

# Physical and Emotional Factors in Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how emotional factors can be just as, if not more, important than physical factors in a conflict. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Factors in Conflict
  - a. Tangible Factors
  - b. Emotional Factors
2. Addressing Both Factors in Conflict Resolution

## 1. Factors in Conflict

When there's a conflict, it often presents itself as a dispute over something physical or observable; however, there are quite often issues underneath that physical conflict that aren't quite as obvious.

It is therefore important to discuss both tangible and emotional factors when assessing a conflict.

### 1a. Tangible Factors

At the root of a conflict, there are tangible things that bring people into conflict in the first place. These **tangible factors** are needs which are external resources.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Two business partners are in a conflict over money, or something related to finances.

↪ **EXAMPLE** At work, you are having a conflict with a coworker over some research, a spreadsheet, or something else that you need to finish your project that you are not getting.

↪ **EXAMPLE** There could be a dispute between neighbors over a property line. One neighbor is doing some landscaping on his or her property, and the other neighbor feels like the property line is being crossed. Or there could be an issue over the neighbor's barking dog. Both of these are tangible factors.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Tangible Factor

A need which is an external resource.

## 1b. Emotional Factors

While the tangible factor can be the presenting issue, the discussion of this issue often makes new issues arise that escalate the conflict.

These arising issues are usually **emotional factors**, or needs which are not external resources, but rather internal feelings, such as relational and/or communication issues.

A conflict over something tangible can escalate because of these emotional factors.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Consider the scenario about resources at work. You need these resources, and you're not getting them. As you begin to talk about the issue, you may discover that what's at the root of the conflict is the unresponsiveness of the person who has this information.

However, it turns out that she feels that she's lacked communication from your end; she's a little annoyed that a lot of her emails in the past have not been answered. She also feels as though there were some decisions made on the project without her; she wasn't included in the team meetings.

All of a sudden, she's being asked for information, yet she wasn't involved in the whole process of discussing this information. The relational communication issues going on in the everyday process of working on this project have gotten in the way of you getting what you need; this escalates the conflict.

➞ **EXAMPLE** This could happen in the same way with the financial issue. The two business partners, who have perhaps been friends, suddenly find that their business is not going so well. There are financial issues, and one of the partners begins yelling at the other about the situation.

When they begin to talk about the financial issues, they realize that the communication patterns here are what are really escalating this conflict. Perhaps something that could be solved as a tangible issue is not being solved because of the way these partners are communicating with each other.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Emotional Factor

A need which is not an external resource, but rather an internal feeling.

---

## 2. Addressing Both Factors in Conflict Resolution

While it's clear that conflicts about tangible factors can lead to conflicts about emotional factors, the opposite can also be true.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Let's go back to the example of the neighbors who were having the property line dispute; we'll call them Joe and Steve. Joe is upset that Steve is doing landscaping that affects Joe's property.

Joe feels as though his neighbor is not communicating with him or paying attention to his feelings. This perceived disrespect leads Joe to dump snow over Steve's driveway, or accidentally tip over the garbage can. The neighbors now have a conflict over Joe's behavior, which really stems from the fact that Joe was feeling disrespected.

Because emotional factors and tangible factors are often both present in a dispute, it's key for the conflict-resolver to acknowledge that both factors are important during the conflict resolution process.

The conflict-resolver can give these factors equal weight by listening carefully to and asking questions of both parties. This will create an awareness of whatever factors are underneath the presented actions or emotions.



#### BIG IDEA

In a conflict resolution setting, the conflict-resolver must acknowledge both the tangible and the emotional factors, give equal weight to both, and make sure that the parties have a chance to listen to one another and be heard.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **factors that cause a conflict** can be tangible, emotional, or a combination of the two. You now understand that in order to effectively **address both factors in the conflict resolution process**, the conflict-resolver must listen to and ask questions of the parties involved in order to get to the root of the issue. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Emotional Factor**

A need which is not an external resource, but rather an internal feeling.

##### **Tangible Factor**

A need which is an external resource.