The proverbs listed below can be thought of as descriptions of some of the different strategies for resolving conflict. Proverbs state traditional wisdom and these proverbs reflect traditional wisdom for resolving conflicts. Read each of the proverbs carefully. Using the following scale, indicate how typical each proverb is of your actions in a conflict on the scoring sheet.

5 = Very typical of the way I act in a conflict
4 = Frequently typical of the way I act in a conflict
3 = Sometimes typical of the way I act in a conflict
2 = Seldom typical of the way I act in a conflict
1 = Never typical of the way I act in a conflict

1. It is easier to refrain than to retreat from a quarrel.
2. If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him or her do as you think.
4. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.
5. Come now and let us reason together.
6. When two quarrel, the person who keeps silent first is the most praiseworthy.
7. Might overcomes right.
8. Smooth words make smooth ways.
9. Better half a loaf then no bread at all.
10. Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion.
11. He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.
12. He hath conquered well that hath made his enemies flee.
13. Kill your enemies with kindness.
15. No person has the final answer but every person has a piece to contribute.
16. Stay away from people who disagree with you.
17. Fields are won by those who believe in winning.
18. Kind words are worth much and cost little.
19. Tit for tat is fair play.
20. Only the person who is willing to give up his or her monopoly on truth can ever profit from the truths that others hold.
21. Avoid quarrelsome people as they will only make your life miserable.
22. A person who will not flee will make others flee.
23. Soft words ensure harmony.
24. One gift for another makes good friends.
25. Bring your conflicts into the open and face them directly, only then will the best solution be discovered.
26. The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them.
27. Put your foot down where you mean to stand.
28. Gentleness will triumph over anger.
29. Getting part of what you want is better than not getting anything at all.
30. Frankness, honesty and trust will move mountains.
31. There is nothing so important that you have to fight for it.
32. There are two kinds of people in the world, the winners and the losers.
33. When one hits you with a stone, hit him or her with a piece of cotton.
34. When both give in halfway, a fair settlement is achieved.
35. By digging and digging the truth is discovered.
The higher the total score for each conflict strategy, the more frequently you tend to use that strategy. The lower the total score for each conflict strategy, the less frequently you tend to use that strategy.
Conflict Strategies: What are you like?

Different people use different strategies from managing conflict. These strategies are learned usually in childhood, and they seem to function automatically. Usually, we are not aware of how we act in conflict situations. We just do whatever seems to come naturally. But we do have a personal strategy; and because it was learned, we can always change it by learning new and more effective ways of managing conflicts.

When you become engaged in a conflict, there are two major concerns you have to take into account:

1. Achieving your personal goals – you are in conflict because you have a goal that conflicts with another person’s goal. Your goal may be highly important to you, or it may be of little importance.
2. Keeping a good relationship with the other person – you may need to be able to interact effectively with the other person in the future. The relationship may be very important to you, or it may be of little importance.

How important your personal goals are to you and how important the relationship is to you affects how you act in a conflict. Given these two concerns, it is possible to identify five styles of managing conflict:

**THE TURTLE (withdrawing):** Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the persons they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict than to face it.

**THE SHARK (forcing):** Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them, and relationships are of minor importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of others. They do not care if others like or accept them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled by one person winning and one person losing. They want to be the winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy, and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating others.

**THE TEDDY BEAR (smoothing):** To teddy bears the relationship is of great importance while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy bears want to be accepted and liked by others. They think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and that people cannot discuss conflicts without damaging relationships. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt, and that would ruin the relationship. Teddy bears say “I’ll give up my goals and let you have what you want in order for you to like me.” Teddy bears try to smooth over the conflict out of fear of harming the relationship.

**THE FOX (compromising):** Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and their relationships with others. Foxes seek a compromise – they give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of his/her goals. They seek a conflict solution in which both sides gain something – the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

**THE OWL (confronting):** Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their own goals and the goals of the other person. Owls see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing tension between two persons. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, Owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their own goals and the other person’s goals. And they are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.
The Constructive Outcomes of Conflict

Conflicts, when skillfully managed, can be of great value to a group. Here are several of potentially constructive outcomes of conflict:

1. **Conflicts make us more aware of problems in our relationships that need to be solved.** Conflicts increase our awareness of what the problems are, who is involved, and how they can be solved.

2. **Conflicts encourage change.** There are times when things need to change, when new skills need to be learned, when old habits need to be modified.

3. **Conflicts energize and increase one's motivation to deal with problems.** Awareness of conflict can trigger a great deal of physical energy and an intensity of psychological focus, which in turn result in a strong motivation to resolve the conflict and put one’s plan into action.

4. **Conflicts make life more interesting.** Being in a conflict often sparks curiosity and stimulated interest. Arguments about politics, sports, work, and societal problems can make interpersonal interaction more intriguing and less boring. The disagreement of others with your ideas may inspire you to find out more about the issue.

5. **Better decisions are generally made when there is disagreement about what the decision should be among the persons responsible for making it.** Disagreement often causes the decision to be thought through more carefully.

6. **Conflicts reduce the day-to-day irritations of relating to someone.** A good argument may do a lot to resolve the small tensions of interacting with others.

7. **Conflicts help you understand what you are like as a person.** What makes you angry, what frightens you, what is important to you, and how you tend to manage conflicts are all highlighted when you are in conflict with someone. Being aware of what you are willing to argue about and how you act in conflicts can help you learn a great deal about yourself.

8. **Conflicts can be fun when they are not taken too seriously.** Many persons seek out conflicts through such activities as competitive sports and games, movies, plays, books, and teasing. They do so because they enjoy being involved in such conflict situations.

9. **Conflicts can deepen and enrich a relationship, strengthening each person’s conviction that the relationship can hold up under stress,** communicating the commitments and values of each person that the other must take into account, and generally keeping the relationship clear of irritations and resentments so that positive feelings can be experienced fully.

10. **Conflicts can stimulate creativity by promoting an awareness of different ways of viewing problems and situations.** The reorientation gained from viewing a problem from several different perspectives generate insights into the problem and fosters the formation of creative solutions.

11. **When a group enters into conflict with another group its cohesiveness increases and its sense of identity becomes clearer.**

12. **Conflicts promote the social development of group members** by reducing their cognitive self-centeredness and promoting higher levels of cognitive and moral reasoning.
How to tell whether conflicts are constructive

There are four things to look for in deciding whether a conflict has been constructive:

1. If the relationships among group members are stronger, and the members are better able to interact and work with each other, the conflict has been constructive.
2. If the group members like and trust each other more, the conflict had been constructive.
3. If all the members of the group are satisfied with the results of the conflict, the conflict has been constructive.
4. If the members of the group have improved their ability to resolve future conflicts with one another, the conflict has been constructive.

Conflicts are a persuasive and inevitable part of any group, and can lead to growth and development of the group as well as of each individual member. Because of this is it important to learn the skills involved in handling conflicts constructively. If a group puts emphasis on avoiding conflicts, resolving them prematurely, or stifling any discussion of differences, serious difficulties will arise within the relationships among group members and the group’s effectiveness and productivity will suffer. Unless a group is able to withstand the stress of a conflict among members, it is not likely to last very long.