are attacked or perceive a threat to our identity or goals, we will feel some kind of strong emotion. Therefore, avoidance of extreme fear and threat and promotion of safety and connection underlie one's ability to engage in constructive conflict.

Emotions can be defined as *modes of functioning, shaped by natural selection, that coordinate physiological, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and subjective responses in patterns that increase the ability to meet the adaptive challenges of situations that have recurred over evolutionary time* (Nesse 1990). Emotions developed in human beings so people could meet immediate challenges. An emotion is both an *experience that we feel* and *who we are* at that moment in time (Shapiro 2010, 467). We say, "I am afraid" or "I am elated." We identify so strongly with these emotional states that we cannot separate what we "feel" from who we are, at least at that particular moment. Recall that all conflicts may be analyzed in the light of the topic, the relational implications, the process used, and identity concerns. Emotions are most allied with *identity and relationship concerns*. You may have heard someone say, "I am not a jealous person!" at the same time he feels jealous. This sets up a situation of dissonance and turmoil—"How can I feel jealous when I am not a jealous person?" You may have felt fury or scorn when you thought, "I will *not* allow him to treat me that way." We all experience these contradictions, experiencing emotion that does not align with one's identity, or feeling an emotion that does not seem to fit in one's relationship. These incongruities contribute to the anxiety of conflict.

Other languages express the role of emotion and feeling differently. In both French and Spanish, the linguistic construction is "I *have* anger" or "I *have* sadness." This construction avoids overidentification with the feeling being described.

States of emotional arousal are *labeled as different feelings*, depending on what one *believes* to be true. This means that feelings are connected to our appraisal of what is real and true in a situation (Lazarus 1991). Conflicts arise about feelings because the person experiencing the feeling believes the feeling is true. It is, for that person. But someone else may experience an entirely different feeling, equally true. For instance, a student may be upset and angry with her professor, who will not change a paper deadline even slightly, while the student has good, legitimate reasons to ask for an extension. She may feel “defeated,” “enraged,” “mistrusted,” or “insignificant,” depending on what she believes about herself, her professor, and their relationship. *Feelings are facts*; we feel what we feel. *Interpretations* are subject to change based on conversation and new information. A basic approach of conflict transformation depends on changing interpretations. We transform our feelings when we derive new information, practice empathy, hold ourselves open for a third story (not mine or yours, but ours, or one an outsider gives us), and abandon bad habits that keep us from learning (defensiveness, blame, criticism, not listening, and contradicting the other). In short, we transform feelings when we are more mindful of the conflict we are experiencing.

Wise use of emotions facilitates the transformation of conflicts, as long as you listen to what emotions tell you. In the same way that hunger alerts you to eat, emotions can alert you to unmet personal needs (Shapiro 2016). Paying attention to feelings, your own and those of others, creates the ability to change your behavior, and to experience empathy. Transformation of conflicts depends on empathy.

Feelings rise from a generalized state of arousal we call emotion. Specific feelings come and go, but the emotional dimension of life is a constant (Shapiro 2011). Emotion sets actions “into motion,” leading to your own unique subjective experience. Your subjective experiences make reflecting others’ feelings so important, and so challenging. You may say, with all the best aims, “So, you are feeling dismissed and disrespected by Walt’s assignment of project teams.” Then your team member says, “No, not exactly. I feel invisible and unimportant.” Her subjective experiences are a little different from what you imagined. Mirroring what other people feel and how they experience the moment personally is a key step in conflict resolution. Conflicts typically remain unresolved when the other person feels misunderstood. Simply parroting back feelings, with good-enough active listening skills, does not transform a conflict. Experiencing, for a while, what the other person actually feels helps to break down sides in conflict. This kind of listening to feelings, your own and others, requires concentration, vulnerability, and openness.

Emotions are like moving water. Water that is dammed up with no inlet or outlet usually becomes stagnant, dries up, becomes toxic, or freezes. Like water, emotions were designed by evolution to move through the body. We feel them, they change, they transform. Constructive conflict resolution depends upon our ability to work with and transform emotion, not close off or repress, normal human emotion. Approaches to emotions that are current, and informed by neuroscience, explain that emotions are both hard-wired (nature) and malleable (nurture), and are adaptive to social and cultural influences (Lindner 2014).

Feelings function as facts; they aren’t right or wrong, they simply exist. What you do with those feelings is a key element in managing conflict. You cannot maintain perfect equanimity and “not feel” when you are in conflict, and neither can the other. You may have experienced how futile it is to tell someone, “Don’t be angry! I didn’t intend to hurt you.” Worse yet may be the comment, “You should not feel that way.” Feelings are facts.

You Can’t Ignore Emotions

You may want to ignore emotions, but they will not ignore you (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). *Emotion affects your body*, leading you to perspire, experience rapid heart rate, blush, laugh, tense up, or feel nervous. Your emotions are a *felt, physiological experience* in the body (Hein and Singer 2008).

Emotions affect your thinking. You may criticize yourself or others, feel overtaken by negative thoughts, temporarily be unable to think clearly, or not even hear what others are saying. Thinking and interpreting are based on our appraisal of what is happening (Lazarus 1991). Based on neuroscience research, we are learning that “humans (and animals in general) use emotion to navigate the world by *filtering* for safety and danger.” We survive and thrive based on how intelligently we navigate the world. The mind takes care of the *body-in-the-world* (Early and Early 2011, 11).

Emotions affect your behavior. Almost every emotion motivates you to act, to move in some way. Sometimes you can stop yourself from acting in ways you will regret, but sometimes you cannot (Fisher and Shapiro 2005, 11). Emotions are both intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena. We feel them “inside” ourselves and we communicate them through verbal (linguistic) and nonverbal (embodied or somatic) messages (Jameson et al. 2009). Specific emotions lead people to particular tendencies to act or behave in certain ways (Bell and Song 2005; Frijda, Manstead, and Bem 2000; Guerrero and LaValley 2006).

Throughout this book we have emphasized that conflict entails both danger and opportunity for creative adaptation and change. The same is true of emotional states—your skill at making informed choices while feeling strong emotions can bring either danger or opportunity. Humans feel as well as think. Scientists used to imagine “left brain” solutions as coming from a rational place, and “right brain” solutions coming from an emotional place. But our sense of self is not compartmentalized into a pocket in the brain. The brain, like the whole person, is an inextricably entwined system (Coy 2005). No matter how much we might argue differently, no purely “rational/logical” or “emotional” reactions exist in complicated human beings.¹

Negative beliefs about emotions might include the following. Which resonates with you?

• Misconceptions of Emotion in Conflict

- Emotions are either real or unreal.
- Emotions can’t be controlled and will escalate if expressed or released.
- One should ignore emotions to resolve conflict well.
- Emotions hinder good decision making.
- Emotions are for the powerless (e.g., women, children, and marginalized people).
- Emotions are not to be expressed at work.
- Mature, well-developed people should be beyond emotions.
- I can express emotions if I can justify my feelings logically.

¹In the 5th century BCE, Aristotle compartmentalized rhetorical arguments as *logos* (logic) or *pathos* (emotions), as did other writers throughout the centuries.

- Emotions should be saved for “later.”
- People will avoid me if I express emotions (except “nice” feelings).
- Other people should not burden me with their emotions.
- If other people express emotions, I have a responsibility to do something about them.
- If I express anger, it means I don’t love or respect the object of my anger. If others express anger it means they don’t respect me. (Adapted from Cloke and Goldsmith 2000.)

Application 6.1**Discussion on Emotions**

With your small group, discuss the following questions, which explore what you learned about emotion as a child, and what you have learned since you became an adult.

1. How did members of your family express emotion? What did they teach you, implicitly and explicitly, about the place of emotion in difficult situations? Give specific examples.
2. Were you punished or rewarded for displaying certain emotions?
3. Now as an adult, who serves as a constructive model for you in dealing with emotions in conflict situations?
4. What would you like to learn or change about how to use emotions in difficult situations?
5. Is there someone who looks to you for such modeling? What sort of model are you?

How Does Emotion Function in Conflict?

1. *Conflict depends upon enough emotional arousal to “get the job done.”* Without enough energetic emotion moving us to engage in interaction, avoidance seems like an easy alternative. When you are unhappy, distressed, excited, or angry, you may exert enough energy to resolve a conflict. When we want to close the uncomfortable gap with an intimate partner with whom we feel distant, we are moved by love and attachment. In this book, we highlight the importance of solving problems while maintaining relationships. The process of conflict transformation takes energy—it is not a passive, placid process. The emotional charge enables the confrontation to take place (DiPaola, Roloff, and Peters 2010).
2. *Emotional events trigger familiar patterns of responses.* We realize we are in conflict when we begin to sense something uncomfortable. We become agitated on the bodily level; this bodily response takes on a label as a certain emotion or feeling. For instance, Patricia, a junior, has just become engaged. She realizes that she is feeling distress and discomfort around her fiancé’s family. Josh’s family is large, gregarious, and warm. They often invite Josh and Patricia to join family events. Yet, recently Patricia has noticed that she feels resentful and hurt, and is making up excuses to keep from seeing them. In a conflict with Josh, Patricia realized that she feels left out or “blotted out” by the large, enthusiastic family. Her feelings alerted her to a problem. She had felt unseen in her family of origin. We may desperately want to avoid an apology to a partner when we have betrayed them. We can think of many reasons why the betrayal occurred, we aren’t over being angry at the way our betrayal was discovered,

but at the same time we feel afraid of losing the relationship. Fear interacts with resentment and shame, mediated by love, to move us to a specific action—in this case, apology. If we were only afraid, we would avoid. If we were only resentful, we might escalate. Emotions interact in layered ways. Conflicts are difficult and complex because feelings and thoughts are often mixed.

3. *Intensity of emotion varies through the conflict process.* You may feel very strongly at the beginning of a conflict, then less intensely as resolution or process continues. For instance, you may begin by feeling fury, move to irritation, and then realize you are feeling relief. Try to avoid making a prediction based on an early emotion, such as describing someone as “an angry person who can’t be reasoned with.” In one study, people who initiated a confrontation experienced more intensity and disruption in their lives than did the “target” of the confrontation. This might be because the one who initiates experiences a buildup of emotion. The emotional charge enables the confrontation to take place (DiPaola et al. 2010).
4. *Individual personalities are built upon the blocks of emotion-behavior patterns.* For instance, consistently high levels of joy or positive emotions often lead to positive social relationships and ease with people (Abe and Izard 1999). We bring our personality structures into conflict resolution activities. People differ, for example, in how long they can tolerate anger, or uncertainty, or hostility from others before they are motivated to do something about the unhappy situation. Personalities are constructed upon many learning situations. We inherit certain traits, such as extraversion and introversion, but our unique personalities result from many different experiences. Some people learn to move toward people in ambiguous situations. They grew up in a trusting environment that rewarded an outgoing nature; they may be seen as “gregarious” in adulthood. We can change aspects of our personalities by focusing on what works and does not work. For instance, in the spirit of mindfulness, we can learn to express more warmth and compassion, to wait longer while experiencing discomfort, and to think instead of simply reacting.
5. *We experience emotion as good or bad,* positive or negative (Sanford 2007), pleasant or unpleasant, and helpful or destructive. We humans *evaluate* our emotions; we don’t experience emotions objectively from a distance. Not many people enjoy fury, resentment, anger, or fear; most prefer the positive emotions such as joy, elation, love/bonding, or pleasure. Since we experience specific feelings, rising from emotional arousal, as positive, negative, or neutral, we learn to push away negative ones and hold on to positive ones. We will explore the role of both positive and negative emotions in greater detail later.
6. We become emotional because *something is at stake for us* (see Chapter 3; Fisher and Shapiro 2005). Often one person in a couple will say, “I can’t discuss this while you are so emotional.” Yet, when important identity and relationship issues are at stake, emotion is simply part of the picture. We can regulate our *expression* of emotion, but one should never require oneself or others “not to feel.” You could adopt a great new habit—never again say and mean, “You shouldn’t feel that way!”
7. *Maturity mediates strong emotion.* Older adults may feel that less is at stake in conflict, since they report fewer conflicts than do young adults (Almeida 2005; Almeida and Horn 2004) and when they do have conflict, they report lower, overall distress (Charles and Carstensen 2008). Older adults even reported fewer negative emotions in conflicts than did middle-aged adults (Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson 2004).

It may be that maturity for most people increases their options to place conflicts into perspective. With maturity, we define ourselves less by the outcome of each conflict because we simply have more of a sense of who we are.

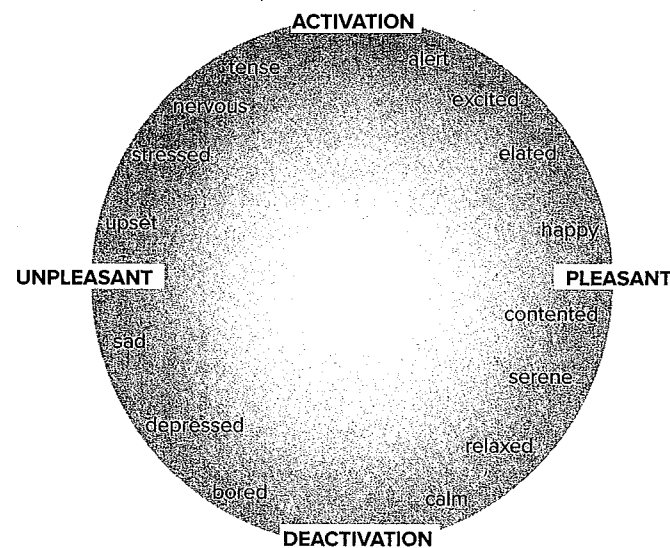
8. *Relationships are defined by the kind of emotion expressed.* Two acquaintances are working on a project in class. One person feels upset because the quality of work done by the other is disappointing and the due date is coming up soon. When she expresses disappointment, the project partner says, "If you don't like it, do it yourself. I am overwhelmed by work." The relationship suggests that even moderate emotion (disappointment) cannot be safely expressed. These two will likely not remain friends after the project is turned in—and they may not even be speaking at that point!

The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm that is not easily disturbed. It is just these intense conflicts, and their conflagration, which are needed to produce valuable and lasting results.
—C. G. Jung

A Model of Emotions

How many emotions exist, and what are these emotions? Researchers compile different lists of basic emotions. All include fear and anger, and most include joy and sorrow (Nesse and Ellsworth 2009). One of the leading researchers on emotion suggests that no general theory of emotions needs to be adopted because emotions are complicated, nuanced, layered, and change with fluidity during any encounter (Nesse 2014). One way to organize emotions is the **circumplex model of affect** (Figure 6.1).²

Figure 6.1 A Circumplex Model of Affect



²See Nesse and Ellsworth (2009) for a complete literature review of the different ways theories of emotions have developed.

You will notice that emotions are classified as *Activated or Deactivated* and *Unpleasant or Pleasant*.³ Look at the northeast quadrant of the model. In this quadrant, emotions are activated and pleasant (alert, excited, elated, and happy). Study the other quadrants, then answer the questions in Application 6.2.

Application 6.2

Mapping Emotions

Think of a recent conflict. Describe to your small group, in just 3 minutes, the feelings you and others expressed in the conflict. Include verbal and nonverbal messages from that conflict. The group takes notes on what you report. Draw a circle for each party, placing the feelings in the correct quadrant. After each of you finishes, discuss what you notice about the emotions expressed. Might a *process conflict* show up in this discussion; that is, do the parties prefer to express emotion differently? Remember that sometimes conflict intensifies because parties disagree (implicitly) on how to express the conflict.

A tension of opposites is present in conflict—do we open up or close down? Do we soften or harden? (Baxter 2011; Sanford 2007; Welwood 1990) Do we avoid or engage; tighten up and turn away or relax and turn toward? (Cloke and Goldsmith 2000.) For the purposes of conflict transformation, we are concerned about whether the feelings open, broaden, and help people come toward each other for problem solving, or whether they shut us down, close us off, and lead us to withdraw from the person or the problem that arouses our feelings. Do we respond to emotions with communication that leads to healing and movement, or constriction of self, other, and relationship? Hard emotions commonly lead to blame, criticism, threats—tearing the fragile fabric of the web of connection—whereas softer emotions tend to lead to openings for transformation. The circumplex model provides a map so you can locate yourself in relationship to your usual style of emotional experience in conflict.

Core Concerns: Organizing Positive Emotions

Researchers at the Harvard Negotiation Project have pioneered the inclusion of emotion in conflict resolution, especially negotiation. (See the website to gain a comprehensive overview of their research over the past three decades.) The concept of *Core Concerns* helps organize their many good ideas about creative negotiating and conflict resolution (Fisher and Shapiro 2005; Shapiro 2011; Shapiro 2016). The **Core Concerns Framework** provides a system for dealing with the emotional dimension of conflict resolution. In the middle of a conflict, we find it difficult to remember all our communication skills, the best principles, how to use positive emotions, and how to avoid negative emotional triggers and ineffective practices. Students of conflict can use a simple-to-remember set of core concerns that will serve as a *lens* through which to view conflict and a *lever* to stimulate integrative approaches. Transformation of conflicts depends on taking into account these core concerns. These concerns, similar to the interests and goals explored in Chapter 3, are:

- *Appreciation* (recognition of value). No one wants to search for an integrative solution when being demeaned and dismissed.
- *Autonomy* (freedom to feel, think, take action, or decide). When an intimate says to you, through clenched teeth, "We are *not* talking about this. Now change the subject,"

³Nesse and Ellsworth (2009), adapted from Posner, Russell, and Peterson (2005).

your response might be, “You do *not* dictate to me what we will talk about. Who do you think you are?” Coercion guarantees lack of cooperation.

- **Affiliation** (emotional connection to others). Affiliation has to do with your emotional connection with a person or group. Stable connections generate positive emotions. Rejection, the flip side of affiliation, creates acute pain in the part of the brain that processes physical pain. When people are rejected, they stop cooperating, even if their best interests would be served by cooperating.
- **Status** (standing compared to others). Status also designates the relational concerns of a conflict—who we are to each other. Everyone wants enough status to feel empowered, or else, why engage in conflict?
- **Role** (effectiveness and meaningfulness of job label, designation of the person, and recognition) (Adapted from Shapiro 2016).

These motives appear to be hardwired into the motivational needs that inform, and sometimes govern, people’s lives. They are moderated by different cultures and different neurobiology and personal background. If you memorize them and practice using the principles, you will lay the foundation for your own “best practices in conflict resolution” approach. Conflict choices that take the core concerns into account result in more positive and productive emotions, which lead to integrative conflict resolution.

Finding Feelings

People sometimes find it difficult to talk about feelings, so let’s explore **feeling words** in more detail. Figure 6.2 provides an exhaustive list of feeling words that are commonly used when one’s needs are not satisfied. Choose words that might be clustered with anger, fear/anxiety, sadness, shame, or disgust to describe how Darlene and her father (presented in the case below) might be feeling. In the next section, we will discuss the function of positive and negative emotions. For now, expand your feeling-words repertoire by studying the words that describe what the two parties might be feeling.

Case 6.1

Big Sister, Little Sister

Mia and Mackenzie are sisters who are two years apart and are attending the same college. Mia is in her senior year of college, plays in the basketball team, and is involved in numerous student organizations. Mackenzie is starting her sophomore year, has a job on campus, rarely attends social events, and isn’t involved in many activities. Growing up, their parents looked to Mia to compel Mackenzie to be more social and extroverted. They are, again, asking her to do the same now so Mackenzie is able to build a network of friends and colleagues for her future career.

Mia: Mackenzie, I am glad you have a job on campus and are making friends. I would like for you to come to one of my meetings for the club I am in about preventing climate change. I think my friends would love to meet you. Also, college is an important time to explore different things.

Mackenzie: I don’t think so. I am fine with my job and the friends I have there. They can help me meet more people.

(continued)

Case 6.1

Big Sister, Little Sister

Mia: I know you are happy. But I really want to make sure you can start building an even bigger network with people who might be a little different from you and your friends.

Mackenzie: Why are you pushing this? I am fine at my job with my current friends and you weren’t on my case about this in high school. Why now?

Mia: I cared just as much about you building a larger network in high school. Why won’t you let me help you set yourself up for a stronger future in your career? I just want you to have all possible means to succeed.

Mackenzie: I’ll be fine, Mia. Don’t worry about me. Focus on what you are going to do when you graduate.

What do you think Mia is feeling, and why do you think she is feeling this way? Based on how different Mia and Mackenzie are feeling, what do you think Mia could have done differently when she approached Mackenzie? Go through the list of feeling words from the “when your needs are not being met” circle the words you feel are relevant to the sisters’ situation, and locate them on the Circumplex Model of Affect (Figure 6.4) for both Mia and Mackenzie.

Application 6.3

The Matter of Lights

Here is one example of the way emotions affect bodily experience, thinking, and behavior. Carrie and Jim live together. Jim feels strongly about the environment and wants to change most of the lights in their apartment to LEDs or compact florescent bulbs. He follows current information about the difference in energy use between incandescent and compact florescent bulbs or LEDs. He thinks he and Carrie should do their part to help the environment in this way. Carrie prefers the warm ambience of incandescent bulbs. She has been attempting to turn off lights frequently when they aren’t in use, and is willing to turn the thermostat down in the winter to conserve energy. Carrie comes home one day to find her favorite reading lamps converted to CFLs. She feels, literally, hot and bothered. Carrie then confronts Jim angrily, telling him that he had no right to change out the lamps she uses most without talking to her. Jim replies that he knew she would never agree so he just went ahead, hoping she would see that it was the right thing to do. What might happen next on the emotional level?

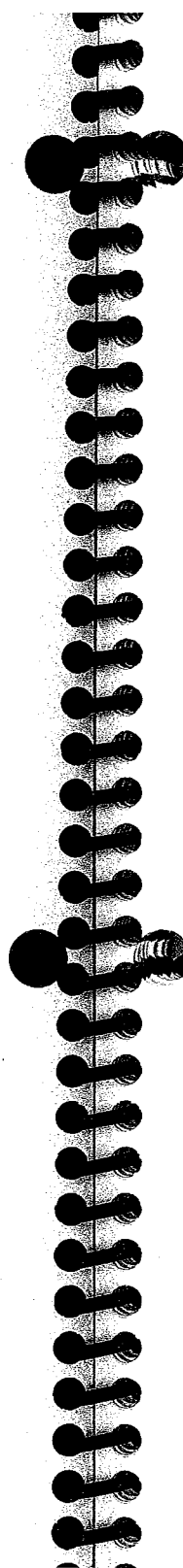
What might Jim *sense* in his body, *think* about the situation, and how might he *express* all this? What about Carrie? With your small group, answer the questions for Jim and Carrie, then discuss your responses. What opportunities for conflict and danger exist? What opportunities do you see for a constructive conversation? How might responding to this conflict mindfully add to the outcome?

We will start with the physiological level of their emotional response. Both might experience a tightening in their stomach, heightened blood pressure, and a felt sense of urgency. Both will feel aroused. They certainly feel “stirred up.” The exact nature of their *feelings* depends on their personal history, relationship history, interpretations, appraisal of what this means separately and for the relationship, and their sense of connection with each other. What specific feeling labels might they put to their “stirred up” state? Now continue your discussion with your small group. Now describe what Carrie and Jim’s attributions (thinking) might be, and how they might behave and communicate.

Figure 6.2 Feelings Inventory

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met, and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

Feelings when your needs are satisfied			
AFFECTIONATE	encouraged	GRATEFUL	PEACEFUL
compassionate	optimistic	appreciative	calm
friendly		moved	clear headed
loving	CONFIDENT	thankful	comfortable
open hearted	empowered	touched	centered
sympathetic	open		content
tender	proud	INSPIRED	equanimous
warm	safe	amazed	fulfilled
	secure	awed	mellow
		wonder	quiet
ENGAGED	EXCITED	JOYFUL	relaxed
absorbed	amazed	amused	relieved
alert	animated	delighted	satisfied
curious	ardent	glad	serene
engrossed	aroused	happy	still
enchanted	astonished	jubilant	tranquil
entranced	dazzled	pleased	trusting
fascinated	eager	tickled	
interested	energetic		REFRESHED
intrigued	enthusiastic	EXHILARATED	enlivened
involved	giddy	blissful	rejuvenated
spellbound	invigorated	ecstatic	renewed
stimulated	lively	elated	rested
	passionate	enthralled	restored
	surprised	exuberant	revived
HOPEFUL	vibrant	radiant	
expectant		rapturous	
		thrilled	
Feelings when your needs are not satisfied			
AFRAID	petrified	ANNOYED	impatient
apprehensive	scared	aggravated	irritated
dread	suspicious	dismayed	irked
foreboding	terrified	disgruntled	
frightened	wary	displeased	ANGRY
mistrustful	worried	exasperated	enraged
panicked		frustrated	furious
			incensed



indignant	indifferent	burnt out	unhappy
irate	numb	depleted	wretched
livid	removed	exhausted	TENSE
outraged	uninterested	lethargic	anxious
resentful	withdrawn	listless	cranky
		sleepy	distressed
AVERSION	DISQUIET	tired	distraught
animosity	agitated	weary	edgy
appalled	alarmed	worn out	fidgety
contempt	discombobulated		frazzled
disgusted	disconcerted	PAIN	irritable
dislike	disturbed	agony	jittery
hate	perturbed	anguished	nervous
horrified	rattled	bereaved	overwhelmed
hostile	restless	devastated	restless
repulsed	shocked	grief	stressed out
	startled	heartbroken	
CONFUSED	surprised	hurt	VULNERABLE
ambivalent	troubled	lonely	fragile
baffled	turbulent	miserable	guarded
bewildered	turmoil	regretful	helpless
dazed	uncomfortable	remorseful	insecure
hesitant	uneasy		leery
lost	unnerved	SAD	reserved
mystified	unsettled	depressed	sensitive
perplexed	upset	dejected	shaky
puzzled		despair	
torn	EMBARRASSED	despondent	YEARNING
	ashamed	disappointed	envious
DISCONNECTED	chagrined	discouraged	jealous
alienated	flustered	disheartened	longing
aloof	guilty	forlorn	nostalgic
apathetic	mortified	gloomy	pining
bored	self-conscious	heavy hearted	wistful ⁴
cold		hopeless	
detached	FATIGUE	melancholy	
distant	beat		
distracted			

⁴Source: 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication | Website: www.cnvc.org | Email: cnvc@cnvc.org | Phone: +1.505.244.4041

As you discuss this case, assume that Darlene is the person most likely to initiate a different set of communication interventions. You might also notice that the father and daughter are indeed engaging in conflict, although their family affection stays intact.

Functions of Negative Emotions

Emotions fit, although not “neatly,” into two main subjective categories. In addition to recognizing and categorizing emotions according to the circumplex model and the feeling words organized by the Nonviolent Communication Center, parties in conflict use a more informal and personal way to categorize emotions. People commonly refer to (1) *negative* emotions and (2) *positive* emotions. As discussed above, all emotions serve some adaptive function. Nevertheless, people typically refer to emotions as negative or positive. People who can distinguish among discrete emotions are usually better able to regulate negative emotions than those who make fewer distinctions and remain less knowledgeable (Rivers et al. 2006). The good news about research on positive emotions in conflict resolution is that positive emotions are finally receiving more attention. However, since anger and fear remain the emotions most people think of when they imagine or experience conflict, those troublesome and common emotions are presented first.

Anger

Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure, defined as a reaction to a perceived threat to person, belongings, or identity that can range in intensity from mild irritation to frustration and rage. Angry emotion threatens most people; few healthy people enjoy feeling angry or having others direct anger at them. Anger comes to life verbally by yelling, using command language, using sarcasm, and employing clipped and short tones, just for starters. Anger often shows nonverbally through a wide array of indicators including closed off body language, glaring, frowning, and slamming objects. Anger differs from aggression in that aggression is an attack, whereas “anger is the feeling connected to a perceived unfairness or injustice” (Young-Eisendrath 1997, 26). In this sense, anger helps people set boundaries when they need to be set, and to right wrongs. When we believe an action is unjust or wrong, our usual response is anger (Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt 1998). People who have an unrealistically high sense of self-esteem ride the horse of angry aggression more than people who are also motivated by the desire to solve problems, not seek vengeance, and avoid negative consequences (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden 1996).

Anger can be a wake-up call, a motivator, and an energizer—a source of empowerment (usually) for the person who feels it (Planalp 1999). Anger can mobilize and sustain energy at very high levels. We sense anger in our bodies by the awareness of heightened blood pressure, flushed face, sweating, muscle tightness, fast breathing, and a loud or high voice. When anger is expressed directly, the person to whom it is directed receives a warning—change or face the consequences (Planalp 1999). Self-responsibility calls for understanding our anger well enough so we don’t justify ineffective and harmful behavior “because she made me mad.” We can use anger to act, while we question which actions will be most helpful, effective, and will avoid backfiring into a spiral of hostility and revenge. In certain bureaucratic, high-pressure situations, such as in the courtroom (judges) and Transportation Security Organization employees, anger, intimidation, and sarcasm were found to help put role distance between employees and others and to build cohesion with colleagues. The authors of a study on these two organizations point out that

anger expression must be subtle for employees to be seen as professional (Scarduzio and Redden 2015). Even in high-stress environment, we would hardly respect a judge or TSO official who began screaming at a defendant.

Anger was termed “the moral emotion” by the ancients because it is based on a fast, reflective judgment that we have been wronged or threatened. We feel anger when our safety or our core values are threatened. Anger is “rooted in reason; it is equally of the heart and the head” (Young-Eisendrath 1994, 154). When an offense is real and important, the desire for revenge makes sense. However, in the flush of fresh anger, we may exaggerate an offense, plan revenge, and then charge off into unproductive conflict (Planalp 1999). Thinking about revenge can make people feel better as they imagine vengeful acts, but remorse sets in when people commit acts that may come back to shame or sanction them (Yoshimura 2007).

Expressing anger in an unrestrained way creates more anger. *Venting* (unrestrained expression of anger) does not discharge the emotion or reduce the feelings (Tavris 1989). In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea that “anger is cathartic” gained prominence; that discharging anger would make anger lessen. This idea was especially helpful for people, often women, who had learned to repress their anger, and above all, to be “nice.” Repression of anger leads to somatic concerns and an inauthentic way of living. Many people in the post-World War II era learned to conform, to repress their anger and other emotions, and to just “get on with it.” Women, especially, learned that their anger was seen as unfeminine. The second women’s movement of the 1970s and beyond helped change this harmful belief. Researchers now know that talking anger through in a way that does not escalate can be helpful; escalating verbal or physical anger usually escalates the anger emotion. Repression makes people sick and unhappy. Anger can be worked with in conversation.

The following suggestions aim to help you deal with your own anger constructively:

- Use your anger to *restore your sense of justice* and control over an intolerable situation (Cahn and Abigail 2007). Avoid creating harm. You can address a situation without making it worse or causing emotional injury.
- *Seek information* rather than immediately acting on anger. Deliberation in groups improves when people have more information, which mediates anger. The more information you have about facts, others’ perspectives and feelings, and background, the less likely you will be to act in a destructive manner, based on anger.
- *Direct your anger at the correct person* (adapted from Cahn and Abigail 2007). Avoid venting to “the world in general when you actually need to speak to a specific person.” Notice how insincere your response is when someone says, “Oh, I’m not mad at you—you’re just the only one who will listen.” Venting is not constructive, with the possible exception of a trusted intimate who will not take your anger personally. Be careful!
- *Reflect, calm down, and think* before you express your anger. Yes, you can “think while feeling.” Going with angry words before you have thought them through usually makes everything worse.
- *Use all your best communication skills*, such as “I” statements, reflections, rephrasing, open-ended questions, soft start-ups, and showing respect for the other while stating your own feelings and needs clearly.

- *Be courageous.* Rather than use indirect communication (sarcasm, snide comments, passive aggression, avoidance, and hiding behind e-mail or other electronic communication), pick up the phone, find the person, speak directly, and look him or her in the face.
- *Develop a keen awareness of how people react to you nonverbally.* Take seriously any criticism that you look or sound enraged, threatening, hostile, or demeaning.

The voice of intelligence is drowned out by the roar of fear. It is ignored by the voice of desire. It is contradicted by the voice of shame. It is biased by hate and extinguished by anger. Most of all, it is silenced by ignorance.

—Karl Menninger

Fear and Anxiety

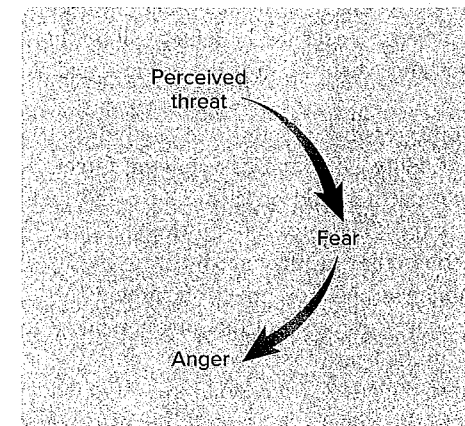
Fear and anxiety figure heavily in conflict resolution activities. These emotions can be found on the left quadrant of the circumplex model. Most experience fear and anxiety as actively unpleasant. During a conflict, to reap any advantage of fear, such as enhanced alertness, we need to cool down and help our opponents to calm their fears as well (Lindner 2014, 291). Fear leads people, first, to avoid. Fear does not have to involve “flight” in the commonplace “fight” or “flight” choice. Just as anger does not necessarily lead to fighting, fear does not necessarily lead to fleeing. Fear sometimes disables the physical and emotional systems as we “freeze,” not able to mobilize ourselves to do anything for a while. We may dissociate, or withdraw (even without knowing it), from the painful emotion of a situation. The threat often is perceived as personal and psychological. We feel threats to our integrity, or our sense of well-being, or the painful threat of loss of a person, position, or role that we value. Fear can create “tunnel vision” as we focus only on the threat and forget to look around and assess what else might be happening (Izard and Ackerman 2000). Fear is the key emotion in anxiety. When we worry about what may happen, we are *anxious or afraid*.

The phrase “dreading ahead” describes what many people feel when they describe their anxiety. One man described to us his anxiety about his wife taking a job in another town. He was worried (anxious) about both not wanting to give up his job and move, and not being able to find a new job as good as the one he would be leaving. He was temporarily frozen, experiencing great anxiety, dread, sadness, hurt, and depression. He was not able to discern what bothered him most until he began to list his anxious fears. Not surprisingly, he also discovered that he was angry that his wife presumed that she should go ahead and accept the new job without considering his feelings more fully.

Fear and anger often interact in a patterned way. When one focuses on the “target” of anger, the person or situation that may threaten something valuable, the **anger-fear sequence** is set into motion (Figure 6.3).

Consider the list of the dynamics of anger and fear below. Fear and hurt underlie most emotions of anger. Fear makes human beings experience **vulnerability** that we then experience as anger, more socially acceptable for adults than fear. The following list gives some examples of interpersonal anger situations along with possible intermixed fears/anxieties. Study these, then list a few angry situations of your own and see if you can discern how fear/anxiety might be mixed in with your own anger.

Figure 6.3 Anger-Fear Sequence



Anger Situations

1. A woman is angry with her friend for calling her a mean name in public. (She is fearful of not being accepted by others and of losing face.)
2. A newly promoted employee is angry because his assistant didn't submit the final report to him on time. (He is afraid that his own supervisor will think he is not working hard enough, and he really needs this job.)
3. A husband is furious that his spouse has disclosed their private life to others in a hurtful way. (He is frightened that their bond is no longer strong and that their relationship is ending.)
4. A single parent overreacts to a child's misbehaving at a family reunion by raising his voice and ordering the child into a time out. (He is afraid that other family members will criticize his parenting.)
5. An intimate partner casually indicates that she might change her plans and not visit her fiancé when she had planned. Her partner says, “Well, if you have better things to do than honor your commitments, go ahead.” (He has asked an old friend to meet his significant other and fears looking foolish after speaking in glowing terms about the wonderful woman he wants his friend to meet. He is afraid he is unimportant to her, and he doesn't want to lose face with his friend.)

Hurt

Hurt is an intense emotion that comes from feeling psychologically injured by another person (Guerrero and LaValley 2006; Vangelisti and Sprague 1998). Hurt is inherently interpersonal, even if the injury happened long ago. When people are deeply hurt, they experience intensely strong feelings such as agony, despair, anger, sadness, and suffering. Hurt is a difficult emotion to experience without looking for someone to blame. The feeling of being injured is painful enough that human nature causes us, often, to look for a cause of the hurt. Often, someone has caused the hurt—true enough. When a partner betrays another, the “cause,” or at least the trigger, of the hurt is very clear. When the injured party stays frozen

in the hurt/blame cycle, little changes. Great skill is required for both the injured party and the person causing the harm to reconcile with each other, if they want to do so. Many times, hurt is made worse when the person causing the injury will not listen or will not accept any responsibility. Relationships end when the hurt is too great and the attempts at repair are inadequate.

Common relational transgressions (Metts 1994) include betraying a confidence, leaving someone out, sexual infidelity, lying and covering up, forgetting plans or special occasions, flirting with a former partner, and physical abuse and making unfair comparisons to other people (Bachman and Guerrero 2003a; Metts 1994). The best conflict resolution approach when someone tells you they are hurt, or even, “you hurt my feelings,” is to inquire about what happened and how they interpreted the action. Listen and don’t defend. You will be able to have your say, but the hurt person (whether you think the hurt is reasonable or not) needs to be heard first. Then you can say, “I would like to tell you my perspective; can you listen to me now?” (after you have reflected what you heard).

Attachment theory currently explains not only to infant/caregiver bonds, but also adult relationships. Secure connections remain essential for physical health and human thriving (Coan 2010; Early and Early 2011). The purpose of constructive conflict resolution is to solve problems and preserve relationships. In the case of hurt and disrupted attachment (anxious/ambivalent, avoidant, insecure, or disorganized) (Cozolino 2010), a key moment of *rupture* can change everything. One long-term friendship between two men changed irrevocably due to one man’s angry attack on his friend in front of a group of men on vacation together. They were not able to *repair* the rupture even though both tried. When an “attachment injury” occurs, the needed response is repair. The good news is that ruptures can be repaired and connections can be woven together again (Early and Early 2011). Dynamics can shift from danger through safety by creating a new story, a co-constructed narrative, or a “third way.” Ignoring a rupture by denying that the other “should” not feel hurt usually ends the relationship, or at least a relationship of depth.

Application 6.4

What Would Have Helped?

Think of a time when you hurt someone, or someone hurt you. First, write the feelings or emotions you felt. Then write your assumptions about the other person, about yourself, and about your relationship. What were the behaviors? From your perspective now, what might have helped? This could be something either of you could have done. You could share only the last part of this activity, “What might have helped?” with your small group if you would like to preserve your privacy. It may be the case that nothing could have helped; the rupture brought too much hurt. Not all hurts can be repaired, but the basic movement of “rupture/repair” restores connection and safety.

Humiliation

While fear is basic, anger more complex, hurt even more complex, humiliation carries even deeper layers of emotion, and is more complex than anger, fear, and hurt. The act of humiliation involves putting someone down, holding them down, while rendering them helpless to resist the debasement (Lindner 2014). Humiliation administers a devastating identity injury. For a while, researchers viewed humiliation as another form of shame. Given the

violence unleashed in the world (such as in terrorism), as well as among those known to each other, humiliation deserves more attention in conflict resolution. When a person feels debased and humiliated, then that person is not available for integrative conflict resolution. Differences can lead to transformation of difficult conflicts, but only in the framework of respect. When condescension, patronizing, and arrogance (all forms of disrespect) braid through any relationship, no transformation of a conflict is possible (Lindner 2014). Verbal forms of humiliation reflect a dominating style of communication. Fear of being overcome underlies the feelings of a bully or a dominator. If the person doing the humiliating in an interpersonal context is not amenable to change, it may rest on the skill of bystanders, people who are not the victims of humiliation, to speak up. Not everyone being humiliated has the power to say, “I will not allow you to disrespect me,” stopping the dangerous interaction. You may, however. You might say, “Kevin, David does not deserve to be spoken to that way. The way I see it is. . . .” or “This line of conversation is not productive. Would you be willing to say what you are saying another way?” Then if the bully keeps going, you can say, forcefully, “Please, stop now.”

Sadness and Depression

Sadness and depression also influence conflict resolution. These feelings comprise the southwest quadrant of the circumplex model. Sadness is not always a “negative” emotion, although few like to feel sad. Sadness, mourning, and grief can in fact strengthen social bonds. For instance, when loved ones come together around the death of a friend or family member, the values of community and friendship are reaffirmed. Averill (1968) suggests that in the course of evolution, grief increased the probability of surviving because of the ways that enduring bonds are formed. Social media presents both a way to communicate about a loss and express grief in an online community. Caution should be taken, however, in using social media for communicating with glibness about a life-changing event for the bereaved (Rosetto, Lannutti, and Strauman 2015). Social media provides both an opportunity for community connection and a reason to take care.

Sadness slows a person down. This may give a chance for deeper reflection on what is happening, giving the sad person more choices to take care of oneself and others. Sadness communicates that there is trouble (Tomkins 1963) so the person should pay attention to one’s circumstances. Sadness is adaptive as well, because it may create a bridge of empathy to another person. Unrelieved sadness may create anger or resentment over a long time; this may turn into depression. In addition, many clinicians report elevated feelings of anger, along with sadness and anxiety, when people are depressed (Rutter, Izard, and Read 1986). Extreme sadness commonly leads to an almost total loss of pleasure and interest in one’s surroundings, and also leads to dejection and withdrawal. A person who is overwhelmingly sad cannot participate in creative conflict transformation. It’s too difficult. Sadness and depression refer to different emotional states. When sadness turns into clinical depression, you will help yourself by seeking professional help, or your friends by suggesting they seek assistance. If you experience overwhelming sadness, a flat feeling, or an inability to motivate yourself to do the things that will help yourself (exercise; seeking positive activities; socializing with friends; and reflecting on your automatic, negative thoughts), then you will benefit from professional assistance.

Sadness may help advance conflict resolution because feeling sad all the time is so unpleasant that we are moved to find new solutions to problems. When we are so depressed

we can hardly get out of bed to function normally, we may ask, “What is wrong and what can I do about it?” For example, Pamela found herself very sad every time she turned into her driveway after work. Even though the day might have gone well enough at work, when she came home she found herself feeling sad. One day she went to her friend’s house after work and told her she just didn’t want to go home, then burst into tears. Pamela’s mother had died a few months before this interaction. Her husband Baird went to the farthest end of the house and turned on the TV when Pamela cried. Several times Pamela told Baird that she needed comfort when she was so sad. Baird, however, felt extremely uncomfortable with Pamela’s tears. He said once, when she asked for comfort, “But there’s nothing I can do. I am sorry your mother is gone but I can’t change anything.” Pamela felt more sorrow and loneliness at this point. Finally, after talking with her friend, Pamela decided to talk with Baird. After explaining how she felt about coming home, their dialogue sounded like this:

Application 6.5 Sadness Leads to a Better Solution

- Pamela: Baird, I know you care that my mother died and that I am so sad. But when you go to the den and turn on the TV when I’m crying, I feel more lonely than ever. I start to tell myself that you don’t care.
- Baird: I care a lot but there’s nothing I can do.
- Pamela: There is a *lot* you can do. You can listen to me, hold my hand, tell me you are here for me, and that you are sorry I’m feeling so awful.
- Baird: But that’s not doing anything. I can’t change anything and I feel helpless.
- Pamela: You could change a lot for me. I wouldn’t feel so alone. I didn’t know you felt helpless.
- Baird: Yes—I see you so miserable and feel awful that I can’t do anything.

As this conversation progressed, both Pamela and Baird softened instead of hardened. Pamela had been hardening into the perspective that “He doesn’t care.” Baird had been hardening into the story that “Nothing I do makes any difference.” They found different ways to stay together through Pamela’s sadness.

Some gender differences occur in the expression of sadness. Women are often more likely to express sadness and cover up their anger, whereas men are usually more likely to express anger and cover up sadness (Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead 1998). In the previous example, Pamela moved from sadness to anger at her husband’s inability to comfort her. Baird felt angry at himself that he didn’t know what to do. Then he retreated into sadness. Both misunderstood the emotions of the other until they talked through their dilemma.

Too little sadness expression commonly leads to distorted emotional expression; too much sadness expression can burden others. One function of sadness is that people experiencing sadness are more likely than others to attempt to change their situation by cognitive reappraisal (“I don’t think he meant to hurt me in the way he did; he was busy and distracted”) or by apologizing or listening to music or doing other activities to change their mood. Women have been found to be more skillful at emotion regulation in general (Rivers et al. 2007). This gender-skill difference brings many challenges to heterosexual couple relationships. Same-sex relationships with women often benefit from both partners being willing

to deal with sadness in conversation. More depends on personality than gender, however. Some female couples experience the same challenges as opposite-sex relationships.

Disgust, Contempt, and Revulsion

Disgust, contempt, and revulsion are emotions that move to expel something noxious or repulsive. In an adaptive sense, it makes sense to think that humans who learned to “spit out” or expel bad food or water were more likely to survive. In interpersonal communication, we may be trying to “get rid of” something (someone) repulsive when we use disdain, contempt, condescension, and demeaning comments. We explored earlier in the book how damaging contempt is in intimate relationships. Humiliation depends on contemptuous communication and must be interrupted for anything positive to occur.

Disgust is one of those emotions to feel, reflect upon, and *not communicate* about until you understand and process the raw emotion. Revulsion and disgust both break relationship connections on the emotional level. Yet, disgust and revulsion might serve a positive function, as the following example shows. Kristin was a new bank employee. She was mentored by a senior banker, a man with a very strong, dominating personality. In one session, Mark, the senior executive, was upset with Kristin’s handling of a client. He said, “We’re just about done here. I don’t have time to sit around all day and keep telling you how to cultivate clients like this who have a lot of money. You’re not getting it. I’ll give you one more chance. Watch me more closely next time.” Kristin felt angry, hurt, belittled, threatened—and also noticed when she left Mark’s office that she felt nauseated. Her revulsion led her to question whether she wanted to continue under Mark’s verbally abusive mentoring. She asked her senior manager to assign her to someone else. Gottman’s research (1993) explores the *cascade effect* that often goes into motion when disgust and contempt are expressed. We referred to “the four horsemen of the apocalypse” in Chapter 1. Gottman found that couples headed for divorce exhibit this pattern: “complaining and criticizing, which leads to contempt, which leads to defensiveness, which leads to . . . withdrawal from interaction (stonewalling)” (110).

Contempt *expressed* is like pointing a loaded gun at someone, pulling the trigger, and then being surprised when they fall over (or the relationship is killed). Worse, sometimes contempt is used consciously as a weapon to weaken the other person and gain power in a relationship. It’s a good idea to get out of contemptuous relationships if you cannot influence the other, or yourself, to change.

Shame, Guilt, and Regret

Shame and guilt play an important role in regulating conflict. When people break social norms, and receive formal or informal social sanctions (“How could you have done that?”), they may feel shame, guilt, embarrassment, regret, or remorse (Nugier et al. 2007). When you act in a way that is incompatible with your own standards, your ideal self, or your own sociocultural values, you may feel these uncomfortable emotions (Frijda 1986; Fisher and Shapiro 2005).

Shame often increases social cohesion, as long as one does not stay stuck in personal shame. We try to avoid shameful situations because we lose face, lose self-esteem, and generally feel miserable (Izard and Ackerman 2000, 260). Shame may also be present in fear and anxiety. “Shaming” others usually leads to defensiveness, and works poorly as a conflict resolution tactic. When we recognize that others feel shame or embarrassment, we

can further the cause of good conflict management by remaining gentle and considerate. Shame hurts.

Shame also creates negative responses. Berry (2016, 130) recounts a story of Ena, a woman who had repeatedly suffered bullying in school during her youth. When a bully approached her in class, in front of other students, and with the teacher not far away, she reported, “I did not move, though I was screaming inside to do so. I never understood how fear could do that to bodies. I did not ‘fight,’ nor did I experience ‘flight.’ I just took it . . . At the same time I felt guilt and confusion. . . .” Ena experienced freezing, shame, fear, and guilt all at the same time. In this way, shame can function to keep a desperately needed change of power from happening. In Chapter 7 we dig deeper into bullying, including the role that shame places in this violence.

People usually experience guilt when they perceive that they have injured, unjustly hurt, or failed to help someone (Guerrero and LaValley 2006). Guilt that comes when people actually do or do not do things they value can motivate people to act differently, for instance, to choose a nonreactive approach and to collaborate more quickly. Some people feel guilt all the time, but that feeling is more akin to shame (about who one is as a person). Real guilt comes from real actions or lack of actions. Making amends, as the 12-step programs for recovery from substance abuse require, helps. Making amends means expressing that you are aware of the harm you caused and that you take responsibility for it. Making amends, a form of repair, tends to restore connections and restore self-esteem for all parties. The feeling of guilt is often so unpleasant for most people that if they can avoid their “run and hide” impulse, and move toward the injured party, the guilty person will feel a lot better.

Regret can also serve a helpful role in conflict resolution. Painful regret can push one to action rather than leave you mired in a sense of sorrow, self-pity, or helplessness (Buechler 2008). You can probably remember times of painful regret, when something you did could not be undone, but haunted you with feelings of regret. Regret can heal relationships when we atone for mistakes, and when we learn from the past situation how to manage our lives differently in the future. One example might be a situation in which you neglect an important friendship. When your friend inquires, “Is something wrong? Did I do something to offend you?” this inquiry might well move you to take action if you value the friendship. You can invite your friend to do something, make her a priority, set aside time, and restore connections between you. Regret ignored can turn into self-pity (“I never seem to get it right”), which does no one any good.

Functions of Positive Emotions

Many times we do not think of positive emotions in relation to the effective management of conflict. Several decades of research, especially the ideas of Seligman when he was president of the American Psychological Association, Isen (1987), Fredrickson (2003), Fisher and Shapiro (2005), Socha (2008), and Shapiro (2011) demonstrate the creative value of positive emotions. Positive emotions radiate outward into integrative and transformative conflict.

Joy, Love, and Laughter

Joy, love, and laughter clearly provided an adaptive role in human development. For instance, altruistic individuals were more likely to “tend and befriend,” and therefore survive catastrophes. Positive emotions broaden an individual’s mindset, allowing one to *broaden and build*. Whether in the lab or in everyday life, when people feel positive emotions such as interest,

joy, altruism, hope, sympathy, and empathy, they are more likely to think creatively. When people feel good, they are more likely to integrate new ideas, be flexible, and remain open to information (Fredrickson 2003). When people feel safe, they are more able to grasp the opportunities of conflict instead of remaining paralyzed by the danger of conflict.

Some organizations use these ideas for team building. When colleagues are able to play together, they are more likely to clarify their life priorities, strengthen social ties, and build skills to express love and care. In work-related conflicts, colleagues are more likely to choose cooperative modes of conflict resolution when they like each other and have shared positive emotional experiences (DeSilvilya and Yagil 2005). When students were asked to think of positive meaning in their daily lives, at the end of a month they scored higher on psychological resilience than those who focused on some neutral task (Fredrickson 2003). Interest and joy in play interacts with affiliation (Izard and Ackerman 2000). *Rituals* such as eating and playing games help people engage their feelings rather than just their cognitive abilities (Maiese 2006). Eating a meal together can help people relax and think of their opponents as people who want to solve problems. Many cultures signal the end of hostilities by having a meal together, giving gifts, and sharing greetings and apologies. *Nonhostile joking* helps people see each other as friendly others rather than enemies (Maiese 2006). Positive feelings (induced by watching positive-emotion films) help boost broadened thinking, and vice versa (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002).

Community conflict resolution and transformation create a “positive spiral” in an important way—people who give help can feel proud of their good deeds, and people who receive help often feel grateful. Even people who simply witness good deeds can feel elevated and more joyful (Fredrickson 2003).

Happiness, Serenity, and Contentment

Happiness, serenity, and contentment contribute greatly to resolving conflicts. When you approach a problem with interest and a positive attitude, you communicate these feelings to others involved, and they, too, are motivated to work with you (Deci 1992; Izard and Ackerman 2000). Serenity might be explained as a kind of balance and equanimity; whatever happens in a conflict, the relationship will be preserved, along with an individual’s sense of self. *Positive emotions lead to empathy and sympathy*. Communicating *warmth* indicates that you see the other not as an enemy, but as a partner in conflict (Lindner 2014). Much, that is positive, is communicated through statements indicating confidence and warmth, serenity and optimism, such as:

“I’m glad to get a chance to work on this issue with you.”

“We can come to a good outcome instead of wasting our energy struggling against each other. I feel confident that we can work together.”

“What a relief to be facing this issue directly instead of skirting around it.”

“I am interested in what you have to say.”

(To an intimate): “You are important to me. I will do whatever it takes for us to get past this time of hostility and mistrust. I remember what it feels like to actually like each other.”

“That’s hilarious. I never thought of myself that way—you may be right. Uh oh!”

“OK, I’ll put down my guns if you will. We’re scaring each other to death.”

“After this meeting, I hope we will set up a meal for our team to look forward to. This much hard work deserves a celebration.”

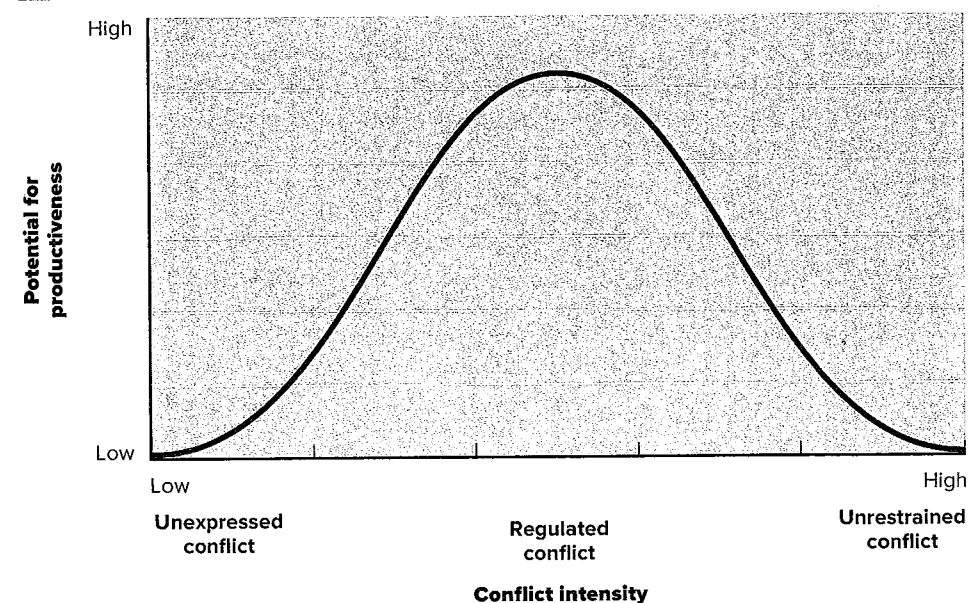
Notice that stating optimistic confidence sets the conditions for elevating the communication bar, so to speak, to a high level, and expecting the best.

Throughout the first part of this book, we emphasized the importance of taking the other’s perspective while holding fast to your own thoughts and feelings. When we assume that others want essentially what we want, we can join with them to solve problems instead of seeing the other person as the problem. While incompatible goals certainly exist, people of goodwill want to solve the current problem and enhance the relationship enough to transform a conflict into an opportunity. The metagoal can help transform competing goals. Effective conflict resolution draws on feelings about and for the other person, and for oneself. Creative solutions transform anger, fear, hostility, and mistrust into confidence, contentment, and trust.

• The Mid-Range: Zone of Effectiveness

Conflicts that are worked out in the **mid-range** of the level of emotional intensity typically resolve more effectively than those that are left unexpressed or are handled with unrestrained emotion. See Figure 6.4 for a graphical depiction of regulated conflict. Aristotle wrote about the Golden Mean and the Buddha taught about the Middle Way. Low productivity occurs when interpersonal conflicts are either not identified (but the emotions leak out anyway) or when people indulge in unrestrained emotion (thus leading others to fight or flee). A lack of regulation in personal conflicts damages the process. For instance, a divorcing couple, attempting to share the custody of their two children, was close to agreement when the wife exploded in a mediation session, saying, “He’s selfish! He always was

Figure 6.4 Continuum of Conflict Intensity



and always will be!” Her unregulated outburst ruined the chance for collaboration on their problem. Regardless of the specific content, after an episode has passed, the other person will likely recall what you said and did during the conflict. *People have long memories for bad treatment.* Even if you feel perfectly justified for blowing up, your “bad behavior” will remain in memory even if the conflict outcome works out reasonably well. You may lose a relationship while trying to solve a problem.

Venting does little, if anything, to help the conflict process. Venting (or avoiding) does not remain your only option for expression. If you feel the need to vent, do it with a safe friend, a counselor, or designated third party—not the conflict partner with whom you are attempting to work. Venting can feel wonderful for a while—but the price is usually too high to warrant the “Yes!” feeling of telling the other person off.

Unthinking avoidance of a conflict—pretending you don’t have strong feelings when you do—will ultimately fail. Your feelings will come through, and the problem will remain unresolved. Young couples who avoided emotional expression, especially when men avoided speaking their emotion, were less happy than those who engaged in mid-range emotional expression (Velotti et al. 2016). Avoidance leads to resentment, whereas unregulated emotional expression leads to broken bonds of trust and affection.

Moderated emotions in conflict bring many advantages. The escalatory spiral will be halted, you will learn more with self-restraint, and you will be able to be more creative in your options when you don’t create a bitter enemy. You will not take actions, such as revenge, that you would later regret or have to justify (Yoshimura 2007). Restraint of your emotions, but not suppression, allows trust to build when trust has broken down.

Mindfulness: Thinking About Feelings

How do we learn to manage the raw emotions that make up conflict? As Welwood (1990) writes in his book on love and relationships, we try to manage our lives so we avoid “raw” feelings, but in fact we are human partly because we feel so deeply. He refers to feelings as “raw” because we feel tender and vulnerable, but also because our emotions, at the beginning of a conflict, are “uncooked.” They have not been processed. When we approach conflict as a **warrior of the heart**, we draw on some of the metaphors from earlier in the book. Conflict is a dance, or is a mode of martial arts, and is like stepping along an unfamiliar path. Since we cannot avoid conflict, we can learn to move skillfully. No more positive metaphor exists for all that is good in conflict than the *heart*. When in danger, we may remind ourselves not to lose heart. You might be described by your friends as a person having a heart of gold, or being warm-hearted. The heart is viewed as filled with positive emotions and feelings (Reeves 2010). Hearts can also be cold or hard. Approaching conflict by practicing mindfulness, we have the option to choose to soften and open our hearts to others with compassion, and to ourselves as worthy of good treatment.

These ideas will be helpful as you start out on the difficult warrior path of working with strong emotions. **Awareness** is “by far the most essential, powerful resource we have for effecting change and working with life’s challenges” (Riskin 2010; Welwood 1990, 23). Awareness draws not on “knowing about something,” but on *clarity*. We are clear when we can use all our senses to tell what is actually happening and when we can move with *fluidity*, as though we are a zoom lens that can move in and out to change perspective. When we stay clear and fluid, we can stay stable instead of being blown around or thrown off our path. We can cultivate mindfulness of others’ needs, as well as our own; becoming less self-centered builds bridges

instead of walls. When a person takes a mindful posture and works to stay reflective instead of reactive, that person will become more aware of the ways she filters incoming information. She becomes aware of her biases and distortions, saying, “Hmm, I usually misperceive very talkative, confident women. I’d better listen more carefully.” She knows herself and her distorted lens, which enables her to correct her lens, at least some of the time.

Chapman (2012) teaches a mindfulness tool in communication workshops. The metaphor used to notice whether communication is open, closed, or somewhere in-between is the traffic light. Using this image, a *green light* communication pattern means communication is flowing well, a *red light* indicates closed or defensive communication, or a lack of listening, and a *yellow light* indicates something in between red light and green light. Working with the yellow light takes practice in mindfulness (Chapman 2012, 6). Mindful communication means that when you sense uncertainty, confusion, or danger that you slow down (yellow light).

Application 6.6

Traffic Light Mindfulness Practice

You can practice this in your small group.

1. Choose a current, emotion-laden conflict to role-play.
2. Choose people to take the roles of two or three people. As the people discuss how to transform the conflict, others hold up red, green, or yellow cards to indicate the emotional tone in the conflict.
3. Any time a yellow card goes up, everyone in the role-play stops for a count of five to think about what they are feeling, then resumes the conversation. Try this as a tool for learning mindfulness.
4. What did you learn when you stopped at the yellow light, to reflect on what to say next?

Another mindfulness practice is to *remain compassionate* toward ourselves and others. **Compassion** makes us strong and expanded as conflict managers; since when we are compassionate, we make space for our own feelings and the feelings of others. Making space is like stepping out of the flames (of emotion), but rather than running from the fire, we sit “next to it,” look into the fire, and reflect on what is hurting. We have freedom to think, feel, move, and choose actions (Welwood 1990, 24). Calm reflection often leads to compassion.

When strong emotions toss us around, we feel so miserable or anxious or furious or scared that we begin to *tell ourselves stories*. These stories become bad mental habits that lead us to take shortcuts to action/reaction instead of thinking and feeling our way along a new path in a conflict. These “stories” become dramas that we believe are true, as was the case for Pamela and Baird as they told themselves stories about each other regarding Pamela’s grief and Baird’s response. Stories filter what we are able to think and feel. As we listen and tell our conflict narratives with an ear to the underlying emotion, we receive invaluable information about what our own and the other’s core concerns really are. When we notice a shift in emotion, we can usually figure out why and how the conflict became intractable or reached impasse. Being mindful entails leaning into, and putting ourselves “on the spot” of, the challenges (and joys)

that are present and so influential in conflict; attempting to stay grounded, even though strong emotions create the conditions for groundlessness (Chödrön 1997).

We periodically return to the topic and practice of compassion in the book because it is a fundamental aspect of mindfulness, and, in turn, an important dimension to effectively responding to conflict. As Chödrön (1997) writes:

When we talk of compassion, we usually mean working with those less fortunate than ourselves. Because we have better opportunities, a good education, and good health, we should be compassionate toward those poor people who don’t have any of that. However, in working with the teachings on how to awaken compassion and in trying to help others, we might come to realize that compassionate action involves working with ourselves as much as working with others. Compassionate action is a practice, one of the most advanced. There’s nothing more advanced than relating with others. There’s nothing more advanced than communication—compassionate communication (101–102).

Compassionate communication is vital for all parties in conflict . . . compassionate for others and us. Why is compassion so vital? Also, do you know anyone whose life would likely be better, more at ease and happier, if that person were to practice self-compassion? Could that someone be you?

Practice your awareness of the **triggering event**. When you know what sets you off, you are usually better able to handle the episode creatively (Shapiro 2016). You can pinpoint that exact moment when a discussion turns into a conflict. Many times you will notice a defensive reaction, a rebuff, a rude comment, an explosion of anger, or your own inner emotion or story that notifies you, “That’s enough. I’ve had it.” Or you might notice someone else about to lose it. One of the best transformation tools depends on metacommunication (see Chapter 4), such as, “We need to tread carefully here,” or “I’d like to slow this down.” Respond to the triggering even with care and excellent communication, rather than escalation or extreme emotional expression.

Finally, the “warrior of the heart” needs *courage*. Courage is ordinarily depicted as a characteristic of “the lone, separate person who defies vulnerability and fear” (Jordan 2008). Jordan, one of the pioneers of the Relational-Cultural Model of Therapy, developed her ideas, as does Welwood, on a different model of courage. Courage derives from the Latin root *cor*, meaning heart, “the seat of feeling, thought” (Jordan 2008). Courage involves bringing even painful truths into a relationship. It often involves courage to come into conflict. We have thoroughly explored the lures of both avoidance and escalation. Courage of the heart and feelings involves finding the truth with awareness, resisting the tried and true stories that propel us to act in habituated ways, and the true bravery required to act in an honest and compassionate manner.

Jordan suggests that we redefine vulnerability as an emotion and position that requires courage. Vulnerability indicates “we are open to the influence of others at the same time that we are open to our need for others” (Jordan 2008, 213). In a dominant, power-over culture, we don’t feel safe when vulnerable. In a connected, relational culture, we can be moved by our feelings, express them with care, and continue to resolve our differences.

We will practice some of the “first steps” ideas for dealing with feelings by studying the following case and applying the ideas presented above.

Case 6.2

It's Not Yours to Loan!

Victor and Tom are a married couple. They both work in real estate, Victor in mortgage financing and Tom in sales. Tom's grandmother died and left each of her five grown grandchildren \$100,000. Victor and Tom were amazed and pleased. As they talked, they agreed to put the money into a money market account until the real estate market settled down, at that time they would make a down payment on their next home. Both Tom and Victor like the duplex they bought when they married. They can afford the current mortgage because one side of the duplex is rented. They feel no hurry to buy something larger, although they are quite crowded, especially since the value of their duplex has dropped. In a recent appraisal, they were disappointed at how the duplex had lost value.

Half a year went by. Victor usually managed the money, paying bills out of a joint checking account to which both contribute. One day Tom was at the bank and as he made a deposit, noticed that the money market account was down by about \$50,000. In alarm, he asked the teller to track down the activity on the account. What he found shocked him. Victor had taken \$50,000 out 3 months before, then had made small deposits back into the account since then. He rushed home and confronted him. After a long, escalating fight in which Victor was first evasive, then defensive, and Tom was accusing and unbelieving, Victor confessed what had happened. His parents had gotten themselves into trouble with credit card debt. Victor arranged to loan them \$50,000 with their promise and assurance that they would quickly pay him back. But Victor's mother needed an unexpected operation. His parents had made no payments back to Victor. Victor, panicked, tried to replenish the account but knew he could never do it on his salary. Here is part of their first conflict episode:

Tom: I cannot believe you would deceive me and do something so dangerous, dishonest, and selfish. What about our plans? You had absolutely no right to touch that money without talking to me. *(Notice harsh start-up.)*

Victor: I feel terrible. But my parents had a good plan for paying us back. It's not their fault that Mom had to have surgery. Have a heart, Tom. *(He is not taking Tom's outrage seriously.)*

Tom: They needed help for their credit card problems and stupid debts. I might have wanted to help, but you didn't ask. Now I can't trust you. You are not the man I thought you were—you are a sneak and I will never be able to trust you again. *(Now he is using damaging labeling.)*

Victor: Fine!!! I'll put every cent of my salary in the fund and you can tell my parents that you wouldn't help them. I'll tell them how selfish you are. What son wouldn't want to help his parents when they had gotten in trouble because of terrible jobs and a sinking economy? We had the money, and they didn't. They'll pay us back. I had no idea you were so heartless. *(He's threatening and attacking Tom's character.)*

Tom: And I had no idea you were so gullible and deceitful! There's no earthly way your parents could have paid us back, even without your Mom's operation. You care more about them than our plans. *(More labeling and attacking, this time, of Victor's parents.)*

Victor: And you apparently care more about money than love and helping out. *(Character assassination!)*

(continued)

Case 6.2

It's Not Yours to Loan!

Using the ideas of Welwood, Riskin, Chapman, and Jordan from our earlier discussion, let's see what *awareness, flexibility, mindfulness, compassion, and vulnerability* might sound like. A counselor asked each of them to reflect on the storm of emotion they were feeling before they talked with each other about the conflict again. They each wrote in a journal as they reflected.

Victor: *I can see from the look on Tom's face and hear in his voice that he is shocked and dismayed. It's extremely painful to me to know that I betrayed his trust. I wish I had talked to him and told him about my parents' need. I was afraid that he would say no, and I believed that with a bonus coming in at Dad's business, they would be able to pay us back. Well, I see that I was not thinking. I just wanted to help and I felt guilty having the money and not helping them. I want to let Tom know that our values are different. In my culture, you help people in your family who are in need, period. But I hated feeling scared all the time and I'm actually glad Tom found out. I don't know what to do.*

Tom: *I feel awful about blowing up at Victor the way I did. I humiliated him. And yet I felt so shocked and scared that he took my money without telling me. More than that, I realize that I don't like or trust his parents. I am furious that they manipulated him, the way they have done before with kids in the family. Victor's right, in a way. I do feel ungenerous with them. His dad's an alcoholic and his mom works way too hard. His dad expects people to take care of him. I think his mom put all those charges on the credit cards because she feels entitled to whatever she wants. I feel sorry for Victor's mom. I'm still angry at Victor, but I have seen for years how his parents take advantage of their kids. But I can't talk to Victor about that—he'd be really hurt. And now we are furious with each other. But under all that, I feel scared and sad. It's not really the money; it's the trust issue. And I can imagine something like this happening in the future.*

Tom and Victor are on their way to becoming "warriors of the heart." They are telling the truth to themselves, which will enable them to tell the truth to each other, and likely solve their problems. With help, they can tackle the trust issues, rebuild their bond with each other, make agreements about hearing what the other needs to say, no matter what, and repair the rupture in their relationship.

Before the counselor asked them to reflect in their journals, and then talk with each other again, Tom and Victor had begun to tell themselves stories, make predictions, and believe these predictions. If they had listed their "stories," or **automatic thoughts**, they would have been following "hot thoughts." Wires that carry electricity are called "hot" wires. Similarly, the automatic thoughts that are most connected to strong feelings are called "hot" thoughts. These thoughts conduct the emotional charge, so these are the thoughts that are important to identify, examine, and sometimes alter to change our feelings (adapted from Greenberger and Padesky 1995).

Case 6.3

Strong Emotions and Automatic Thoughts

Write down a situation that you are experiencing in the present or immediate past about which you have strong emotions, like Tom and Victor did. Then write down the automatic thoughts (the hot ones) that lead from your emotional situation. Some questions that might help you discover your automatic stories are these:

- What was going through my mind just before I started to feel this way?
- What am I afraid might happen?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if it is true?
- What does this mean about how the other person(s) feels and thinks about me?
- What images or memories do I have in this situation? (from Greenberger and Padesky 1995: 51)
- What other conflict situations in my lived experience would benefit from the practice of engaging strong emotions and automatic thoughts with mindfulness?

Here is another example of a situation full of feeling.

Case 6.4

You Voted for Who?

You have just discovered that your fiancé has voted the opposite ticket from you in the presidential primary election. You have both argued over this; you cannot believe that he/she feels so differently. Your fiancé reminds you that you share a lot of values in common, but you still feel disbelieving and shocked. *Automatic thoughts:*

If we are so different on something as important as who is president, what will this mean for our future together?

I am ashamed to tell my family how my partner voted.

I never saw myself as being married to someone so different from me. Is there more about him/her that I don't know? How can I find out?

Is this marriage right for me?

Using awareness to gain clarity, to build in space to reflect, to stop oneself from telling stories, and to remain gentle with oneself and others is a key tool for working with feelings. Feelings are facts, but with attention and care, we can work with our feelings and still be honest and be ourselves.

The following additional techniques will help you work with strong emotion.

Express Anger Responsibly

Anger can be relationally lethal if you express it with contempt, disgust, exaggeration, shaming, and other mixtures of strong negative feelings. Anger can be expressed in a way that is *clear, calm, firm, respectful, honest, and compassionate*. This way of speaking works well as you express any strong emotion.

Mace (1987) suggests the following guidelines for **responsible expression of anger**:

1. Verbally state the anger. Just as one says, "I am hungry," say, "I am angry."
2. Distinguish between venting and acknowledging anger.
3. Agree that you will never attack each other in a state of anger.
4. Work to find the stimulus for the anger. It won't go away just because it is expressed.

Mace (1987) summarizes his approach (for use with intimate partners) as follows: "I find myself getting angry with you. But you know I am pledged not to attack you, which would only make you angry too, and alienate us. What I need is your help to get behind my anger to what really is causing it, so that we can do something about it together." The response to this is, "I don't like your being angry with me, but I don't blame you for it. And since I know you won't attack me, I needn't put up my defenses and get angry with you in turn. I appreciate your invitation to help you get through to the underlying cause of your anger, because I care about our relationship, and it should help both of us to find out what is really happening to us" (97). When you practice this approach to communicating anger, you will find it doesn't seem strange. The rewards for this kind of expression will help you keep using the approach.

Nonviolent communication (NVC) training helps in many situations in addition to intimate relationships. Male parolees, undergoing substance-abuse treatment after their incarceration, were trained with principles of NVC (very similar to principles in this book). Those parolees who learned NVC principles, and practiced them, tended to develop more empathy, support skills, and ability to cope with heightened emotion than did those who received a different kind of training (Marlow et al. 2012). As scholars of communication, you may be able to integrate conflict transformation training and education in professional roles you will take in your career.

Use the X-Y-Z Formula for Clarity

Often, finding the right words to communicate anger is difficult. The **X-Y-Z formula** will help one express any difficult emotion. Here are its components:

- When you do X
- In situation Y
- I feel Z

An administrative assistant might say, "When you interrupt me (X) when I am on the phone (Y), I feel rattled and belittled (Z)." His response, taking responsibility for feeling upset yet letting the other person know what produced his feelings, is more likely to result in a constructive solution than if he had said, "I don't get any respect around here!" Another way to use the X-Y-Z format is this:

- When you do X in this specific situation
- I feel Y
- What I want instead is Z

The second format incorporates a request into the sequence. Both are helpful tools to learn.

The X-Y-Z skill has the advantage of clarifying the issue of concern for the recipients of strong emotion and urging the senders to take responsibility for their emotional reaction. The first format is helpful when the situation needs exploration. Requests for change will come later. In the second format, the request is lodged in a specific, descriptive form so that recipients might reduce defensiveness and respond appropriately.

Actively Listen to Emotional Communication

As you listen to someone express a negative emotion, you likely experience a natural tendency to experience your own fear and then to respond defensively, as in, “I only interrupt you when it is important to the company—get off my case.” Remember, however, that when conversation partners are upset with you, they need to express that feeling or the feeling will usually turn into resentment, despair, sadness, or some other emotion. *You can’t “argue” or “reason” someone out of any feeling.* When you say, “You shouldn’t feel disappointed/angry/sad,” this injunction may increase, not decrease, the emotion. The other person may feel frustrated and misunderstood because you are devaluing the other’s real feelings. You don’t have to agree with feelings to listen respectfully.

Case 6.5

Roommate to Roommate

Here is an example of respectful listening to someone who is upset. Your roommate has just said:

When you leave your clothes on the floor (X) and I have people in after my night class (Y), I feel embarrassed (Z).

Recipient: So my clothes on the floor really get you mad? (reflection—not perfect, because the roommate said “embarrassed,” but it’s good enough.)

Then you might ask *one* of these questions and make one of the statements:

1. Does it make you mad all the time or just if people are coming over?
2. Is this a big deal that bothers you a lot, or is it a minor irritation, or somewhere in between?
3. Let’s both come up with some ideas. I’ll bet we’ll figure something out.
4. It’s important to me that we give and take because I like having you as a roommate.

The X-Y-Z format deescalates conflict.

Protect Yourself from Verbal Abuse

When another’s expression of anger, rage, or contempt burns out of control, you have a responsibility to *protect yourself*. Listening to belittling, hostile blame, ridicule, demeaning or untrue accusations, sarcastic name-calling, contempt, or actual physical threats is *not* good conflict management. The other person should be told, firmly and consistently, “I won’t listen to this kind of talk. I can’t hear anything important you’re trying to say when you’re demeaning me.” Then you can leave or disconnect from the phone, giving the other person a chance to cool off. You can say, “Wait!” or “Stop!” in a firm voice. Never try to argue with a person who is engaged in verbal abuse. (It’s like arguing with an alcoholic—nothing healing can happen until the person is not actively abusing alcohol.) But just as you would move to stop the abuse of a child, you have the responsibility to stop verbal abuse in a conflict, if you possibly (and safely) can.

Verbal abuse leads to escalation or withdrawal, hinders conflict resolution, and lowers the dignity and self-esteem of all parties. Productive reception of someone’s anger may not be possible until boundaries are reset and conversation takes a more constructive tone. You can raise your voice (without shouting) and speak in a firm, no-nonsense tone. Of course, as a student of conflict resolution, you possess skills that will make it unnecessary for you to ever use verbal abuse!

Conflict is not always polite, but constructive conflict is never abusive or violent. When you know you are overpowered, or cannot stop the verbal abuse from another, leave. You may need help from friends or professionals to do so. You are never responsible for someone else’s verbal abuse, as long as you are using reasonably constructive communication.

Use Fractionation

The essential conflict reduction tactic, known as fractionating, is an idea developed by Follett (1940) and later called “fractionation” by Fisher (1971). Fractionation reduces the intensity of emotion in conflicts by focusing attention on the *sizing of disputes*. Conflicts can be broken down from one big mass into several smaller, more manageable conflicts. Fractionating conflict does not make it disappear, of course; it simply makes the components of large conflicts more approachable by parties who are trying to manage their disputes. Conflicts “do not have objective edges established by external events” (158). Rather, conflicts are like a seamless web, with indistinguishable beginnings and endings. Choices are almost always available as to how to size, and therefore manage, conflicts. When you choose to “downsize” a conflict, you probably also downsize the big emotion. This simple idea is one of the most useful conflict management tactics. Almost all conflicts can be made smaller without being trivialized. Smaller conflicts carry less strong emotion. Rather than saying, “I can see we will never solve the problem of where we want to spend our vacations and I feel completely discouraged,” you could say, “I propose we work on this Spring break vacation, come to agreement, and then return to what we do in the future after we have a good time.”

Use Positive Language to Work with Strong Emotion

Communication students transform conflicts with their use of language. As discussed earlier in this chapter, positive emotions help people broaden their thinking, reflect, and build on integrative ideas. You can adopt the “contribution system” (essentially, both people acknowledge that they contribute something to the problem, rather than blaming the other person). Fisher and Shapiro’s ideas from *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (2005) will change your language from negative language to positive language. Study *Difficult Conversations* for excellent language that leads to moderated emotion (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999). Express appreciation and all the core concerns, use “we” language, involve people in decisions that affect them (which reduces defensiveness), and show respect by asking for opinions and advice from others.

You will benefit from Rosenberg’s influential book *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict* (2005), another resource full of the language of peaceful communication.

Personal Responsibility for Emotional Transformation

As we have explored, emotions naturally arising in conflict often “feel bad.” Peacemaking is a crucial stress reduction mechanism for people (Aureli and Smucny 2000; Shapiro 2016). In fact, “post-conflict anxiety and reconciliation may function as part of the human

homeostatic mechanism, which regulates and stabilizes relationships between former opponents” (Butovskaya 2008, 1557).

As we think about change, we often try to change the other. This “change the other” attempt usually yields little that is constructive. Sometimes we can *change the situation*. Finally, we can deeply influence, from the inside out, only *ourselves*. Change in your interior communication or thoughts changes the entire system. This is especially true as we work with our own emotions, taking responsibility for how we feel. No longer can we accurately say, “I couldn’t help it. He pushed all my buttons.” With reflection, we know where our buttons are, how to manage our actions, and how to gain enough space to think while feeling. We might call this the watershed principle, based on where water flows along the Continental Divide. On one side, water flows toward the Atlantic, yet just a few feet farther away, it flows toward the Pacific. Very small changes can produce enormous effects. Similarly, in conflict interactions, small personal changes reverberate throughout the entire system and bring results that are much larger than you would ever imagine.

Because self-change in a conflict is difficult, it usually requires prerequisites. If you are going to alter your own emotionally based behavior rather than assert that your feelings and actions are only “natural” or “only in response to what she did,” you have to care about the relationship. If the relationship is of no consequence to you, then you likely feel little impetus to change. The essential point is that you are not waiting for the other to change first—someone has to “step up to the plate.”

In conclusion, working with strong emotions by understanding them, reflecting, choosing actions instead of reactions, and learning to express yourself precisely when you are feeling strongly—all this personal growth and responsibility leads to better conflict resolution. Radical self-responsibility and mindfulness mean we take seriously our own possibilities for infusing hope and positive change into the world. This is a lifelong work in progress.

*Out beyond the ideas of right doing and wrong doing,
There is a field.
I'll meet you there.
Jelaluddin Rumi*

Source: From *The Essential Rumi*, Translated by Coleman Barks. 1995.

Summary

otions are states of feeling that arise naturally during conflict. During conflict a natural tension of opposite occurs—to soften or harden. Attachment theory is an emotion-regulating system, focusing on safety and danger; we recommend increasing safety connection so conflict resolution approaches actually be used. The circumplex model of emotions presents and organizes a theory of emotions. Feelings, and how they fit into the model, are predicted, along with a list of emotions typical when someone's needs are and are not being met. Enough

strong feeling is required to engage and collaborate in conflict—strong feeling can be used for positive purposes. Emotional intensity varies and one should not predict a conflict's trajectory based on the first level of intensity. People experience emotions as good or bad, and relationships are defined by the kind of emotion that is expressed.

Emotions serve a variety of functions, and negative emotions such as anger can serve as a wakeup call. The popular notion that you can get rid of emotions by expressing them (the catharsis view) is not accurate.

The anger-fear cycle details what is underneath feelings of anger. Other emotions such as sadness and depression can alert us to trouble in the relationship.

The functions of positive emotions and their role in conflict resolution are described. Core Concerns provide a framework for remembering integrative conflict approaches.

You have a better chance of productive conflict if you neither deny nor blow up—rather, express

whatever feelings you have in the mid-range. Mindfulness, awareness, flexibility, compassion, and vulnerability are ways to express strong emotions for a positive result. Learning how to catch your automatic thoughts, express anger responsibly, and take personal responsibility for your own emotional transformation yields big payoffs for managing conflict productively.

Key Terms

emotions	193	gender differences	210	automatic thoughts	219
circumplex model of affect	198	mid-range	214	responsible expressions of anger	221
Core Concerns Framework	199	warrior of the heart	215	X-Y-Z formula	221
feeling words	200	awareness	215		
anger-fear sequence	206	compassion	216		
vulnerability	206	triggering event	217		

Review Questions

1. Define emotions.
2. What is the tension of opposites that occurs with emotions and conflict?
3. Describe the main function of emotions in engaging conflict resolution activities.
4. How are feelings and emotions related?
5. List some common misconceptions about emotions.
6. How do these misconceptions hinder effective conflict resolution?
7. How do negative emotions serve us in conflicts?
8. What is the anger-fear sequence?
9. How do sadness, disgust, shame, and guilt influence conflict parties?
10. What are “feeling words”? What makes the study of feeling words useful?
11. Explain the adaptive theory of emotions applied to negative and positive emotions.
12. Why would one want to be in the mid-range of emotional expression? What happens when you express more extreme emotions?
13. What does it mean to become a “warrior of the heart”?
14. What are automatic thoughts and how are they connected to emotions?
15. Why is it important to practice mindfulness when reflecting on, and responding to, emotion in conflict? Also, which mindfulness practice is most difficult to perform, and why?
16. List ways to express anger productively.
17. Why would you want to change yourself rather than others?
18. What are some of the reasons change is difficult?
19. Explain self-responsibility in relation to emotional understanding and regulation.