

KEEPING YOUR COOL UNDER FIRE

We sometimes don't get involved in community issues because we believe that the issue is going to spark controversy, and may even lead to conflict. We don't want to get upset and "lose our cool" in public.

But there are ways to get through conflict without getting angry. Although no technique works every time, some anger management techniques work well in times of conflict.

As the voice rises when in conflict situations, the tendency to speak louder in response is often a natural reaction - even if one person is not blaming the other. Softening your voice can quickly diffuse a tense conversation.

Your tone of voice is particularly important when discussing an issue over the phone - the voice carries up to ninety-three percent of the meaning when speaking on the phone.

How you respond to another's statements can also ignite or diffuse conflict. Our reaction may imply that we think the other person is lying, simply by the tone of voice that we are using. Expressions such as "I understand your concern" or "May I share my view?" are known ways to relieve tension and also let the speaker know they are being perceived as honest—someone who is worthy of being listened to.

When you are feeling threatened or provoked, don't interrupt the speaker. Let them finish and then ask a couple of questions such as "Is there anything else that you feel is important?" or "Have you thought of anything else that you would like to add?" When asking those kinds of questions, wait until the speaker is finished and then say, "What would make the situation better?" or "What solution would you recommend?" The speaker is then the person who has to verbalize his or her own concerns.

No one can guarantee that you will never be put into a situation where conflict arises. But many tense situations can be made calmer by simply making sure the parties feel that they are being heard and respected.