

Here are six steps to the conflict resolution process:

1. **Clarify what the disagreement is.** Clarifying involves getting to the heart of the conflict. The goal of this step is to get both sides to agree on what the disagreement is. To do this, you need to discuss what needs are not being met on both sides of the conflict and ensure mutual understanding. During the process, obtain as much information as possible on each side's point of view. Continue to ask questions until you are certain that all parties involved (you and those on either side of the conflict) understand the issue.
2. **Establish a common goal for both parties.** In this step of the process, both sides agree on the desired outcome of the conflict. "When people know that they're working towards the same goal, then they're more apt to participate truthfully to make sure that they reach that end goal together." Kimberly A. Benjamin explained in a recent BLR webinar. To accomplish this, discuss what each party would like to see happen and find a commonality in both sides as a starting point for a shared outcome. That commonality can be as simple as "both sides want to end the conflict."
3. **Discuss ways to meet the common goal.** This involves listening, communicating, and brainstorming together. Continue with both sides working together to discuss ways that they can meet the goal they agreed on in step 2. Keep going until all the options are exhausted.
4. **Determine the barriers to the common goal.** In this step of the process, the two parties acknowledge what has brought them into the conflict and talk about what problems may prevent a resolution. Understanding the possible problems that may be encountered along the way lets you proactively find solutions and have plans in place to handle issues. Define what can and cannot be changed about the situation. For the items that cannot be changed, discuss ways of getting around those roadblocks.
5. **Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict.** Both parties need to come to a conclusion on the best resolution. Start by identifying solutions that both sides can live with. Ask both sides and see where there is common ground. Then start to discuss the responsibility each party has in maintaining the solution. It's also important to use this opportunity to get to the root cause to ensure this conflict will not come up again. "A lot of times when we try to fix problems, we get so caught up in fixing it that we do not identify what we need to do so it doesn't happen." Benjamin cautioned.
6. **Acknowledge the agreed upon solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution.** Both sides need to own their responsibility in the

resolution of the conflict and express aloud what they have agreed to. After both parties have acknowledged a win-win situation, ask both parties to use phrases such as "I agree to..." and "I acknowledge that I have responsibility for..."