Fred Kofman on Managing Conflict

1. Managing conflict effectively and improving conversations start with being in the right frame of mind. Consider these tips:
   a. Approach conversations with a different perspective – and that is to start conversations with something to which the other person would agree.
   b. Find a shared purpose or goal and keep focus on that.
   c. See any conflict as potential for collaboration and frame it like that.

2. Remember these four goals each party should strive for when trying to resolve conflict in a conversation, and engage in collaboration:
   a. Listen and understand what the other person thinks and feels.
   b. Explain feelings and perspectives so the other person understands.
   c. Discuss ways in which each party can come together with mutual benefit.
   d. Once a mutual goal has been agreed upon, make commitments to accomplish the goal, and keep each other accountable.

3. Listening to the other person in a disarming way is important when attempting to resolve conflict.
   a. Be quiet, pay attention to what they have to say, and try to understand.
   b. While listening, nod and make appropriate gestures or ask questions that encourages them to continue sharing.
   c. Check for understanding by summarizing what they said and then asking whether the summary is correct.
   d. Acknowledge what they have said and how they feel, which validates their reasoning.

4. When in conflict, avoid making assumptions about what the other person may think or feel concerning the situation. Try reframing the conversation in terms of solving a problem together.

5. Speak so that the other person wants to listen. State personal opinions as opinions, use “I” statements to explain personal feelings in a way that does not discount another’s opinion.

6. Put forward suggestions in a way the other person does not feel like they are losing by adopting the suggestion. Good leaders do this and encourage collaboration to solve problems.
7. Each person needs to explain the reasoning for their opinion, idea, or position in a non-toxic way.
   a. Explain the situation in a personal manner, as in “This is what I think thus far.” Explain in a way that invites the other person to consider the perspective, change theirs, or offer information for consideration.
   b. Explain why the perspective is held.
   c. Explain the proposal for what to do given that perspective.
   d. Ask the other person for their perspective, which gives them a chance to reflect on what was said.

8. Understanding what is really important and what really matters to each party is key to moving forward and finding solutions that are mutually beneficial.

9. When a solution is agreed upon, parties must also agree on who does what and by when.
   a. Not committing to deadlines prevents accountability.
   b. No accountability can lead to loss of trust.

10. Each person should figure out their Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). This helps to clarify each person’s bargaining position in a disagreement so that they know their alternatives if there is not a resolution to the conflict.

11. Remember, healthier relationships are present when individuals realize they are happier working with others than working without them.