

A Stepwise approach to addressing conflict

Step	Self-assessment questions	What to say to the family
1. Notice the conflict	Am I feeling angry or irritated or bored, or having my usual response to conflict?	This is an internal reflective step.
2. Prepare yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get into a 'ready to negotiate' state of mind. • Examine the situation. • Decide on the purpose of working through the conflict. 	Am I too angry to fully listen? Am I still thinking I am right? What information do I need to know? What are the consequences of not addressing this conflict? What are my needs that should be addressed in dealing with this?	This is an internal reflective step.
3. Find a non-judgemental starting point.	What would an impartial third person say that this conflict is about?	<i>"Let's start with the big picture – what are we hoping for in Mrs X's situation?"</i>
4. Reframe emotionally charged issues.	How can I describe the issue so that it is something that we both need to work together on? Am I moving into the 'me against you' stance?	<i>"For a lot of people, providing food is a way of showing love. If that is a part of the issue, let's talk about other ways you can do that."</i> <i>"I don't think of withholding intravenous fluid as starvation. It is a medical intervention that isn't always good for someone who is in the last phase of life."</i>
5. Respond empathetically.	Have I given explicit feedback that shows I understand the other person's feelings?	<i>"I know you would never want to feel that you were starving your mother. These decisions require a lot of thought."</i>
6. Look for options that meet the needs of both parties.	Does this option address the other person's and my concerns?	<i>"How about I describe a treatment option, and you can tell me your reactions, both positive and negative?"</i>
7. If no satisfactory agreement can be reached, get help.	What resources exist to help you in your organisation?	<i>"I think it would be useful to have another impartial person help us discuss what is best."</i>

Adapted from: Back AL, Arnold RM. *Dealing with conflict in caring for the seriously ill: "it was just out of the question"*. JAMA. 2005;293(11):1374-1381. doi:10.1001/jama.293.11.1374

