

Conflict at Work: Pause, Clarify and Get Help

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

A disagreement can interrupt the communication a task depends on. Pause the exposure, clarify the work and get help when needed. The crew does not have to settle a personal argument before making the work area safe.

Objective: Identify how to pause a disputed task, clarify instructions and reach help safely.

Key hazards or failure points

Conflicting directions; raised voices masking warnings; blocked exits; ignored concerns; unavailable leaders; treating threats as an ordinary disagreement.

Practical controls

- When coordination breaks down, stop the affected activity using the agreed safe method. Keep people clear of movement or other exposure while the instructions are resolved.
- Describe the work issue plainly: the task, hazard, needed control and unclear decision. Listen without insults or public blame. Ask the responsible leader to settle conflicting directions.
- Use the designated reporting route for threats, harassment or repeated problems. Provide an alternate contact when the concern involves the immediate supervisor. Workers should not physically intervene in fights.

Verify It in the Field

Have the crew name the primary and alternate help contacts. Confirm that both routes work on this shift and that workers know how to use them without approaching an unsafe interaction.

For a disputed task, ask affected workers to restate the agreed plan, control and decision owner. Resolve different answers before restarting. Agreement to be polite does not resolve a missing control.

Identify a safe place to step away and the route to summon help. Keep exits open. Record the task correction and follow-up owner; use the appropriate private process for personal allegations.

Stop and reassess

Hold work when an argument prevents clear coordination or instructions conflict. For threats, physical aggression, a weapon or immediate danger, leave if safe, alert others and contact security or 911 under the emergency plan. Do not put yourself into the confrontation.

Ask the crew

1. Which task depends on clear coordination today?
2. Who can resolve conflicting directions?
3. What is the alternate reporting route if the concern involves that person?

Before restarting: confirm the same safe plan with everyone affected.

Sources: OSHA workplace violence overview; CCOHS negative-interaction guidance.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.