

# Reducing Conflict 25 Stop Acting Like Children

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



If you observe people in conflict at work, you can see their actions often resemble the actions of young children. They are not consciously trying to be immature, but they exhibit the mannerisms that typically define kids in the schoolyard.

You can observe bullying, sulking, bribery, physical violence, tantrums, intimidation, along with a host of other juvenile behaviors.

It can be individual mannerisms or group-to-group activity. It is so common that we almost expect to see it every day at work. The consequences of these activities are at least a distraction from the vital work we are supposed to be doing and at worst destroying the culture of the group. Is there no way out? The hopeful answer is, there is a way out.

## One Way to Stop It

I recall one group where I was a leader. There had been some child-like behaviors in the past. When I asked the group how we wanted to tackle the problem, they said, "Let's just make a rule that we will act like adults at all times. If someone is acting like a child, we will remind him or her of the rule that helps define our culture."

Having an agreed-upon intention was important in that case because it made the expected behavior highly visible. If someone was having a tantrum, we would just give a little hand signal that had the thumb and first finger very close together. It was a sign to make childish behavior very small.

Another group I heard about would use a verbal cue to remind people of the rule. When someone was acting like a child, they would say, "can I get you a cup of coffee?" Usually, that reminder was enough to stop the behavior. If it persisted, then the observing person would be encouraged to bring it to the attention of the manager.

## What About Virtual Fights

Sometimes the fight takes place in the virtual world. One person will put out some "bait" in a nasty email and the other person will snap at it. Before long, the two people are fighting openly and the distribution gets embarrassingly large.

The way to prevent email battles is to just not take the bait. Simply do not respond to someone who is trying to bully you into a fight. Eventually, that person will realize that the tactic does not work on you.

### **Free Video**

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to stop individuals and groups from acting like children.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJMZ8TuperA>

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