

Stages in Conflict Escalation

Stage 1: Disagreement

The two sides failed in the attempt to solve the problem. There is mutual misunderstanding and the difficulties in communication are increasing. The problem is becoming a growing obstacle between the two sides.

Stage 2: Personal antagonism

The problem itself is not the main problem anymore – now it is the other person in conflict. There are mutual attacks and accusations. You start to be judgmental about the person you are in conflict with (“You are stupid!”).

Stage 3: Expansion of the problem

At this stage you have started to recall all the problems you had with the other person in the past. Old and unresolved conflicts are revived and used against the other side (“You have never supported me!”).

Stage 4: Giving up on dialogue

Strong emotions have overwhelmed you and you are not capable to think and talk constructively anymore. You don’t listen to what other person is talking to you and you feel not listened as well. Conversation slowly stops and ends. You don’t talk *with*, but *about* each other.

Stage 5: Creation of the enemy – image

You have created an enemy image and everything the other person does is interpreted in line with that image. At this stage you have forgotten about the initial object of conflict and your aim is to show that you are right and to win over the other side. The logic is “either him/her or me” and “if you are not with me, you are against me!”.

Stage 6: Open hostility

You are no longer capable of seeing the other side as a person and human being. You are treating the other person as an object who doesn’t deserve our basic respect and human treatment. Here you have become ‘autistic’ and the aim starts to justify all the means, including the ‘destruction’ of the enemy. There are open threats towards the other side.

Stage 7: Polarization

Different sides in conflict are no longer capable of sharing the same space. Separation, breaking any contacts, cold war or direct violence.

Source: <http://www.konfliktloesning.dk/files/engelsk.pdf>