

# What to do when team members start fighting



Your team may seem like a close-knit family most of the time.

But even the happiest “work families” can experience simmering conflicts, short-term flare-ups and even red-hot feuds between certain members.

Here are some techniques to help you deal with these fires quickly and effectively before they spread and cause irreparable damage to workplace morale.

- 1. Identify the spark.** Interpersonal conflicts can be ignited by unusually heavy work pressures, new roles, procedural change, perception of unfairness or a host of other circumstances. Start your fire-fighting by looking past the heat and smoke to find the source of the conflict, or there is little you can do to keep the peace. Hold one-on-ones with those whom you suspect are in the thick of the conflicts to help you gain an understanding of what’s at the root of the discontentment.
- 2. Cut back on the fuel.** Often the simplest approach is to reduce work pressures by adding a temp, stretching deadlines or rearranging priorities. Try separating people who aren’t getting along. Sparks generally become harmless when there’s little or nothing around them to burn.
- 3. Dampen smoldering embers.** Unless people involved are totally inflexible, you can usually induce them to try mediation. Let both sides take turns expressing their grievances and desires—and listening to the other side to do the same. Look for possible compromises or accommodations, and encourage each to “give up” something in return for movement from the other.
- 4. Prevention is the best weapon.** To keep conflicts from burning out of control, it’s important to make clear to your team that cooperation is part of the job, not an afterthought or a lucky circumstance. At least once a month, talk up instances where team cooperation yielded concrete benefits. You’ll cool off a lot of unwanted friction and irritability that might otherwise ignite into productivity-sapping conflicts.

**Note:** If there is an employee who has a propensity for fighting and thrives on chaos, you need to step in quickly and straighten him out. Bullies have no place on any team.