

# Conflict Management & Difficult Conversations for Optometric Staff

1 hour

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This course equips staff to recognize and manage workplace and patient conflict with confidence. Participants learn to de-escalate tension, handle difficult conversations, and adapt to different conflict “personalities” to maintain harmony—much like a zookeeper managing diverse animals. By mastering these communication and resolution skills, team members enhance patient satisfaction, improve team efficiency, and contribute to overall practice success.

**Theme:** *Taming the Zoo* – Understanding and managing different “animal” behaviors in conflict.

## Introduction:

- **Purpose:** Help staff understand workplace and patient conflict, and equip them to manage disagreements, de-escalate tension, and conduct difficult conversations effectively.
- Emphasize impact on patient satisfaction, team efficiency, and practice success.
- **Theme Connection:** Just like a zookeeper manages different animals, staff can recognize and adapt to various conflict “personalities” to maintain harmony.

## 1. What Conflict Really Is (5 minutes)

- Differentiate **disagreement, tension, and toxic conflict**.
- Common triggers in optometry: scheduling issues, workflow miscommunications, patient dissatisfaction, lab or product errors.
- **Zoo Analogy:** Conflicts are like a jungle—knowing the creatures helps prevent chaos.

## 2. Understanding Conflict Styles – The Zoo (5 minutes)

**Purpose:** Introduce five core conflict styles and pair with memorable animal metaphors.

Conflict Style	Zoo Animal	Description
Competing	Lion	Assertive, dominant, strong-willed. Useful for quick decisions but can intimidate others if overused.
Collaborating	Elephant	Thoughtful, seeks win-win outcomes, values teamwork and consensus. Takes time but builds lasting solutions.
Compromising	Dolphin	Flexible, seeks middle ground, cooperative yet strategic. Balances needs efficiently.
Avoiding	Turtle	Withdraws to stay safe, useful for low-stakes issues, but can delay resolution if overused.
Accommodating	Golden Retriever	Loyal, seeks harmony, prioritizes relationships. Can feel one-sided if over-relied on.

- Self-assessment or live poll: Identify your “animal style.”
- **Zoo Tip:** Knowing your style helps you “speak animal language” and manage interactions effectively.

## 3. Common Optometric Workplace Conflict Scenarios (5 minutes)

- Staff scheduling disputes.
- Hand-off miscommunications.
- Upset patients over wait times or costs.
- Tension between sales goals and clinical recommendations.
- Lab errors or product delays.
- **Zoo Analogy:** Each scenario has a different “animal” to manage—anticipate behaviors to prevent chaos.

## 4. De-escalation Skills (5 minutes)

- Calm body language and tone (mirror without mimicking).
- Active listening techniques (“looping back”).
- Separate facts from emotions; avoid absolutes (“You always...”)
- Time-out strategy when tempers flare.
- **Zoo Tip:** Approach each animal calmly—don’t roar back at a lion or chase the turtle.

## 5. Difficult Conversation Framework (5 minutes)

- Preparation: clarify goals, gather facts, anticipate solutions.
- **B.L.U.R. Model:** Begin with empathy → Lay out facts → Understand perspective → Resolve with options.
- Avoid trigger words or defensive language.
- **Zoo Tip:** Plan your approach like feeding the animals—know what motivates each type.

## 6. Handling Upset Patients (5 minutes)

- Acknowledge > Apologize > Act
- Scripts for delays, insurance misunderstandings, product errors
- Redirect anger to problem-solving mode
- **Zoo Tip:** Patients are like wild animals—calm, consistent handling prevents escalation.

## 7. Peer-to-Peer Conflict (5 minutes)

- Private conversations when needed.
- Handling repeated friction.
- Appropriate escalation to management.
- **Zoo Tip:** Even friendly animals may bite—address recurring patterns early.

## 8. Role Play & Practice (10 minutes)

- Mock patient scenarios
- Coworker miscommunication drills
- Quick “What would you say?” challenges
- **Zoo Tip:** Practice is like a safari—observing behavior safely before entering the wild.

## 9. Creating a Culture That Prevents Conflict (5 minutes)

- Regular team huddles
- Clear SOPs for frequent friction points
- Encourage feedback without fear
- Celebrate successful resolution stories

- **Zoo Tip:** A well-managed zoo is safe and productive for everyone—same for your workplace.

## Key Takeaways and Questions (10 minutes)

- Conflict is normal; unmanaged conflict is the problem.
- Listen first, talk second; focus on solutions, not blame.
- Everyone is responsible for a healthy, collaborative work environment.
- Using structured frameworks, empathy, and de-escalation techniques strengthens teamwork and patient trust.
- **Zoo Reminder:** Recognize your “animal” style and others’—adapt to maintain harmony and prevent chaos.

Conflict Style	Zoo Animal	Traits	Tips for Managing
<b>Competing</b>	Lion 🦁	Assertive, dominant, strong-willed	Stand firm when needed, but avoid intimidating others; use facts to support your position.
<b>Collaborating</b>	Elephant 🐘	Thoughtful, team-oriented, seeks win-win	Listen actively, take time to explore options, value consensus.
<b>Compromising</b>	Dolphin 🐬	Flexible, cooperative, seeks middle ground	Offer solutions that balance needs, be ready to negotiate fairly.
<b>Avoiding</b>	Turtle 🐢	Withdraws, cautious, low-risk	Respect their space, avoid pushing too hard, revisit issues when appropriate.
<b>Accommodating</b>	Golden Retriever 🐕	Loyal, relationship-focused, seeks harmony	Show appreciation, gently assert boundaries, when necessary, maintain trust.

- Q&A / Discussion