



# The EmC Conflict Resolution Guide

*The Scientifically Proven Strategy to Constructively  
Resolve Conflict and Strengthen Work Relationships*

Every business owner, manager, and executive knows the pain of work-related conflicts and disengagement. In many instances, resolving conflict has become a continuous effort.

Whether conflicts are regular or sporadic, managing them can be difficult and uncomfortable. Persisting conflicts that have spread across teams can create a toxic culture marked by disconnection and lack of trust.

This step-by-step guide can be used by anyone who wants to improve their skills in managing and resolving conflicts at work. This technique is also covered in the [EmC Train the Trainer Course](#). If you have any questions or need additional support, please feel free to contact us at [EmC Leaders](#) or visit our website at [EmCLeaders.com](#).

The Emotional Connection (EmC) process is based on years of scientific research focused on creating emotional responsiveness, building trust, safety, and secure bonding. The EmC process shows you how to resolve conflict and strengthen working relationships. Using the following steps, you can help your team members repair relationships, create psychological safety, and establish trust so they can collaborate effectively in times of stress.

*Interaction is the dance and emotion is the music.*

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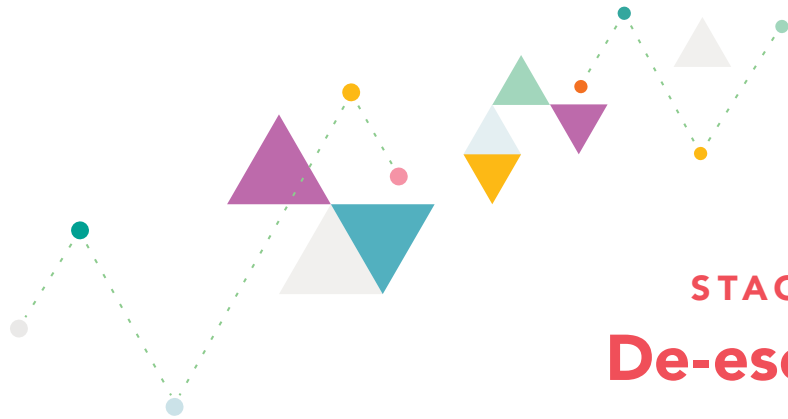
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## STAGE 1

# De-escalate

### STEP 1 - Create a safe environment and alliance

Coworkers Sam and Alison have problems getting along and working together productively. Their work is being affected and other workers' morale is negatively impacted. Many managers in this situation make the mistake of avoiding the conflict completely. Others take sides and provide suggestions on how each person needs to behave differently. However, these strategies rarely work. In fact, it often makes the problem worse.

When we work together, we depend on each other. This dependency creates a natural need for us to be emotionally connected. When we lose that connection, we spiral into conflict. To repair the conflict, you must create emotional safety and alliance, so both parties feel heard and validated by you.

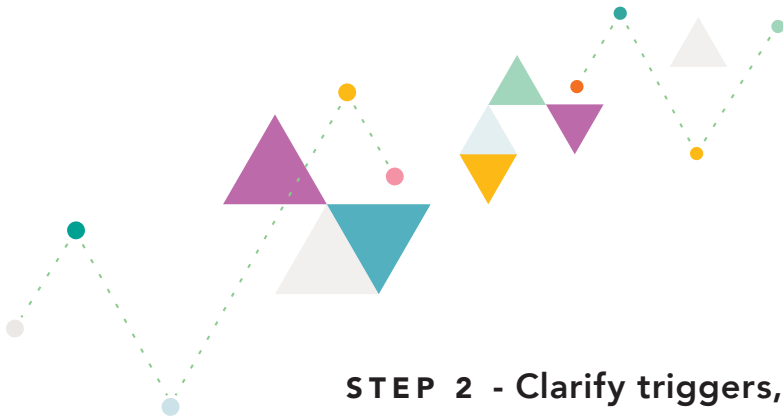
You don't need to agree with the content of the conflict or people's individual viewpoints. Instead, by providing validation and listening with compassion, you slow down negative emotions and pause the disconnection. If this conflict is occurring on your own team, it may be difficult for you to remain unbiased. If you are new to using the EmC process, it's best to take small steps so you can stay on track and not be overwhelmed.

Creating emotional safety takes practice, so don't be discouraged if things don't change right away. As you learn the techniques and practice the skills outlined in our basic [EmC Course](#), you will become more comfortable in creating safety and alliance. You may want to invite Sam and Alison to take the course with you so that you can learn all together.

We recommend you approach one individual at a time to start the EmC process.

In your invitation, assure each person that the conversation will be "off the record" and confidential. This process helps to repair their relationship, so having an off-the-record conversation is crucial in allowing everyone to feel free to express themselves in an authentic and vulnerable way. If this is impossible and you cannot do it in good faith, we highly recommend that you employ an outside consultant. Research has shown that confidentiality is critical in an effective resolution process.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nora Doherty, & Marcelas Guyler. (2008). *The Essential Guide to Workplace Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Rebuilding Working Relationships*. Kogan Page.



## STEP 2 - Clarify triggers, raw spots, and emotions

You have arrived at the one-on-one meeting with Alison and gotten past the casual small talk of greeting each other. Restate your purpose that you have noticed some problems between her and Sam and emphasize that you would really like to help. And once again, if possible, assure her that this conversation is confidential and off-the-record. It is just you two as human beings, and you wish to hear her side of things.

This step will require careful listening skills, focusing on the person's experience, identifying with them as to what caused the conflict (triggers), which sensitive emotions were triggered (raw spots), and some of the emotions they experienced that time.

This is an important step to help the person stay out of the content (storytelling) and start to look inward on what was happening with them. This step slows down the emotional reaction and helps the person to feel more connected and not alone in their experience.

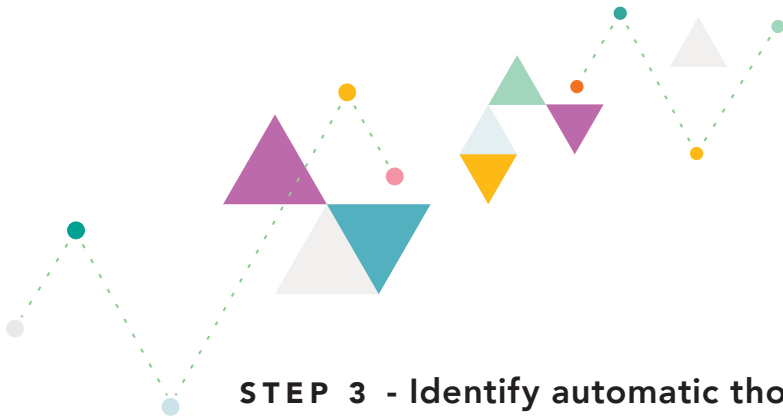
**Research** shows that free expression of grievances is a critical step in the process of de-escalation. To successfully conduct this step, you must remain as non-judgmental as possible. As each person presents their side, they likely to present themselves as right and the other person as wrong; your job is to remain neutral and to listen with compassion.

It is important to focus on the triggers, raw spots, and emotions. Validate their experience along the way instead of agreeing with their positions. Letting them know that their feelings are valid and important is key to creating a safe space for them. As they tune into their emotions, triggers, and raw spots, they begin to understand their reaction in the conflict. This is critical to the resolution process as they can more clearly communicate their emotions to the other party.

Sometimes, you will discover that you agree with one side over the other. Do your absolute best to get past the actual content and focus instead on everyone's emotional experience.

As each person shares their side of the story, it is important to reflect (mirroring) what is being said. Consolidate each person's narrative into concrete step-by-step (triggers, raw spots, and emotions). By doing so, you externalize the conflict, which is what makes eventual conflict resolution possible.

It is essential to continuously use words of appreciation and encouragement to acknowledge everyone's authenticity and vulnerability.



### STEP 3 - Identify automatic thoughts and protective behaviors

Next, you want to recap the incident as you reflect on each person's triggers, raw spots, and emotions while validating their experience. You'll want to keep your tone of voice calm and non-judgmental. Do your best to stay connected with the experience instead of offering solutions or taking sides. By understanding each person's experience, you will help calm their emotions and prepare them for the next step: identifying automatic thoughts and protective behaviors.

Automatic thoughts are automatically generated by our brain when we feel disconnected from the person we depend on. They often sound like, "This person doesn't care about me," or "They don't value my time or opinion," or "They are not there for me." It is essential to validate what you hear and not make judgment calls such as, "That's horrible," or "You shouldn't think this way." Instead, reassure them and provide words of encouragement on how strong they are to share these thoughts with you.

Protective behaviors are automatically generated by our brains. They manifest themselves as withdrawing, distancing, avoiding, blaming, judging, or lecturing. With practice, we are all capable of changing our automatic behaviors. As you help them understand their protective behaviors, they will become more aware of their own contribution to the conflict.

### STEP 4 - Raise awareness of the negative cycle as the enemy

As you help Alison and Sam individually identify their automatic thoughts and protective behaviors, refer to their conflict as a "negative cycle" that sits between them and pushes them apart. This will help to shift the blame from any one individual to the negative cycle itself. It is much easier to change the cycle than trying to focus on changing any one person. During this step, you begin to change the music by affirming how important they are to each other and how much they care about the project, the company, and one another. You may want to consider acknowledging their efforts like this example:

*"Thank you for doing this process. I know how much you care about this project and about working together collaboratively. I can see how much you care about this company. You have been stuck in a terrible negative cycle that has taken over your relationships. You have shown amazing courage and have worked hard to preserve your relationship."*

You may have to repeat these steps, in individual and pair session until the conflict is de-escalated and both individuals feel safe and comfortable engaging fully in the process.



## STAGE 2

# Restructure

This step is the heart of the conflict resolution process. This is the stage where true change happens, where the transformation begins to take place. Your role as the facilitator will be to remain supportive, encouraging, and neutral by validating Alison and Sam's experiences.

### STEP 5 - Define safety needs to create a positive cycle

In this step, you repeat and reaffirm your acknowledgment of their courage and commitment to the process, to each other, and to the organization. While it may seem repetitive to do this, in practice, it has proven effective in paving the way toward a positive cycle leading to conflict resolution.

Here we begin to change the music and dissolves any notion that the two individuals cannot work together. The conflict is often the symptom – the real issue is emotional disconnection. Once the connection is restored and repaired, the conflict can more easily be resolved.

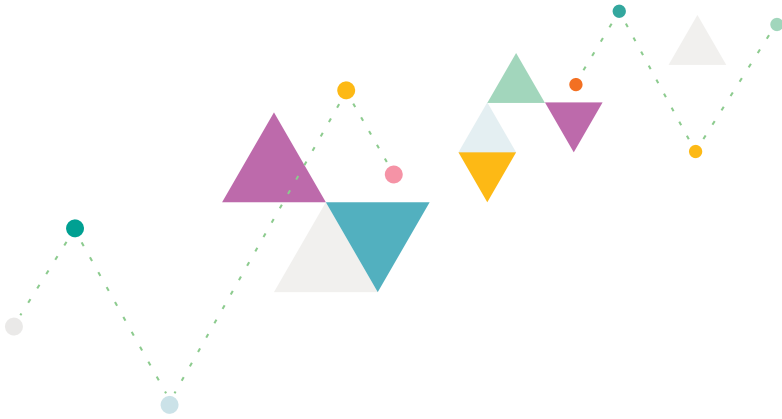
Expressing appreciation and words of affirmation helps minimize defensiveness and lowers each person's wall. It is remarkable to notice how parties begin to feel relieved, grateful and connected. This starts to transform the relationship, allowing softness and empathy to enter into the conversation.

Remember to repeat words of appreciation and reaffirm their care and importance during individual and paired sessions. Early in the process, people are likely to feel hurt and closed, so will be difficult for them to fully accept these words. You will need to repeat these messages often with validation and reflection so they will feel more at ease, engaged, and open.

### STEP 6 - Help individuals to remain accessible, responsive, and engaged

Once you feel the appreciation has been sufficiently communicated, you may start by asking them how their interaction has progressed since the start of this process. As each person shares, you continue to validate, reflect, and help them feel you understand their experience.

As the facilitator, you now can take control by sharing your understanding of the situation as clearly and as concisely as possible so they can understand how they became disconnected. Doing so will help you guide them through a process of identifying their fears, their attachment longing and needs, and what would make them feel safe and connected.



Explicitly stating their fears and attachment needs helps them to pivot from a negative to a positive cycle, creating the opportunity for reconnection and behavior change.

We all want to feel valued, important, and know that the other person cares about us. In essence, in this step and afterward, all we are doing is confirming these important needs.

By the end of this step, you now have a roadmap of each person's triggers, raw spots, emotions, automatic thoughts, protective behaviors, and what they need from the other person to feel safe and connected, laid out in a clear and concise manner.

At this point, you are not explicitly looking for behavioral change. However, as individuals identify their emotional needs, and how the negative cycle is impacting their relationships, eventually their behavior will begin to change.

## **STEP 7 - Facilitate bonding moments to repair relationship injuries**

Next, you create an enactment, a bonding moment where each person can turn to the other and share their raw spots, emotions, and needs. This is where the magic happens. This is where the repair occurs.

A typical enactment can go as such:

*“Alison, do you think you can turn to Sam and say, ‘When you avoid me, I get scared that I am not important to you anymore like my opinion does not matter. What I need to know is that my opinion does matter, and I am important to you.’”*

After Alison shares her experience, it is important to acknowledge her courage and check on her experience. It is important at this step that Sam acknowledges what he has heard and reaffirm Alison's importance to meet her need.

Repeat the same process with Sam to complete and co-create a positive cycle.





### STEP 8 - Reinforce safety and emotional connection

After Alison and Sam share their experiences directly with each other, provide reassurance and acknowledge their needs, it is essential for you, the facilitator, to recognize their courage and willingness to share this vulnerable experience. You can help them see that they have changed from a negative to a positive dance. Now they are both hearing the same music and are able to re-engage and reconnect.

### STEP 9 - Integrate bonding conversations into daily interactions

Continue to have regular meetings with Alison and Sam for a period of time. This will help them use the process in their daily interactions and will nurture their feelings of emotional safety and connection. It will help them learn to recognize their triggers and reactions. They will also be better equipped to acknowledge their emotions and fears so that they can have bonding conversations on a regular basis.

You will discover that over time, each person will report that they feel less triggered, have fewer negative reactions, and are quicker to use bonding conversations with each other. At the end of the process, individuals often report feeling connected, happy, relieved, and energized. They start to trust each other and feel that they have each other's back.

### NEXT STEPS

The EmC process is simple and effective. However, it takes practice to know how to create psychological safety and guide individuals to a state of emotional reconnection.

Our online courses will help you master the skill of emotional connection. You will learn the language of emotions, practice creating psychological safety, and learn how to help teams reconnect.

To become fully trained and equipped, take the online [EmC Master Class](#). This course includes all the tools, skills, and techniques you need for conflict resolution. The EmC Master Class includes a workbook, videos, practice exercises, transcripts, examples, and recorded demonstrations of real EmC sessions. We also have the EmC Train-the-Trainer Certification for those who wish to gain advanced skills and teach others to use the EmC process.

We are always available to guide you if you need any help. Feel free to contact us at [EmC Leaders](#). Our goal is to empower you in emotional connection so that you can thrive.



## About EmC Leaders

EmC Leaders is the management consulting firm that works with your team to increase team engagement, build trust, and reduce workplace conflicts.

We are a leading organization committed to understanding, researching, and providing Emotional Connection (EmC) programs specially designed for leaders, teams, boards, and individuals to ignite their transformation. Our EmC strategy is a groundbreaking approach and the pathway for organizations to thrive.

Organizations that use the EmC strategy report improvements in engagement, create an inclusive and effective team culture, exhibit higher productivity, and consistent performance. Our scientifically proven method is easy to use, based on rigorous research, and includes our proprietary tools and techniques. Our training programs and coaching services ensure effective skills are applied immediately.

**Our Vision:** To unleash the human potential through the pleasure of growing and discovery, to build resilient teams through strong working relationships, and to nurture thriving cultures through durable emotional bonds. We want people to feel happy, engaged, and connected at work.

**Our Mission:** To provide high-quality EmC programs and sessions to educate leaders, managers, teams, boards, HR professionals, OD Trainers, coaches, and organizational consultants on the power of emotional connection. We seek to be change-makers, illuminating the essential role of emotions and creating connected and flourishing communities.

### Our Values:

- We value the human potential to elevate the human experience.
- We value research and practice as partners in informing our thoughts and actions.
- We value and respect the emotional state of every person.
- We value the independence of each person we work with and their individual journey.
- We value what we teach and do what we say.

### We are committed to:

- Make EmC available at all levels of the organization: easy to understand, easy to use, and easy to implement
- Respond to your needs and collaborating with you, creating safety and connection
- Involve you in the process, so you feel confident and comfortable
- Empower you to build strong relationships and team engagement so you can reach your goals and objectives