

# MANAGING DIFFERENCES

Published by your Employee Assistance Provider 888-682-2224, ext. 401

April 2005

Managing conflicts and resolving differences are important in maintaining healthy relationships. In both personal and work relationships, common approaches can be used to avoid differences from escalating into full-blown conflicts.

## Get a Clear Perspective on the Situation.

- Your perception of a situation will influence the way you feel, and consequently how you respond to a situation.
- Consider whether you are taking a situation more personally than is warranted, or perhaps, you are just on the receiving end of someone else's anger.
- Try to see the larger picture. There may be other factors or people contributing to the situation.

## Know your "triggers."

- Everyone has areas that are especially sensitive to them. Hurt feelings and anger can quickly arise when this vulnerability is touched.
- Your reaction to these vulnerable feelings may be disproportionate to the situation.
- Knowing your areas of emotional vulnerability will help you have better control over your responses.
- Once you are familiar with your "triggers," you can prepare and even practice alternative responses for when these feelings are provoked.

## Have Empathy.

- Having empathy means putting yourself in the place of another person; being in touch with and appreciating their feelings and experiences.
- Treat the vulnerabilities of others with understanding and respect.

## Don't Blame.

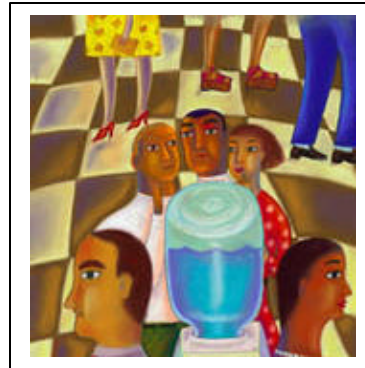
- Being non-judgmental can encourage communication between people.
- Name-calling, sarcasm, and accusations will make the other person defensive.
- Begin a difficult conversation by saying, "When you do (or say) this, I feel hurt or frustrated or angry...." Instead of saying "You shouldn't do this....or why do you do or say that or stop doing that....." By using "I" phrases, the person won't feel attacked and will be more open to listening to you.

## Take Time Out.

- If a disagreement is escalating, suggest a time out so that both parties can cool down.
- Use this time to reflect on the thoughts and feelings that have been triggered in you.
- Consider that the other person may be responding to his/her own triggers.
- Return to the discussion when you both have taken some distance and can bring more understanding and open mindedness to the discussion.

## Create Healthy Relationships.

- Healthy relationships can tolerate and even enjoy differences.
- Avoid holding others to standards you have set for yourself.
- See the other as a separate person, not as a reflection of you.
- Establish honest communication, with an underlying acceptance of and appreciation for each other. This creates a safe environment in which people and a relationship can grow.



If you are having difficulty in managing differences with others, contact your EAP counselor or discuss the problem with a mental health provider.

### How to contact your EAP

#### Phone numbers:

(888) 682-2224, extension 624 or 401

(978) 922-3000, extension 3439

#### Email:

lkenny@hes-inc.org