



Conflict Management Styles: Aversive

The next three articles will cover different ways to approach conflict or disagreement. There will also be a virtual workshop on this material on May 20; details to come in *IDA Today*. As always, the purpose of these materials is to build awareness and skills that help reduce the stress of difficult situations.

Interpersonal conflict is inevitable, where the parties in the conflict want different outcomes, and will typically use different methods to try to get the outcome they want. Broadly speaking, there are three styles of conflict management, each with benefits and costs: Aversive, Passive, and Assertive. This article describes the **aversive style**, where one party attempts to win by hurting or shaming the other party. Being AVERSIVE means that I...

1. Discount you by sending the message that your needs or wants are invalid
2. Withdraw from or abandon you, or threaten to
3. Threaten you with harm
4. Blame you for the problem. Since you “caused it” you have to fix it.
5. Belittle you by making you feel foolish or wrong
6. Guilt-trip you
7. Derail the attention away from what is important to you or by changing the subject, usually to myself
8. Take away – or threaten to take away – something you want or need, as punishment for not doing what I want you to do.

The “benefits” of being AVERSIVE include that I temporarily feel powerful, I may get my way in the short term, it’s easy to do (especially if others have done it to me), and I may get approval from “the crowd.” The costs of being AVERSIVE include that it eventually pushes people away, my “power” isn’t real and only works when I’m aversive, and it can produce resentment and aggression in others. It also is a poor long-term solution, but unfortunately it gets used all too frequently!

Homework: This month, challenge yourself to recognize the **aversive conflict management style** in yourself or others. Notice what triggers the use of this style, and its impact on problem solving, interpersonal relationships, and your stress level.

Adapted from Marsha Linehan, PhD, author of “DBT Skills Training Manual.”