

The LSCI Conflict Cycle

The LSCI Conflict Cycle™ is a way of looking at crisis by analyzing the interactions among a young person's stressors, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, behavior, and the reactions of others in the environment. This circular concept, developed by Dr. Nicholas Long in 1965, represents the idea of conflict between two opposing forces: needs within the young person clashing against the expectations of others. Healthy adjustment results when the conflict between these two opposing forces is minimized or resolved; maladjustment results when these two opposing forces continue to conflict. Conflict Cycles that are not broken will inevitably explode into crisis.

The Adult's Role in Conflict

An amazing aspect of the Conflict Cycle is how young people under stress can create their own feelings of anger, frustration, helplessness, and insecurity in adults, to the point that adults behave in counter-aggressive, impulsive, or rejecting ways. Counter-aggressive adult reactions create new stress for the student. The young person now must deal with the adult's rejection or anger in addition to the original stress.

For an adult to respond with any counter-aggressive behavior is self-defeating. If you act out the feelings you have and "do what comes naturally," your behavior will perpetuate the cycle of conflict by mirroring the young person's aggression or inability to control behavior. *As a result, the youth becomes the one determining the adult behavior.* The more involved you become in struggling with a young person, the more likely it is that you will be the one who ends up in crisis. Even if the child loses the battle, by getting you to express open dislike, hostility, or rejection, he wins the emotional war by demonstrating that adults are hostile and cannot be trusted.

What must adults do to stop this destructive cycle? They must understand the dynamics of conflict as represented in the Conflict Cycle. *They must see clearly how they can succumb to their own negative thoughts and feelings, and make a conscious, professional choice not to fall into the trap!*

The Sequence of the Conflict Cycle

A Conflict Cycle follows this basic sequence:

1. A *STRESSFUL EVENT* occurs which activates a young person's irrational beliefs.
2. *BELIEFS* generate a youth's way of perceiving the world.
3. *PERCEPTIONS* may lead directly to feelings or may first produce negative thoughts

4. These *NEGATIVE THOUGHTS* trigger intolerable feelings.
5. *FEELINGS*, not rational forces, drive inappropriate behaviors.
6. Inappropriate *BEHAVIORS* incite adults.
7. Adults take on the young person's feelings and may *MIRROR* his behaviors.
8. This negative adult *REACTION* increases the young person's stress, often becoming the next *STRESSFUL EVENT* and a second cycle of conflict ensues, escalating the incident into a self-defeating power struggle.
9. The young person's *SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY* (irrational beliefs) is *REINFORCED*; the youth is not motivated to change thinking or behavior.

Unless the first cycle is interrupted by a constructive, calming adult response in Step 7, the Conflict Cycle spirals into a crisis. The Conflict Cycle provides a paradigm for understanding how a youth in stress creates feelings comparable to their own in adults, and if the adult is not trained, how the adult may mirror the young person's behavior.

Using Conflict as a Learning Opportunity

Conflict can become contagious to groups of young people. In schools, learning can be brought to a standstill by a single, spiraling conflict between a teacher and student. Yet, crisis also represents a potential turning point and opportunity for new learning. A crisis can be one of the best times to teach young people how to handle stress constructively. LSCI provides the framework for doing this.

INSERT CONFLICT CYCLE IMAGE