



STAY FOCUSED, POSITIVE & HELPFUL:

The Air Force Guide to Managing Conflict & Heightened Emotions by Telephone



You have a caller on the line who is very upset.

Words are flying and you're not sure where to start. Managing conflict by phone can be hard!

Try these tips to help you stay cool and focused while you help them with their problem or conflict.

★ **Stay Calm & Take a Breath.** You don't have to say much at first. **Try:** *I'm here. I'm listening. Tell me what's going on.* Let them vent and, of course, listen carefully.

★ **Acknowledge & Check-in.** After a few minutes, they will likely calm a little and give you space to speak. **Try:** *I'm glad you called. It sounds like you are feeling (frustrated about... confused about... really concerned about...), is that right?* Let them affirm or modify your understanding.

★ **Offer Support & Empower Them with Questions.** **Try:** *How can I support you? Have you thought about how you want to approach the situation?* This will tell you if they are ready to move on and give you information to work with.

★ **Stay Positive.** If the caller is having trouble engaging with you, be affirming.

Try: *You're good at what you do. I'm here to support you. I appreciate your effort to work through this.*

★ **Assess & Consider Options.** How ready are they to move on? What are they telling you they need? What are your options? Do they need additional support or resources?

★ **Help them to Resolve Conflict.** If their issues involve a conflict - **Try:** *How do you feel about talking to . . . about your concerns? What can I do to help you prepare for that conversation?* If they aren't comfortable having a difficult conversation on their own, offer to try to bring the other(s) into the conversation. Take care to get the caller's permission before reaching out to others.

★ **Follow Up!** Before you hang up, be sure you have their phone number, review what you've said you would do, tell them when you will get back to them and invite them to call you back at any time.

TAKE CARE IN YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS

In uncertain times people may not want to acknowledge that they are afraid, but you can identify the emotion you are hearing such as frustration or anger.

W H A T I F		What if they hang up on me? – Get the caller's phone number as soon as you can at the start of your call. Give them a few minutes and consider calling them back. If you're worried about them, contact an appropriate helping agency or Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
		What if they go silent? – It's hard to know what's going on over the phone. Just hold the space for them. They may need a few moments of silence. Try: <i>I'm here when you are ready. I'm listening. What else?</i>
		What if they get abusive with me? – Recognize that they are distressed and may not be in control of their emotions. Try not to react, but do set boundaries. If it continues, you can alert them that you'll need to take a break and allow them to calm down.
		What if they don't calm down, can't get focused, or tell me about big changes in their behavior? – They may need a different kind of help. To prepare, consult the appropriate helping agency or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) <u>now</u> to develop a protocol for referral and how to hand-off a call to a helping agency professional.