

How can conflicts reduce stress?



In a recent seminar organised by SMU's Behavioural Sciences Initiative (BSI), SMU Associate Professor of Psychology Tsai Ming-Hong explains how mild types of conflict can minimise stress and offers pointers on how to express conflict in more beneficial ways. [Read more here.](#)

Mild vs Intense Conflicts

Mild conflicts occur when people *debate or express different ideas*. As information is being shared, the uncertainty, that may elicit threatening responses, is reduced.

People are therefore less likely to undermine the influence of others' opinions.



Intense conflict expressions happen when people *argue over different opinions and criticise each other's suggestions*.



Often, forcefully stated arguments are used. These can lead to individuals perceiving one another as threats.

Collaborating through Conflicts

When working in collaborative teams, conflicts are inevitable.



Mild conflicts can stimulate collaboration and task performance as it signals receptivity to divergent opinions.

Intense expressions of conflict, however, convey resistance to alternative viewpoints and therefore discourage collaboration.

Impact on the Workplace

Collaboration can be achieved more effectively by framing tasks as debates – as individuals will focus on enhancing their perception of each other's openness to diverging viewpoints, instead of trying to influence each other's emotions.

Organisations looking to build a culture of openness can reframe decision processes as a problem-solving task instead of a judgment-making assignment, and present discussions as debates.

