

Intention in Relationships

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how we tend to make assumptions about the intentions of others in conflict. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Types of Behavior
 - a. Purposeful Behavior
 - b. Non-Intentional Behavior
2. Mitigating Assumptions in Conflict Resolution

1. Types of Behavior

It's easy to assume something about what another person does, and when individuals are in conflict, they often make assumptions about the other party's intentions.

There are two types of behavior in relationships:

- Purposeful
- Non-intentional

As human beings, we like to think that everything we do is purposeful and that we're aware of our behavior and our intentions; however, that's not always the case.

1a. Purposeful Behavior

Purposeful behavior is behavior which has a consciously selected objective or reflects an unconscious but felt objective. We all observe and participate in purposeful behavior, and it can often be positive.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You see somebody with a lot of groceries or bags, so you go over and help them. Or somebody is stuck in a snowbank during winter, so you and some others gather around and try to push the car out.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You might have a friend who is really troubled about something; you tell this friend to call you at any time he or she wants. You are willing to help, encourage, and listen to someone who is a good friend.

However, people may exhibit purposeful behavior that is not constructive. The following are examples of

negative purposeful behavior.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone might lie to someone else. This person knows they are lying; it's on purpose.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone might decide to purposely withhold information from somebody, or purposely try to sabotage someone at work because they see this person as competition for a promotion.



TERM TO KNOW

Purposeful Behavior

Behavior which has a consciously selected objective or reflects an unconscious (but felt) objective.

2b. Non-Intentional Behavior

People also do things non-intentionally. **Non-intentional behavior** is behavior unrelated to a given objective. It's often this non-intentional behavior that can create or escalate a conflict.

➞ **EXAMPLE** You are feeling annoyed because your friends all got together on a Friday evening and had a great time. They're all talking about it, and nobody included you. Maybe this was just a spontaneous gathering, and the friends happened to be together. Nobody intended to exclude you; it just happened. But you're feeling as though their not inviting you was intentional: "Why didn't they include me? What have I done wrong? Is someone upset with me?"

➞ **EXAMPLE** Or perhaps you find out your best friend has some great news. She just got a promotion at work that she's been wanting. However, you find out about it through a mutual friend, and you feel like your best friend not calling you was intentional even though it might not have been. She might not have meant for you to find out from someone else, but you perceive it as an intentional slight that you weren't the first person she called.

➞ **EXAMPLE** You arrived home late from the mall with the car, and your significant other thinks you intentionally kept them from an appointment. But maybe you didn't know about the appointment; there was some miscommunication. Your significant other perceives the situation as you not thinking about their needs because you didn't come back in time.



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Non-Intentional Behavior

Behavior unrelated to a given objective.

2. Mitigating Assumptions in Conflict Resolution

Little things that may happen unintentionally can create conflict and harm relationships. When you uncover the root of an ongoing conflict, you might often find that one party has been making assumptions about the other party's behavior even though the behavior was really unintentional.

We can prevent this from happening by first understanding that it does happen; we all engage in things that have unintentional consequences.

We sometimes don't realize that what we're doing might be affecting someone in a negative way or causing

someone to think that we meant something by a particular action or statement that we made.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If you are upset because you feel a distance in a relationship which was once close, it's always good to communicate about whatever it is you think is happening. Realize you might have made an assumption, and that what you think of as intentional, purposeful behavior may be unintentional.

A full-blown conflict can occur when a number of small, unintentional behaviors escalate and create more and more relational and communication problems between parties. This is why open communication at the start is key.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that there are two **types of behavior**: purposeful behavior and non-intentional behavior. Oftentimes, it is non-intentional behavior that can lead to or escalate conflict because the behavior is incorrectly assumed to be purposeful. You now understand that it's possible to **mitigate these assumptions during the conflict resolution** process by understanding that incorrect assumptions often happen, and then communicating those assumptions clearly so that the other party has the chance to explain. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Non-Intentional Behavior

Behavior unrelated to a given objective.

Purposeful Behavior

Behavior which has a consciously selected objective or reflects an unconscious (but felt) objective.