

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

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# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

*Your number one option for Personal Security is a lifelong commitment to avoidance, deterrence, and de-escalation.*



It is probably safe to say that most sane individuals hope never to be involved in a dispute that has the potential for developing into a life threatening encounter. Most sane individuals try to stay out of harm's way.

Some day, however, despite all of your best efforts to avoid violent situations, another person might attempt to force you into a situation where your very survival might depend on the use force, or even deadly force. If that happens, it should be your desire, not only to survive the encounter, but to emerge as a winner. Nothing short of winning is acceptable.

One way you can win is through Non-Violent Dispute Resolution.

What is Non-Violent Dispute Resolution?

Simply put, it is the ability to win a dispute without resorting to the use of violence. It is the ability to achieve a favorable resolution in a dispute before there are no options left, except violence.

Why is Non-Violent Dispute Resolution more important to you if you carry a handgun?

When you are in possession of a handgun, the consequences of your actions have the potential for being catastrophic and permanent.

How does Non-Violent Dispute Resolution work?

To make Non-Violent Dispute Resolution work, you must give serious consideration to all of your available options before resorting to physical violence. You must realize the advantages of communication, or even retreat, over a less desirable act of violence.

It should be pointed out that your interests will also be best served by your ability properly define "winning". Just as you have put aside other ideas that you have outgrown, you should also put aside the idea that winning can only be accomplished by defeating the other person in a dispute.

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

Winning does not require defeating anyone.

Winning is

- Going home alive,
- Going home unharmed, and
- Going home with the belief that, if the other person in the dispute also goes home alive and unharmed, it adds to the victory.
  - Non-Violent Dispute Resolution protects all the parties in a dispute.
- Never lose sight of your primary goal, *Staying Alive*. Nothing is more important than *Staying Alive*.

*Staying Alive* requires winning. And, when it comes to winning, there are countless opinions on how best to accomplish that goal. It seems like everyone has a plan or a philosophy that they believe will best help you resolve a dispute in a Non-Violent manner. Again, remember the importance of winning, and remember that “winning” does not always involve beating someone. Winning simply means that you have obtained your objective.

A 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Chinese general, Sun Tzu had a really simple solution for winning, “Stay out of the fight.”

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***He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.***

*[The best way to win is not to have to fight, at all.]*

*-- The Art of War - 6th century BC by Sun Tzu*

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The outcome of a potentially dangerous or even deadly encounter will be greatly influenced by your level of preparation.

- You need to have a plan that will enable you to de-escalate a potentially violent dispute, using all the options available to you at the time.
- For your plan to work, you always must remain in control of the situation.

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

- Being in control of the situation means first being in control of yourself.
- You must be in control of your emotions.
- You must never let yourself be put in a position where another person dictates your actions; your fate.

John Steinbeck once said,

*The purpose of fighting is to win.*

*There is no possible victory in defense.*

*The sword is more important than the shield and skill is more important than either.*

*The final weapon is the brain.*

*All else is supplemental.*

Steinbeck's quote seems to contradict both Sun Tzu's approach, as well as both the rule and the spirit of Non-Violent Dispute Resolution. But, on closer analysis you will find that even Steinbeck's ideas still allow opportunities to work things out verbally, before you are left with only the final option; that of using violence to resolve a dispute. Steinbeck believed that the final, the most important, weapon is the brain. If you can use your brain to de-escalate a potentially dangerous encounter, so as to deter violence, you will have won.

But, what about Steinbeck's idea that *there is no possible victory in defense*? By taking the initiative, that is, by directing that the dispute will only be resolved in a Non-Violent manner, you have taken the offensive. Only if you lose control of the situation can another person in a dispute force you into a defensive posture.

It is imperative that you remain in control. To remain in control you have to have a plan. You have to be prepared.

- When do you prepare?
  - You start NOW
  - As with everything, in a stress situation you will always revert to your training. If you are untrained when you find yourself in a stressful situation, your most likely response will be panic.
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- How do you prepare?
  - You define your goals - #1 is *Staying Alive*

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

- You learn yourself
  - Your abilities,
    - What options do you have available?
    - Are you willing to use options other than force?
  - Your limitations,
    - Do you have physical limitations?
    - Do you have language limitations?
- Learn the tools and techniques of Non-Violent Dispute Resolution, and how to use them
  - Learn how to effectively use verbal communication to de-escalate a dispute.
  - Learn the elements of a conversation like you would learn the fundamentals of marksmanship.
  - Learn to be observant.
    - Be aware of your surroundings
    - Maximize your available options
    - Distance is an asset
    - Time is a factor of distance
  - Learn to observe and interpret non-verbal indicators.
    - Through this you will learn the other person
  - Never rule out retreat as an option.
    - Always leave the other person a path to retreat

Non-Violent Dispute Resolution has its basis in communication. If you are able to resolve a dispute on a verbal level you will have accomplished your goals.

For communication to be effective you must be aware of the pitfalls that exist in everyday conversation. You need to exercise extreme caution to make sure misunderstandings do not occur. Misunderstandings can have the undesirable effect of angering the other person rather than de-escalating the level of a dispute. Think before you speak. Respond rather than react. Leave emotions out of the conversation. Remain in control of your own input into the conversation and remain objective.

You will be better able to control the conversation if you can first accomplish control over your own emotions. If you find yourself raising your voice in an argument, you have probably lost – lost control of your emotions and lost the argument.

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

It might help if you consider that, in a conversation between two parties, there are actually six different interactions taking place:

1. What the first party intends to say,
2. What he actually says,
3. What the second party actually hears,
4. What he believes he heard,
5. What he responds back to the first party,
6. What the first party actually hears, and so on, and so on ...

Each of these interactions provides an opportunity for the message to be misunderstood.

You need to pay attention to the other person in the dispute. You need to listen to how he or she responds to what you are saying. It is that feedback in the conversation that allows you to know if what you are saying is being received as you originally intended it. If you never allow the other person to respond, you never get any feedback. Without feedback, you never have a basis for determining the effectiveness of your de-escalation attempts.

An example of the importance of feedback can be seen in an old elementary school game. The game began when the first person on a row whispered a statement to the next person, and so on around the room. The rules of the game required that there could be no questions asked. There could be no attempt to clarify the statement. Without the ability to ask questions, and without feedback, the last person to hear the statement will hear a rendition that bears no resemblance to the original statement.

There are other factors that can cause messages to be misunderstood. To be effective in your efforts toward achieving Non-Violent Dispute Resolution, you must be aware of these factors.

## Non-Verbal Signals

- Individuals will be influenced more by what you see than what you hear.
  - Non-verbal signals can work against you. When trying to achieve a Non-Violent resolution to a situation, your words will probably not have a tension reducing effect on an aggressor if you are
    - Clenching your fists while you are talking,

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

- Positioning yourself “in the other persons space”, or
- Making threatening or offensive gestures.
- Non-verbal signals can work for you if you pay attention to the other persons non-verbal signals. There are certain indicators that can give you advanced notice of the other person’s intentions. Some involuntary “fight or flight” signals are
  - A dropped chin usually means fight,
  - A raised chin means usually flight,
  - Fixed stare is usually a gesture that precedes fight,
  - Darting eyes are usually a gesture that precedes flight.
- Pay attention to both the aggressor’s signals and the signals you are sending. Remember, you are on offense. You are in control. Don’t let your own non-verbal signals give the other person the advantage of knowing your intentions.

## Barriers to Effective Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

- Language
  - Do you share a common language with the other person?
  - If you do not speak the same language as the other person, does anyone in the area speak both languages?
- Control of mental and physical faculties
  - Is the other person under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
  - Are there members of the audience, who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
- Race or ethnicity
  - What is the likelihood that the other person will attach a connotation to what you say based on bias or prejudice?
  - What is the likelihood that you can put aside pre-conceived race or ethnicity based ideas, and remain totally objective in your attempts to resolve the dispute?
- Outside interference
  - Do you have to deal with an audience?

You must never lose sight of the fact that you need to remain objective. You need to work toward a resolution that will allow both parties in the dispute to “win”. You can best accomplish the necessary objectivity by avoiding certain behavior.

# Non-Violent Dispute Resolution

- Although you need to remain in control of the conversation, you should avoid the mistake of trying to gain or retain control by “talking down” to the other person. Speaking from an authoritative position will most likely alienate the other person.
  - Imagine your own reaction if the other person made a remark like, “This is the way it’s going to be, because I say so.”
  - Imagine how you would have reacted if one of your parents had made such a statement to you when you were a child.
  - Such an attitude will effectively force the other person into reacting as they might have reacted, when you were a child, “I’m not going to do it that way, and you can’t make me.”
  - This type of exchange will gain you nothing and only tend to aggravate an already volatile situation.
- Keep things on an adult to adult level and work toward a resolution that allows both parties a way out of the conflict without a violent encounter.
- For more on this subject, you can read Dr. Eric Berne’s book, “Games People Play”. Berne wrote that you are composed of three (3) separate ego states or “selves”; Parent, Child and Adult.
  - It is less important to remember Dr. Berne, than it is to remember not to let your emotions push you into either the “Parent” or “Child” ego state.
  - Approaching the problem from the “Adult” ego state allows you to be objective. It allows you to deal with the problem at hand, and leave emotions out of the conversation.
  - Approaching the problem from the “Adult” ego state allows you to work toward a win-win resolution to a problem.

Remember, if you believe you have an opportunity for Non-Violent resolution of a dispute, don’t waste your opportunity. If you do not believe the opportunity for a peaceful resolution exists, don’t waste your time.

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Practice

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