# Win/Win Approach to resolving conflicts

**Step 1: Cool off.**  
Conflicts can’t be solved in the face of hot emotions. Take a step back, breathe deep, and gain some emotional distance before trying to talk things out.

**Step 2: Tell what’s bothering you using “I messages.”**

By starting from “I” we take responsibility for the way we perceive the problem. This is in sharp contrast to “you messages” which put others on the defensive. Compare a statement like, “You’re just lazy!” to “I’m frustrated because I don’t feel like you’re being productive.” Avoid put-downs, guilt-trips, sarcasm, or negative body language. When there is conflict, remember: “It’s us against the problem, not us against each other.”

**Step 3: Each person restates what they heard the other person say.**  
Listen to TRULY understand the other person, then restate what you heard. “What I’m hearing is that you feel like no matter what you do, it’s never enough.”

**Step 4: Take responsibility.**   
In the majority of conflicts, both parties have some degree of responsibility. However, most of us tend blame rather than looking at our own role in the problem. When we take responsibility we shift the conflict into a place where resolution is possible.  
  
“I do push a lot, and I probably haven’t made enough effort to recognize everything you do get done.”

**Step 5: Brainstorm solutions and come up with one that satisfies both people.**  
Resolving conflicts is a creative act. There are many solutions to a single problem. The key is a willingness to seek compromises.   
  
“I’d like to talk about your ideas about how we can get things done without you feeling like you have to kill yourself.”

**Step 6: Affirm or thank.**  
A handshake or thank you gives closure to the resolution of conflicts. Just saying thank you at the end of a conflict, or acknowledging the person for working things out, helps to set the stage for future problem solving.

“Thank you for your ideas; let’s keep working on this to improve.”