

# Contents

- What is Conflict? .....2
- Introduction .....2
- What is Conflict? .....3
- Intersection .....3
  - Pathways .....3
  - PIES: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual .....4
  - Three Types of Intersections: Internal, Circumstances, and Other People .....4
  - Dead-End.....5
- Issues .....5
  - Pathways .....5
  - Issue vs Concern .....6
  - Disruptive .....7
    - Dispute vs Conflict .....7
    - Desirable vs Undesirable .....8
  - Issues vs Statements .....8
  - Negotiation .....8
  - Seven Primary Issues .....9
- Stress..... 11
  - Stress Severity Scale..... 11
  - Feeling Stress: PIES ..... 12
  - Two Groups: Tension vs Pressure ..... 12
  - Two Forms: Acute and Chronic ..... 12
  - Two Types: Eustress and Distress..... 13
    - Good Stress – eustress ..... 13
    - Bad Stress – distress ..... 13
- Stress vs Anxiety ..... 14
- When Stress or Anxiety is the Issue..... 15
- Induce..... 15
- Summary ..... 16
- Author’s Note ..... 17

# What is Conflict?

Tom Dorr, Resolution Specialist, 1/26/2026

FairlaneResolution.com

## Introduction

The reason you are here, the most likely reason you are here, is because you are in the middle of a conflict right now and you want it to end. I understand, I've been there, and I want you to know one thing, you're not alone. Now, when I say you're not alone I mean it in two ways. One, I'm here to help and, two, you're not the first person to be in this type of difficult position. In fact, everybody, and I mean every person that has ever lived on this planet has encountered conflicts.

Another reason why you might be here is because you had a conflict in the past that did not go well, did not settle well, and you don't want to make that mistake again. Or, you know of a conflict right around the corner and you want to prepare for it. Or you just know that conflict is inevitable, life is moments of conflict separated by periods of time, and I want you to know that just as conflict is inevitable, resolution is attainable.

Resolution is the goal and we definitely want to keep that in mind. Stephen Covey coined the phrase, "Begin with the end in mind"<sup>1</sup> and I will engrave the other side of his coin with this, "Start with the beginning in sight". It is vital to know where we hope to arrive, but without a clear understanding of where we are, failure is almost certain. In the next episode, I will cover resolution, the end goal, but today we will take a thorough look at conflict, the beginning.

It is important to know as much as possible about where you are if you hope to draw a line from that spot to your destination. Imagine being on a ship at sea in the middle of a storm. If you don't even know which sea you are in, the odds of you reaching your intended harbor are zero. The more you know about the sea, and the storm, and the ship, and the crew, the better chance you have of not only surviving, but strengthening both yourself and others.

I am sure you have already noticed this is not a quick overview with three tips to help you win the battle. I believe life is moments of conflict separated by periods of time and the better prepared you are for those moments the better your chances of experiencing peace, harmony, and agreement.

So, let's begin. What is conflict?

---

<sup>1</sup> Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989, habit #2

## What is Conflict?

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress.

Picture in your mind a woman driving east on a road, out to get burgers for her family, when she comes to an intersection. The crossroad goes north and south and she stops. As she looks north, she remembers a terrific ice cream shop not too far up and a little voice says, “You deserve an ice cream. You’ve worked hard all week and, nobody would know.” Then she says to herself, “I HAVE worked hard all week and, nobody needs to know.” Then she hears a small voice, “You could bring everyone back here to get ice cream later.” And she just sits there, with the engine idling, looking back and forth from north to east, completely unaware of time. She notices some movement and looks in her rearview mirror to find a car coming up behind her. Now she begins arguing with herself about going straight to get burgers or turning left to get herself an ice cream. The car behind her eases to a stop and the woman mashes the gas pedal to the floor, squealing the tires, and going straight through the intersection toward the burger place.

This woman experienced conflict. She was at the intersection of needs and wants; the need to get her family dinner and the want to get herself an ice cream, and she was feeling stress. Let’s look at these key elements of conflict: intersection, issues, and stress.

## Intersection

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress.

Intersection is a place where two or more paths converge, diverge, or cross.

## Pathways

Each of us is on multiple personal pathways every day. There is the obvious physical path but, additionally and simultaneously, we are on intellectual, emotional, and spiritual paths. Picture in your mind a one lane road on the ground, flat on the surface of the earth, and another pathway about twenty feet directly above that one, running parallel to the ground lane, and a third pathway below the surface, underground, tracking the other two paths exactly. The surface road is your physical being, the elevated path is your intellectual being, the subterranean path is your emotional being, and the spiritual path moves all around. Now, imagine you are just chugging along when, unexpectedly, you come upon a physical intersection of issues. For example, you are merrily going to the symphony and when you come to your assigned seat you find someone sitting in it. Your other paths may get involved but this is a physical intersection. If this intersection induced any degree of stress, then to that degree, you are experiencing conflict. This exact conflict is typically

resolved when everybody produces their tickets, and the offending party understands they are in the wrong row. Sometimes this conflict can produce animosity and other times it can produce long lasting friendships.

Other intersections may be intellectual, emotional, or spiritual. We may be trekking along when an idea comes to mind that challenges our existing thinking. Or we may be happily strolling along when an image suddenly arouses the emotion of anger, sadness, or wonder. We may be rolling down the line when our intuition feels uneasy or a belief is challenged, this is a spiritual intersection.

The intersection may be at only one pathway, but all paths react because each of us is one being with multiple, simultaneous personal pathways. The human experience, however, is not limited to only these four dimensions.

## PIES: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual

Imagine multiple pathways, above and multiple pathways below the surface road. Imagine two or more pathways running side by side at any level. Now, imagine all those pathways rearranging themselves so that what was at the top of the hierarchy only a moment ago is now below the surface, and what was below is now on the surface running alongside the physical. These pathways begin to describe one element of the complexity of the human experience. None of us can consider the entire multitude of pathways at a single time, there are just too many. A good start is PIES; physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. These make up the four cornerstone qualities of the human condition, and it is easy to remember.

Think of every person as a different kind of pie. Some people are, figuratively, fruit pies, nut pies, meat pies, cream pies, pizza pies etc. There isn't one superior PIES, but there are similar types and differences between each one. In a future episode, I will cover PIES in more detail. For our purposes here we will simply accept these four cornerstone qualities.

## Three Types of Intersections: Internal, Circumstances, and Other People

As we go through our day we could encounter dozens of intersections, but all of them fall into three types: internal, circumstances, and other people.

Earlier we considered a woman caught between burgers and ice cream. She was at an internal intersection and, because she was stressed about it, she was experiencing internal conflict. If, while driving to the burger place, she had come upon road construction that detoured her through a neighborhood, she would have experienced a circumstantial intersection. Even though other people are involved in road construction, they are not directly involved with her. It is only random circumstances, fate, or chance that brought them together and, even then, the construction workers' intention had nothing to do with her. Lastly, if our woman, while driving east, received a phone call from her husband asking

her to pick up tacos instead, that intersection would be directly attributed to another person. Whenever any of these intersections induce stress there is conflict. When we are in conflict it is valuable to identify which of these three types the conflict is.

It is common practice to incorrectly identify conflict types. For example, our burger begetting woman who is experiencing internal conflict could easily attempt to work out her stress on the cashier at the burger place for not having ice cream, thus treating her situation as circumstantial conflict. Or she could take out her frustration on her husband for wanting burgers in the first place, instead of tacos which are next door to the ice cream shop, thus treating it like an other-person conflict. The trouble with misattribution is that it never deals with the real issue. This is like walking into your living room at night to discover the lighting is very dim, and so you set out to replace two of the three lightbulbs in the room, except you fail to replace the only lightbulb that was burned out. You did a lot of work, but you never solved the problem.

## Dead-End

Some intersections just don't go anywhere, and you find yourself intersecting with a wall, cul-de-sac, or an open field. In the real world this is usually due to an undeveloped roadway. The plans are in place to finish the intersection so that it goes somewhere but the work hasn't been done yet. In the conflict resolution world the same is true. Sometimes two people come to a conflict that just isn't going anywhere. This is called an impasse, stalemate, or deadlock. The common approach in this case is to throw your hands in the air, blame the other person, and hike across the field until you find a new road. The better approach is to simply back out of the dead-end. It's OK to shift into reverse sometimes and go back to an intersection that leads somewhere.

Next, let's look at issues.

## Issues

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress.

Intersection is a place where two or more paths converge, diverge, or cross.

Issue is a position or demand and its underlying motive which produces disruption<sup>2</sup>.

## Pathways

Just as the map is not the journey, the pathway is not the issue.

---

<sup>2</sup> People within the conflict resolution field commonly use the terms position and interest. Position includes demands and describes WHAT the demand or position is, and interest describes the motive or WHY that position is being taken or demand is being made.

We talk about intersecting paths, but conflict is an intersection of issues. What's the difference between an issue and its path?

The personal pathways enable movement and access for our core human elements like PIES. For example, our physical pathway enables us to move and access different places. Our intellectual pathway enables us to explore new ideas. Our emotional pathway enables us to experience a variety of emotions, and our spiritual pathway allows us to adopt or reinforce beliefs.

Most of the time our personal pathways transport calmness and harmony. For most people it is the exception for pathways to carry an issue. Consider the emotional pathway for a moment. When our emotions are in harmony they operate in agreement with our surroundings, they do not make any demands on others or our environment or our own other emotions. In these cases, the emotional pathway is enabling our emotions to move freely. When an emotion takes a position or makes a demand, that emotion transfers, figuratively, from the harmony car to the issue car. The issue car then passes the harmony car, blaring its horn and flashing its lights. The presence of a position or demand that creates disruption an issue.

Here is an example of an issue,

“Give me \$20.” This is the demand, the what.

“I need \$20 because I want to buy lunch.” This describes the motive, the why.

Picture yourself going through your day, month, or life with these multiple pathways running simultaneously, in an ever-changing order of hierarchy. Now, picture everybody you come into contact with going through their life in the same way. Finally, picture all of your pathways intersecting with somebody else's and it's amazing we have only as much conflict as we do!

## Issue vs Concern

Most issues begin as a concern. When someone comes to you and says, “I'm concerned about something and need to talk to you about it,” your intellectual and emotional gates open (assuming trust exists) in anticipation of a discussion. A concern is an idea or feeling about something that is not yet disruptive but might become so. On the other hand, when that same person comes to you the very next day saying, “I have an issue to discuss with you,” your emotional and intellectual walls instinctively go up in preparation for a confrontation. Issues are by nature disruptive.

A concern is the seed of an issue and like all seeds some of them die without growing at all. A concern is couched in an unfixed position, flexible demand, and a motive, or spirit, of cooperation. When a concern has developed into an issue positions are more rigid, demands are less flexible, and motives are more competitive.

An overreaction to a concern may itself be an issue. Conversely, downplaying a genuine issue may only serve to create another issue. It is valuable to identify which stage of development is at play and react accordingly.

## Disruptive

Imagine a four-year-old at a family gathering suddenly throwing a tantrum, or a thirty-four-year-old in a parking lot doing the same. Those are both disruptions that cause trouble or disorder. Now picture yourself in the middle of dinner and suddenly a neighbor bangs on your door yelling, “You have to come out here right now and see this!” This disruption is an interruption of an activity or process. Finally, recall a time at work when someone suggested a change. If you are like most people, simply hearing the word “change” is enough to raise your heartbeat slightly. This reminds me of a classic light bulb joke. How many psychologists does it take to change a lightbulb? Just one, but the lightbulb has to want to change.

Lightbulb jokes are so popular because they represent our varied responses to change. Introducing change at almost any level typically develops into conflict. One or more of these three types of disruption are necessary to create conflict: disorder, interruption, and change.

If you feel you are in conflict with another person but neither of you are bringing up a disruptive issue, that is, neither of you are taking a position or making a demand that attempts to be troublesome or interrupt some process or implement change then you are most likely involved in a heated philosophical dispute. I think healthy philosophical discussion is terrific and it may be contentious or congenial but, without disruption it is not a conflict.

## Dispute vs Conflict

It is valuable to distinguish between a dispute and a conflict because each of these requires a different treatment. The same is true for heart-burn and heart-attack. Imagine having a lovely dinner with a good friend when suddenly he puts his right hand to his chest, grimaces and bends down toward the table. You, in a panic, run to the kitchen, grab an AED, race back to the table and begin sprawling your friend out on the floor in order to apply defibrillation. Your friend, now lying on his back, yells out, “It’s only heartburn!” Later, you discover he gets heartburn every time he eats spicy food. Applying conflict resolution strategies to a mere dispute could make an uncomfortable situation unbearable.

This raises a point worth considering that is a slight detour from our main track. What is today known as the conflict resolution (CR) field began as alternate dispute resolution or ADR. In the beginning ADR made sense and worked well. Today, because we have learned so much from those ADR pioneers, we are able to make a distinction between

dispute and conflict. This change makes sense and works well too. Everything that grows experiences changes in development and complexity. An acorn is small and simple, then it develops into a seedling, then a sapling, then it reaches maturity, and finally it settles into a long senescence phase. Whether it goes by alternate dispute resolution, mediation, or conflict resolution its essence is the same, helping people find peace.

## Desirable vs Undesirable

There are two categories of disruptions, desirable and undesirable.

Some interruptions or changes lead to significant positive outcomes, these are desirable disruptions. And, although riskier, some disorderly disruptions such as picketing, striking, or demonstrating can lead to positive outcomes. For the purposes of conflict resolution, either desirable or undesirable disruptions that induce stress are conflicts, only each category is handled differently.

When you find yourself in a conflict with someone, it is helpful to ask, “What outcome are you hoping to achieve?” and then listen, and then decide if you feel their motive is positive, desirable, or negative, undesirable. A negative outcome is not necessarily bad, but it does require a different tact to resolve.

## Issues vs Statements

Sometimes a person will claim a position or make a demand that calms the situation instead of disrupting it. If I am in the kitchen fixing dinner and my wife steps in saying, “I want to help (demand) because I love you and want to spend this time with you (motive),” I am de-stressed rather than distressed. She has not raised an issue; she has made a **calming statement**.

Other times a person will claim a position or make a demand that serves to inform. If my boss asks me to work a few hours on Saturday, my usual day off, and I tell her I have the entire day planned with my family at an amusement park. I am making an **informational statement**. I am giving, in a non-adversarial manner, information for my boss to consider. This may lead to her raising a concern which leads to an intersection of issues that induce stress, but the initial statement was purely informational.

## Negotiation

Issues are negotiated. If you were a party to the \$20 lunch example, you could negotiate either the demand or the motive. If this issue intersected with any of your pathways and induced stress then you would be experiencing a conflict.

Negotiating a conflict with your words is like negotiating an intersection with your car; you simply try to get through it the best way you can without causing any harm to yourself, others, or property. The mindset in conflict resolution is not about getting a ‘big

win' inside the intersection, but rather, any 'big win' is on the other side of the intersection, and the conflict is keeping everyone from it.

In a future article we will explore negotiation. Today, however, we are looking at conflict and right here we are examining issues. There are seven primary issues.

## Seven Primary Issues

Everybody has issues. I have demands (sometimes called strong requests) and my own reasons for those demands. You have positions and your personal, maybe private, reasons for maintaining them. Our environment has issues. Our environment could include our family, friends, or work culture. It could also include nature. The weather has issues, so does a bear and a bee. If we added them all up there would be ten tons of issues! That would be more than anybody could deal with and so, the conflict resolution field has narrowed this down to seven primary human issues.

A typical hierarchy of the seven primary issues during conflict is as follows,

1. Needs
2. Wants:  
needs and wants typically revolve around time and money.
3. Process: this is how this intersection will be negotiated.
4. Emotions: this is not easily defined but more easily discovered. When emotions are one of the intersecting issues this is usually displayed by words, tone, and volume.
5. Values: such as character values like honesty, respect, or thankfulness.
6. Beliefs: a belief is something held as fact which lacks direct evidence.
7. Physical: survival i.e. safety, food, clothing, shelter.

In a conflict the hierarchy order is subject to change frequently and unexpectedly.

Imagine a man driving north on a road when suddenly the truck in front of him comes to a complete stop and he can't see around the truck to know what is happening. After ten minutes the man only knows that this delay will make him late for his appointment, and he values punctuality. His values are intersecting with the truck's physical pathway, and he is beginning to feel stress. He is experiencing a circumstantial conflict. This is similar to the woman sent out to get burgers who experienced an internal conflict because conflict resolution specialists do not deal with these two types of conflicts. These situations are best handled by therapists, lawyers, or psychologists. Conflict resolution specialists help two or more people find resolution to a conflict. The key phrase is "two or more people".

When your stress is somehow connected to an intersection of issues between yourself and another person a conflict resolution specialist, aka a resolutionist, can help. Also, if another person's stress is somehow connected to you then a resolutionist may be

of help. In a future article I will cover the difference between therapists, lawyers, and mediators but, in order to stay on track, I will speak from this point on only of conflicts between two people.

Picture in your mind a young woman driving her car on a curvy highway headed more-or-less southwest. She is cruising along, on a one lane road, with her seven levels of pathways, enjoying the scenery, when a sign warns her of merging traffic ahead. Initially she is excited about the adventure this may bring, and then it happens, another car pulls up beside her, but there is still only one lane. Space is limited, the two cars bump into each other, and where she used to be able to rearrange her seven levels to have one right beside her, there is now no space for that. She is feeling stressed due to the intersection that merged this other person with her. She is in conflict but not sure at what level.

It turns out that her value for spontaneity conflicts with the other person's belief in order. She says, "I want to decide each morning what direction I will take" (position). The other says, "I want to know in advance where we are going" (demand). She says, "I don't want to be tied to an agenda and miss what might come up suddenly" (motive). The other says, "I don't want to miss things that need to be planned for hoping that something might come up" (motive). And so they decide that, rather than travel side by side, they will travel in single file, alternating the lead with each corresponding style. This works well for a while.

In time another sign warns of an additional lane being introduced. The two co-travelers quickly adapt and find themselves traveling once again side by side, except each has their own road. As it is bound to happen, they come to the intersection of a road going north and south, and they stop. The other says, "I want to turn and go north" (position). The young woman says, "We need to continue straight ahead" (demand). The other says, "I want to go north because that billboard right there is advertising a museum I'd like to see, and I feel the knowledge gained from it would be valuable" (motive). The young woman says, "We need to go straight because we planned to see the ocean and I believe we should keep our commitments" (motive). After discussing it (negotiation) they agree to visit the museum then come back and continue to the ocean.

After arriving at the ocean, the young woman says, "I want to travel by myself from now on. I'm going up the coastline from here" (position). The other says, "I like traveling together. I want to go with you" (demand). The young woman says, "I don't like traveling with someone else. I want to go my own way, on my own terms" (motive). The other says, "I don't know if I can survive alone, and now I am so far from my home I don't know if I can make it back" (motive).

In this short fictional story, the two people experienced all three forms of intersection (converge, diverge, and cross) and all seven of the primary issues. Real life conflicts are much more nuanced, but the fundamentals of conflict are the same: an intersection of issues that induce stress.

# Stress

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress.

Intersection is a place where two or more paths converge, diverge, or cross.

Issue is a position or demand and its underlying motive which produces disruption.

Stress is a feeling of tension or pressure in response to an intersection or issue.

## Stress Severity Scale

One measurement of the severity of a conflict is the intensity of stress. If the stress is unbearable, the conflict should be taken very seriously. On the other hand, if there is very little stress the best strategy may be to ignore the issue and see if what was thought to be a conflict is actually only a disagreement. You may be in a disagreement, even sharp disagreement, but until some level of stress manifests there is no conflict.

This is important because we do not want to apply conflict resolution techniques, strategies, and philosophies to an intersection of issues where neither tension nor pressure exist. This would be like putting out a single candle with a fire hose.

One example is two neighbors talking over their shared, wood slate fence and the subject of backyard fences comes up. The one neighbor says he believes a solid vinyl fence is the best way to go and the other says she thinks a chain link fence is the only one to have. They each hold to their opinion in absolute disagreement, but there is no conflict because there is no pressure or tension between them – until one evening a windstorm blows down their wood fence. The next morning each of them pressures the other to accept their idea of a better-than-wood fence. Now they are in conflict.

Another everyday example of how we intersect with people who have different issues that rarely induce stress is when two people walk up to a door at the same time. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred one will open the door for the other. There is no stress, in fact, there is usually a feeling of happiness for both people, thus, no conflict. But there is that one out of a hundred times when one person is obnoxious about the encounter and a moment of stress occurs. This one instance defines conflict, but the stress is at such a low level that it is not worth addressing.

This last example brings to mind a conflict rule; when two or more people are involved, it only requires one person to feel stress for conflict to exist. I'm sure everyone has experienced a time when a group of friends are gathered, and someone makes a comment in jest that unintentionally offends another. The other makes their feelings known and instantly there is stress among the whole group and conflict has filled the room like the proverbial elephant. Hopefully, any one person in that room has any degree of conflict resolution training so they can all remain friends.

## Feeling Stress: PIES

We describe stress as a feeling, but what kind of feeling is it? Feelings and emotions is a large, complex, and difficult topic. Here, we again use PIES to help gain some understanding of feelings and emotions during a conflict.

When you have a feeling of tension or pressure in your physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual (PIES) being because of an intersection or issue that is causing trouble, interfering with your normal activity, or attempting to change your current situation, you are experiencing stress. As a rule of thumb, when you feel tension or pressure on your skin, muscles, or bones you are experiencing physical stress (this usually revolves around time and/or money), the position or demand is intersecting with your physical needs or wants. Stress in your head indicates intellectual conflict, stress in your heart and lungs, signal an emotional conflict, and stress in your gut is typically the product of a spiritual conflict (spiritual is intuition or beliefs). This is not a proven law of nature, but it is a good start toward understanding. While you are in a conflict, if you identify where you are feeling stress it will help you to know which of the four cornerstones to begin with in seeking resolution. If you can ascertain this same information from the other person and each of you are able to share this with the other, then you are that much closer to resolution.

## Two Groups: Tension vs Pressure

Stress is a feeling of tension or pressure. Tension is pulling and pressure is pushing.

When involved in conflict, it is common for our neck muscles to tighten and our shoulders to rise. This is a result of our muscles pulling the bones closer and we correctly call it tension or feeling tense. Other times our heart rate increases, breathing shallows, and our temperature rises or drops. This is a result of feeling pushed or pressured to do something we feel unprepared for or unwilling to do. Most of the time it is enough to acknowledge the presence of stress but occasionally it helps negotiations to identify whether the stress is tension or pressure.

## Two Forms: Acute and Chronic

One measurement of the intensity of a conflict is the severity of stress; another measure is duration. Stress comes in two forms, acute and chronic. Chronic stress is also sometimes called strain.

Acute stress appears suddenly and is short-term (like being told your flight has been cancelled), while chronic stress develops gradually and lasts a long time (like taking care of an infirmed parent). Chronic stress requires ongoing management.

While "acute" refers to sudden and "chronic" refers to gradual, these terms are not mutually exclusive; an acute issue can sometimes trigger or become part of a chronic

problem, and conversely, chronic stress can trigger acute instances. The key difference between acute stress and chronic stress is duration: acute is fast and temporary, chronic is slow and persistent, often defined as lasting over 3 months.

## Two Types: Eustress and Distress

In addition to acute and chronic, there are two types of stress: good and bad. Good stress is called eustress and bad stress is called distress.

### Good Stress – eustress

Eustress is enabling and occurs when stress pushes us to step outside our comfort zones and tackle challenges, leading to personal growth and accomplishment. We experience eustress when challenges enhance our focus and performance, and when it adds excitement or variety to our lives. Examples include the stress of performing on stage, meeting a deadline, facing a challenge, overcoming an obstacle, or solving a problem.

### Bad Stress – distress

Distress is disabling and is the type typically found in a conflict. The most common tell-tale sign of distress is when one experiences a 4F response.

#### *4F Response*

You have probably heard of the Fight or Flight response. This occurs when we come upon a stressful situation unexpectedly and we either instinctively run toward the issue to fight it or run away from the issue in flight. The fight response looks like yelling, becoming argumentative, or trying to "win" by force. The flight response can manifest as literally walking out of a room, but it also looks like "busyness". Overworking or distractedly scrolling on a phone to avoid a hard conversation are examples of the flight response. Today we know there are two other instinctive responses, freeze and fawn. A freeze response happens when the brain can't decide whether fighting or running is a safe option, so it shuts down the system. You might "go blank" during an argument, feel physically heavy or numb, or dissociate (feel like you aren't really there). The fawn response is a reaction where a person tries to avoid conflict or harm by pleasing others and putting their own needs aside. This looks like constant apologizing (even when you aren't wrong), saying "yes" to things you don't want to do, or suppressing your own needs just to keep the other person happy.

When you suddenly realize you are in one of these four modes there is a good chance you are experiencing stress, and if you are experiencing stress there is a good chance you are at an intersection of disruptive issues – you are in conflict.

## Stress vs Anxiety

Stress is a feeling of tension or pressure in response to an intersection or issue.

Anxiety, or worry, is a feeling of tension or pressure in anticipation of a potential future issue.

Stress and anxiety are often confused because both have a feeling of tension or pressure. It takes some probing to discern whether the source of these feelings is an existing or potential intersection or issue. It is impossible to find resolution for potential future things because, firstly, there is no end to them and, secondly, they are straw men that can be discussed and debated with no definite conclusion.

When the conflict includes an intersection of potential future issues that induce anxiety, the best you can hope to accomplish is a recommendation. There are times when a potential future event needs to be considered, for instance, “What will we do if, when we get home, we discover the tornado has completely destroyed our house?” The trouble with trying to reach a resolution about this issue is there are too many unknowns. Maybe the tornado only damaged a portion of the roof, or maybe it missed the house altogether. Investing all the time and emotional effort into a resolution is foolish. However, suggesting a recommendation, or proposed plan, is prudent, such as, “If the house is gone then we could get a motel for a few nights until we can decide what to do.” Using words like ‘if’ and ‘could’ make this a non-committal recommendation.

Some anxiety is by itself a disorder. Feeling tension or pressure about an election three years away (unless you are the chairman of the re-election campaign) is disabling. Feeling stress about your grandkids’ chances to attend college when your own kids are still in elementary school is debilitating. When these types of anxieties play a role in a two-person conflict, resolution is very difficult.

Other differences between stress and anxiety include,

- Stress is triggered by a present event.
- Anxiety may not have any identifiable trigger.
- Stress is typically acute, although it occasionally develops into chronic.
- Anxiety is lingering.
- Stress, even chronic, usually has distinct hot points and corresponding cool periods.
- Anxiety is neither hot nor cold; it just stays lukewarm.

## When Stress or Anxiety is the Issue

When one's anxiety or chronic stress intersects with another's needs or wants and produces a disruption that induces acute stress in either, they are in conflict.

This is an especially difficult conflict to resolve because separating the anxiety or chronic stress from the acute stress is like separating egg yolks from the whites; it can be done but it takes know-how and practice, and even then, there is always some residual of white on the yolk.

In the case of a conflict the first step is admitting there are two distinct, yet interwoven, types of stress involved. Step two is erecting a cognitive wall between (separating) the acute stress and the anxiety or chronic stress. Step three is a fork in the road. Conflict resolutionists help two people in conflict find resolution, the key to this is 'two people'. Anxiety or chronic stress is an internal conflict and requires the help of a therapist not a resolutionist. The two people in conflict would need to decide whether to pursue resolution for the issue causing acute stress or therapy for the person with anxiety.

## Induce

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress. The word induce has been carefully selected.

Stress is a feeling of tension or pressure. For the purposes of conflict resolution, stress is that feeling in response to an intersection or issue.

Intersections are by their nature stressful. Whenever two or more paths converge, diverge, or cross there develops a feeling of tension or pressure. Any form of a PIES intersection is stressful to varying degrees. Issues also have stress built in. Anytime a position is taken, or a demand is made a feeling of tension or pressure is created. The intersection of issues does not cause stress; the stress already existed separately in both the intersection and the issue before they came together. The conflict merely induces stress to come to the forefront.

When you think of induce, think of a doctor inducing labor. The doctor does not cause labor to happen. The cause of the woman's labor is the mother and father of the child, biology, physiology, and nature. The doctor is gently persuading the mother into a labor that already existed. For the person experiencing severe distress this fine distinction may not matter, but it is valuable to understand the true source of stress.

If one believes the true cause of stress is two issues meeting at a crossroads, and this person wants to avoid or reduce stress, they would be expected to prevent multiple issues from ever meeting. The trouble with this strategy is that, rather than reducing stress,

it adds another layer of stress by creating pressure to keep these things apart. This is called the conflict prevention strategy, and it is exhausting because it is both futile and impossible, and typically leads to anxiety.

Another popular, yet equally ineffective, strategy is avoiding intersections and issues altogether. This is the false notion that in some mysterious way you can travel through life on your PIES pathways without ever encountering an intersection or establishing an issue. This is called the conflict avoidance strategy and, in the extreme, leads to depression.

Lastly, the conflict ignorance strategy suggests you can simply disregard other peoples' issues and blow through intersections as if they were not there.

The root cause of these three errant strategies is misunderstanding the true source of stress. Practicing these strategies will develop more stress, solitariness, and selfishness respectively.

Learning to manage stress begins with acknowledging its inevitable presence and understanding its true source. Learning to alleviate stress begins with accepting conflict as the first step toward resolution and understanding that resolution is peace.

Therefore, one of the first steps to take when you feel you are in a conflict is answering the most basic question, "Am I in conflict? Has bringing my issue to this intersection induced (gently persuaded) the stress inherent in the intersection or the issues, or have I pushed the stress out of proportion?"

## Summary

Conflict is an intersection of issues that induce stress.

Intersection is a place where two or more paths converge, diverge, or cross.

Issue is a position or demand and its underlying motive which produces disruption.

Stress is a feeling of tension or pressure in response to an intersection or issue.

Conflicts are disruptive and stressful. A conflict is not a mere disagreement or dispute and when treated specifically can be the first step toward lasting peace that comes from resolution.

This episode defines conflict as an intersection of issues that induce stress and fully describes each of these key components: intersection, issue, and stress.

Several tools are provided to help you negotiate intersections, such as,

- PIES – Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual pathways that form the four cornerstones of the human condition.
- 4 Stress locations – Skin, Head, Heart, and Gut that correlate with PIES respectively.
- 3 Intersections – Internal, Circumstances, and Other People. Plus, Dead Ends.

- 7 Primary Issues – Needs, Process, Emotions, Values, Beliefs, Wants, and Physical.
- Different kinds of stress – Tension or Pressure, Acute or Chronic, and Good or Bad.
- 4F Response – Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn.

The big idea in this article is centered around the concept “Conflict is Inevitable, Resolution is Attainable” and, while resolution is the “end in mind”, conflict must be the “start in sight”. By having a clear, complete understanding of the conflict you start at, the chances of arriving safely and sanely at resolution are much better.

Resolution is peace. The three popular alternatives to resolution; Prevention, Avoidance, and Ignorance lead to more conflict, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

## Author’s Note

It is completely natural to feel overwhelmed when you hit a tough intersection, but I want you to see that conflict isn't a sign that you've failed—it's actually the first step toward finding real peace. By understanding that stress is just a built-in part of life's many intersections and issues, you can stop exhausting yourself with impossible strategies like avoidance or total prevention. Instead of seeing that tension as a wall, try to view it as a signal that's gently persuading you to address what really matters. You have the tools to identify whether you're dealing with a physical, emotional, or intellectual need, and once you "start with the beginning in sight," you'll find that navigating these moments with others is not only possible but deeply rewarding. You've got this; every resolved conflict is just another road leading you to a better destination.

The next episode will cover resolution. Please download the free PDF version of this episode for your future reference.

If you feel this was helpful and would like more content like it, please like and subscribe (you can always unsubscribe later if you want). If you are in a conflict now and would like some help attaining resolution, reach out and contact me for a no cost, no obligation consult.