

Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to review the role of conflict in stress by covering:

1. Conflict
2. Types of Conflict
 - a. Approach-Approach Conflict
 - b. Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict
 - c. Approach-Avoidance Conflict

1. Conflict

Generally, people tend to think of conflict as something physical, like fighting with another person. While conflict can involve other people, this does not exactly represent the psychological definition of conflict. The psychological definition of conflict is when a person has to choose between two opposing or incompatible actions, motives, or ideas. It's sort of like trying to pick items on a menu when you're out for dinner; having to choose between those things can create a conflict within a person.

Now, conflict can be important or helpful. Psychologist Erik Erikson claimed that conflict was an important motivation in each stage of development within a person. On the other hand, conflict can also lead to stress, which can harm a person both psychologically and physically. Understanding exactly how conflict works is important for understanding how to prevent these negative effects.

2. Types of Conflict

Kurt Lewin, a psychologist, identified three different types of conflict:

- Approach-Approach Conflict
- Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict
- Approach-Avoidance Conflict

2a. Approach-Approach Conflict

Approach-approach conflict is when a person has to choose between two things that they want, or two things that are very desirable to that person. Generally, these kinds of conflicts within a person are less stressful than other kinds, and are resolved more quickly.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you're at an ice cream shop and have to decide between mint chip ice cream or butterscotch ice cream. This would be an approach-approach conflict.



TERM TO KNOW

Approach-Approach Conflict

When a person must choose between two things that he or she wants

2b. Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict

Avoidance-avoidance conflict is when a person has to choose between two things that they do not want. The choice is between two things that are not desirable to a person or are negative in some way. People generally have a hard time deciding in these situations, which can be very stressful on a person. This may cause indecision, or freezing up, in a person because they don't want to decide.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Should you choose to sweep the floors or wash the dishes? If neither chore is appealing to you, this is an avoidance-avoidance conflict.



TERM TO KNOW

Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict

When a person must choose between two things that he or she doesn't want

2c. Approach-Avoidance Conflict

Approach-avoidance conflict is when a person both wants and doesn't want a certain thing. A person often reacts in these situations with **ambivalence**, or mixed feelings. This is generally quite stressful for a person, and can lead to a partial approach.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you want to be in a production on stage, but you have stage fright and don't like performing in front of other people. This would be an approach-avoidance conflict. The partial approach would be if you decide to be in the play, you might just choose a small, inconsequential part or background role.

A person can also have a double approach-avoidance situation where they have two alternatives that are both neither good nor bad, because they have both positive and negative aspects. These conflicts are much more difficult for a person to resolve. These types of situations can increase the stress and the psychological or emotional problems that a person has as a result of conflict.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A person is offered two different jobs. One of them pays well, but it is very boring work. The other one doesn't pay well, but it involves work that they really enjoy. That person has to make a decision between the two jobs, navigating the pros and cons of both.



TERM TO KNOW

Approach-Avoidance Conflict

When a person both wants and doesn't want a thing

Ambivalence

Mixed feelings about the situation



SUMMARY

In psychology, **conflict** is when a person has to decide between two opposing or incompatible actions, motives, or ideas. Conflict can be helpful, motivational force, but it can also be stressful. There are three different **types of conflict**: approach-approach conflict, avoidance-avoidance conflict, and approach-avoidance conflict.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Ambivalence

Mixed feelings about the situation.

Approach-Approach Conflict

When a person must choose between two things that he or she wants.

Approach-Avoidance Conflict

When a person both wants and doesn't want a thing.

Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict

When a person must choose between two things that he or she doesn't want.