

CHAPTER 2 – DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES

LEARNING GOALS FOR CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE

In this chapter, you will increase your knowledge of:

- destructive strategies to deal with conflict;
- different types of violence;
- escalation of conflict.

SKILLS

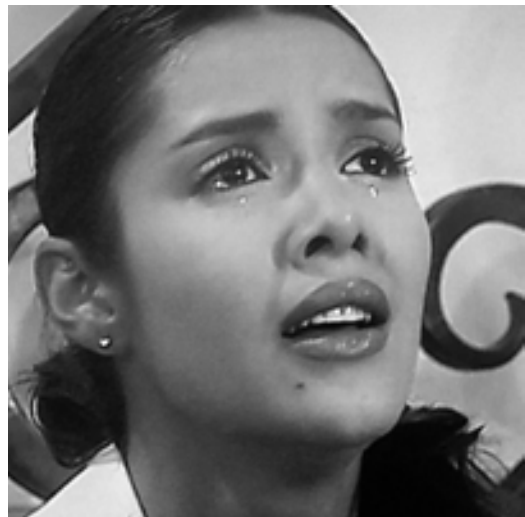
In this chapter, you will develop your ability to:

- distinguish between constructive and destructive strategies;
- analyse how a conflict escalates;
- de-escalate a conflict.

VALUES

In this chapter, you will reflect on:

- the causes and effects of violence;
- the image of “the other” in a conflict;
- avoidance of conflict;
- the costs of destructive conflict strategies.



▲ Why do people use destructive strategies in conflicts?

PREVIEW

1. What is a strategy?
2. How are actions, strategies and goals related? Draw a diagram.

2.1 – STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT

When dealing with conflict, our strategies can be either **destructive** or **constructive**.

- **DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES** make the conflict worse, or create new conflicts.
- **CONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES** help actors to reach an understanding, without damage to their relationship.

Destructive strategies often lead to harm or violence. Interpersonally, these strategies can destroy relationships. At other levels of conflict, destructive strategies have caused mass death and suffering.

However, destructive strategies are often used to deal with conflict. Many people never learn how to deal with conflicts constructively. As a result, they believe that destructive strategies are the only ways to deal with conflict.

Read these words. Which relate to *destructive*, and which relate to *constructive* ways of dealing with conflict?



In this activity, you can try out different strategies to act in a conflict. Follow the teacher or trainer's instructions.

1. Think of a conflict in your community. What strategies are/were used to deal with that conflict?
2. Think of a conflict in your country. What strategies are/were used to deal with that conflict?
3. Which of these strategies are destructive and which are constructive?

EXERCISE

ACTIVITY

IRON FIST

DISCUSSION



PREVIEW

1. How do you feel when you win?
2. How do you feel when you lose?
3. Why don't you want to lose?

2.2 – THE WIN-OR-LOSE MENTALITY: DOMINATE OR BE DOMINATED

The destructive way of dealing with conflict starts in our mind. Many people see conflict as a competition. One side wins and the other side loses; **dominate** or be dominated. They believe that there is no solution to the incompatibility between actors' goals. *"I get what I want or you get what you want."* This is the "win-or-lose mentality." There is no third way in the win-or-lose mentality.

From this **point of view**, conflicts are like competitive games. In competitive games, **cooperation** is not possible. If one team in a football match scores a goal, then the other team is one goal behind. It is *beat or be beaten, eat or be eaten*.

It is natural for people to care about their own interests, meet their needs and fight for their rights. However, often people believe that they have to defeat the other person to meet their needs. This is when conflicts become destructive. The problem is the idea that *"if we do not win, we lose."*

EXERCISE

Are the statements true or false? If false, correct the statement.

1. In the win-or-lose mentality, someone must always win and someone must always lose.
2. It is normal for people to look out for themselves and their interests.
3. The win-or-lose mentality is one way that we can choose to look at conflicts.
4. The win-or-lose mentality allows for discussion of many different views.

1. Look at the two pictures of a *chinlone* game. Which is competitive and which is cooperative? Why?
2. Which version do you like better? Why?

ACTIVITY

COMPETITIVE vs COOPERATIVE

1. Play in pairs. One is Player A and one is Player B. Each player has two cards. One card is "black" and one card is "red." Secretly choose one card. Your partner will do the same.
2. Reveal your cards and score according to the table. The goal for each player is to gain as many points as possible. You are not allowed to talk or plan which card you will use.
3. Play 15 times and see what happens.

ACTIVITY

RED AND BLACK

Round Number	Points, Player A	Points, Player B
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

Scoring			
Points	Player A	Player B	Points
+5	black	red	0
0	red	black	+5
+1	black	black	+1
+3	red	red	+3



4. Discuss the questions.
 - a. Compare your results with the class. How many points did you get?
 - b. Why did you choose the red card? Why did you choose the black card?
 - c. How does this game reflect real-life conflict situations?

1. In your own conflicts, do you sometimes act like you can only win or lose?
2. How often do you win? How often do you lose?

REFLECTION

PREVIEW

Think of somebody who you do not like, or who you have had a conflict with. Find three things that you have in common with this person.

2.3 – DESTRUCTIVE VIEWS OF OTHER ACTORS

The way that we look at the conflict also affects the way that we look at the other actors in the conflict. In the win-or-lose mentality, we do not care about the feelings or needs of our opponent. We treat them as an **obstacle**, not as a person. We treat them as something that stands in our way and stops us from reaching our goal.

This is most obvious when we think about an “enemy.” We only think about what makes our enemies “evil.” We do think about what makes them human. We do not think about their family, how they spend their free time, what kind of music they like, or who they love. The answers to these questions show people as individuals, with feelings and needs similar to our own.

ACTIVITY

FROM A VILLAIN'S POINT OF VIEW

1. Choose a story with a villain (a bad character). They can be from a book, a movie, etc.
2. Tell the story from the villain’s point of view. Explain why the villain acts the way that they do.

Example:

- “Cinderella” from the point of view of the stepsisters.
 - “Turtle and Rabbit” from the point of view of the rabbit.
3. Read your story to the class.
 4. Answer the questions.
 - a. Did your ideas about the bad character change? How?
 - b. Do bad people think that they are bad? Why or why not?



ACTIVITY

IMAGES OF THE “OTHER”

1. Choose a group that your community has presented as dangerous or bad (during you childhood, through your education, through the media, at work etc.). Describe the images that are connected with that group. (What are they like? Why should we be afraid of them?)
2. Discuss the questions.
 - a. What is the effect of these images?
 - b. Who creates them and why?
 - c. How many people from this group do you know personally? Do they match this image?



FOCUS ON MYANMAR: TROUBLE WITH HISTORY BOOKS

In a school, most of the students are Karen. They started studying history this month. They are upset about the textbooks they have to use. They say the history books are **biased** towards the majority ethnic group and ignore the history of their own people.

A student said, "there were many ethnic heroes in the revolution for independence. But in the textbooks, they just teach about Burmese heroes. I am very sorry and angry about that."



Some students moved to the school from the capital city. They were not treated well by some Karen. The new students were confused about why people were treating them badly.

One of the students said, "If you are Bamar, they have feelings of distrust about you. I thought, 'I didn't do anything wrong, so why distrust me?' I feel very sorry. Karen don't believe Bamar because Bamar soldiers killed Karen and Shan people. Ethnic people see soldiers and Bamar as the same. They hate us because they think we are soldiers. I was shocked by this. I did not do anything wrong! After a few years I have got to know some ethnic people and we are friends. But still many Karen and Shan don't like Bamar. And Bamar don't like them because they are ethnic."

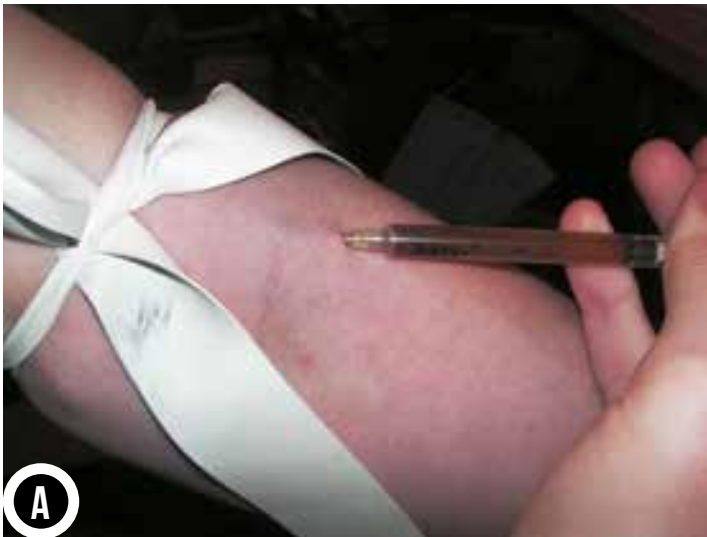
Source: Listening to Voices from Inside: Ethnic People Speak, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, June 2010

1. Why are the Karen students angry?
2. Why do they treat the Bamar students badly?
3. What do the Karen students need?
4. What can the Bamar students do to fulfill this need?
5. What do the Bamar students need?
6. What can the Karen students do to fulfill this need?

Think about a person you are angry with (now or in the past).

1. What do you think about this person?
2. How do these ideas influence your behaviour?
3. What would make you change those ideas?

REFLECTION



PREVIEW

1. Look at the pictures. Which one best represents violence to you?
2. In groups, discuss your pictures.
 - a. Why did you choose that picture?
 - b. What do you think about violence when you see this picture?
 - c. What is your attitude towards the violence shown in the picture?

2.4 – VIOLENCE AS A DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGY

Violence is a strategy that people use to “win” conflicts. The most basic definition of violence is “physical **force**, done **on purpose**, which harms another person”. Therefore, actions like hitting, burning, stabbing, slapping, beating, kicking, shooting, bombing or killing are physical violence.

However, some people disagree about the meaning of “violence.” They say that other actions, like **threats** and **insults**, are also violence, because they also harm people. These actions are called *verbal violence*.



In groups, discuss the following examples. Are these actions *violence*, *not violence*, or *maybe violence*, and why?

- a. A father slaps his child to change their behaviour.
- b. A father accidentally steps on the feet of his child.
- c. A farmer is crippled by a land mine.
- d. Two drivers have a car accident. One is killed.
- e. A country threatens to attack another country if they don't change the border. The other country agrees.
- f. A man threatens to hit another man if he does not stop insulting him.
- g. A soldier points a gun at a villager and threatens to kill him if he does not obey.
- h. Two people insult each other.
- i. A speaker tells his audience to attack another group of people.
- j. Two girls are making fun of a third girl until she starts crying.
- k. A father says to his son: "You are a bad son if you do not help your family." This makes the son feel guilty.

ACTIVITY

VIOLENCE?

EXERCISE

Read the text and follow the instructions.

1. Match each cause with an effect in the box below.
2. Write the missing effect of the final cause.

Never Violence



Astrid Lindgren was a Swedish writer of children's stories. She told this story in 1978.

Once I met an older woman. She told me that, when she was younger, she didn't believe in hitting children. However, beating children with a thin stick was a normal punishment at the time.

One day, when the woman's son was four or five years old, he made his mother very angry. For the first time, she wanted to beat him.

"Go outside", she said. "Find a stick for me to hit you with."

The boy went outside. He was gone a long time. When he came back in, he was crying. He said to her, "Mama, I couldn't find a stick, but here's a rock to throw at me."

Suddenly, the mother understood how her son felt: *if my mother wants to hurt me, it does not matter what she uses – a stick is no different to a stone.*



The mother hugged the boy closely, and they both cried. Then she put the rock on a shelf in the kitchen to remember forever: *never violence.*

I think that everyone should think about this. Violence can begin in the home, a person can raise children into violence.

- Astrid Lindgren

Cause	Effect
a. The boy does something wrong.	i. The boy brings back a rock.
b. The boy thinks that his mother wants to hurt him.	ii. The mother asks the boy to get a stick to beat him with.
c. The mother understands how the boy is feeling.	iii. The mother decides never to beat her son again.
d. The mother keeps the rock in her kitchen forever.	iv. _____

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think parents use violence against their children?
2. Is it necessary to use violence to discipline children?
3. How does violence affect the relationship between parents and children?

There has been violence through all of human history. Therefore, some people say that violence is natural to humans. They believe that humans cannot stop using violence. They say that humans' violent behaviour comes from our animal ancestors.

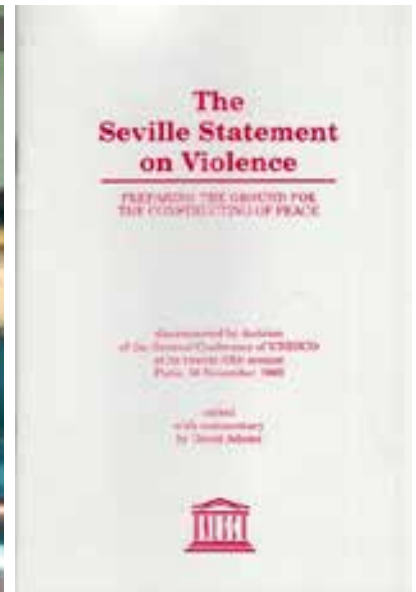
If this is true, peace is impossible.

However, in 1986, an international meeting of scientists announced the *Seville Statement on Violence*. The statement says:

1. "It is wrong to say that humans got their habit of making war from our animal ancestors."
2. "It is wrong to say that war and any other violent behaviour are natural for humans."
3. "It is wrong to say that humanity evolved from the most violent and aggressive members of the species."
4. "It is wrong to say that humans have a 'violent brain!'"
5. "It is wrong to say that war is caused by 'instinct!'"

The Seville Statement concludes: "Just as wars begin in the minds of people, peace also begins in our minds. The same species who invented war can also invent peace. The responsibility lies with each of us."

▼ Is violence a part of human nature?



1. Do you agree with the Seville Statement, or do you believe that violence is natural to humans?
2. Why do people act violently?

DISCUSSION

1. Is your community violent? Why or why not? Give examples.
2. Is violence sometimes acceptable? Why or why not?

REFLECTION

PREVIEW

1. Do you enjoy discussions with others? Why or why not?
2. Do you see a discussion as a kind of fight?
3. When you discuss problems with others, do you often reach an agreement?

2.5 – DISPUTE AS A DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGY

Often, we are not allowed to use violence to deal with conflicts. We use words instead. But even communication can be used destructively. Constructive communication tries to reach understanding. This is called a **dialogue**. But when we push our point of view against someone else, that is called a dispute.

A dispute is a competition. The actor who can silence the other actor is the winner. There are three ways that people can argue in a dispute:

- the soft way;
- the strong way;
- the super-strong way.



EXERCISE

1. How is a dialogue different from a dispute?
2. Are these actions examples of constructive or destructive communication?

Action	Constructive	Destructive
a. Sharing your own feelings about the situation.		
b. Asking a question to better understand what the other person said.		
c. Making jokes about the other person or their point of view.		
d. Shouting at the person.		
e. Speaking at a normal volume.		
f. Asking the other person if they really agrees with a decision.		
g. Showing that you have new opinions about your point of view.		
h. Changing the topic when you feel like you are losing the argument.		

Which definition is the *soft* way, the *strong* way, and the *super-strong* way of arguing?

EXERCISE

1. _____	2. _____	3. _____
In this way of arguing, we criticise the other person and who they are. We say things beyond what may be wrong with their point of view. We criticise their character and personality.	In this way of arguing, we explain why we think our point of view is right. We show the strong points of our position and evidence to support it.	In this way of arguing, we point out why the other person's point of view is wrong. We criticise their position and show why their argument does not make sense.

Read the dispute between Myat Noe and Khine Ye at election time. The lines of the conversation are numbered **A – G**. In the questions below, identify which way of arguing the actors use at which time: the soft, the strong or the super-strong way.

EXERCISE

- A. Myat Noe:** The elections are coming up soon. Who are you going to vote for?
- B. Khine Ye:** Definitely U Kyaw Lin. How about you?
- C. Myat Noe:** For me, it is Daw Khin Saw. She has a really good plan for healthcare, and I think she will improve the education system.
- D. Khine Ye:** But U Kyaw Lin says we will pay lower taxes! This means we can keep more of our salaries.
- E. Myat Noe:** Well, U Kyaw Lin is not going to put any money into our schools with that plan. He is going to push away all of the good teachers.
- F. Khine Ye:** You don't like U Kyaw Lin because he comes from a rich family. You hate rich people!
- G. Myat Noe:** That's not true! I just like Daw Khin Saw better because I think she will keep her promises.

1. Which way of arguing is Khine Ye using in Line D? Explain your choice.
2. Which way of arguing is Myat Noe using in Line E and Line G? Explain your choice.
3. Which way of arguing is Khine Ye using in Line F? Explain your choice.

1. How might a dispute lead to violence?
2. Do some people turn from words to violence more easily than others?

DISCUSSION

1. What behaviour makes you angry in a discussion?
2. What issues are likely to make you angry?

REFLECTION

PREVIEW

1. In turns, complete this sentence:
"When I have a conflict, one thing that makes it worse is..."
2. In turns, complete this sentence:
"When I have a conflict, one thing that helps me to calm down is..."

2.6 – ESCALATION & DE-ESCALATION

One of the biggest problems with destructive conflicts is the danger of **escalation**. Escalation means that people use stronger and stronger methods to "win" in a conflict. With each step they do more harm, as they try to prove their strength.

The opposite of escalation is **de-escalation**. De-escalation happens when someone takes action to slow down the conflict. This can be a main actor or a supporting actor. Actions which de-escalate a conflict are not done to "win." They are done to protect all sides from negative effects.

EXERCISE

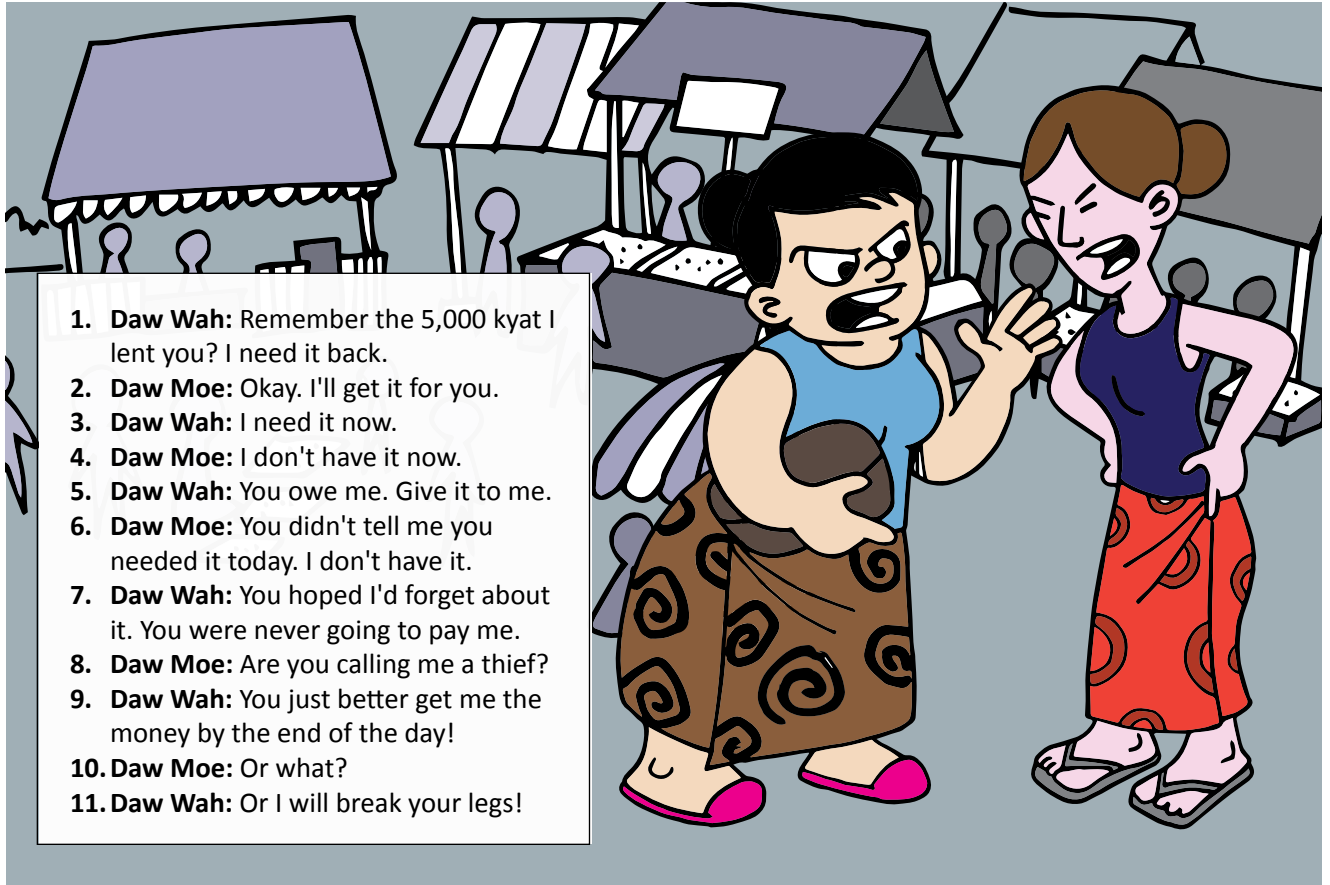
The drawings show each step of an escalating conflict. Put the pictures in order.



ACTIVITY

THE MOMENT OF ESCALATION

1. Read the conversation. Find three points where the conflict escalates.
2. Explain why you think these statements made the conflict escalate. Put your answer in the table below.
3. Identify other things to say that would de-escalate the conflict. Put your answer in the table below.



1. **Daw Wah:** Remember the 5,000 kyat I lent you? I need it back.
2. **Daw Moe:** Okay. I'll get it for you.
3. **Daw Wah:** I need it now.
4. **Daw Moe:** I don't have it now.
5. **Daw Wah:** You owe me. Give it to me.
6. **Daw Moe:** You didn't tell me you needed it today. I don't have it.
7. **Daw Wah:** You hoped I'd forget about it. You were never going to pay me.
8. **Daw Moe:** Are you calling me a thief?
9. **Daw Wah:** You just better get me the money by the end of the day!
10. **Daw Moe:** Or what?
11. **Daw Wah:** Or I will break your legs!

Line Number	Why this statement caused escalation of the conflict	What could the actor say to de-escalate the conflict?
a.		
b.		
c.		



FOCUS ON MYANMAR: THE TEASHOP FIGHT THAT STARTED THE 1988 UPRISING

On 12th March 1988 three students from the *Rangoon Institute of Technology* went to a teashop on Insein Road. They brought some cassette tapes of singer Sai Hti Hseng. The students politely asked the owner to play their Sai Hti Hseng tape in the teashop.

A group of drunk older men at a nearby table **objected**. They did not want to listen to Sai Hti Hseng. His songs were rubbish, they shouted. The students ignored them. One of the drunk men stood up and threw his chair at them. A fight started between the students and the drunk men.



Other people joined in the fight, and soon policemen arrived at the teashop. The students and the men were arrested and taken to the police station. The men were released without charge, but the students were kept in prison.

The next day, friends of the arrested students learned that the drunk man was the son of a local government official. This made them very angry. A group of around 30 students went to the local government office to complain.

The chairman refused to come out, so they began throwing stones at the office and smashed the windows. Soon a bigger group of men arrived. They were friends with the drunk men from the night before. Another fight started. This time, a student was wounded with a knife.

The students went back to the university to get more of their friends. 200 – 300 students went to the teashop to fight with the men. They were met by the police. Students started throwing stones at the police and the police hit back with sticks. Eventually, the police began shooting at the students.

This led to the death of one of the students and eventually to the 1988 **uprising**.

Source: (Adapted from) *A Perfect Hostage*: Justin Wintle

1. Draw a timeline that shows in detail how the conflict started and how it escalated.
2. Was the teashop fight the main reason for the 1988 uprising or was it only a **trigger**?

a group of students wanted to listen to their music

1988 Uprising begins



▲ What strategy (or strategies) are being used in this picture?

1. In pairs, choose one of the conversations below. Perform a roleplay to the class, showing how the conflict escalates.

ACTIVITY

ACT IT OUT

Conversation 1

A: Give it to me.
B: You can't have it.
A:

Conversation 2

A: You did it.
B: I did not.
A:

Conversation 3

A: I want to leave.
B: I want to stay.
A:

Conversation 4

A: It's all your fault.
B: What did I do?
A:

Conversation 5

A: Help me
B: I can't.
A:

2. Discuss the questions as a class.
 - a. What could one of the main actors do to de-escalate the conflict?
 - b. What could a supporting actor do to de-escalate the conflict?
3. Perform the roleplay again and try the suggestions to de-escalate the conflict

Think about an intergroup or an international conflict.

1. What could the main actors do to de-escalate this conflict?
2. What could supporting actors do?

DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever escalated a conflict on purpose?
2. What was the **outcome**?

REFLECTION



▲ Is it common for people to avoid conflict?

PREVIEW

What do you do when you don't want to engage in a conflict? Give examples.

2.7 – AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT

The destructive way of dealing with conflicts has many unpleasant results, so people often avoid conflicts. However, *avoiding* conflict and *dealing constructively* with conflicts are different things. Dealing constructively with conflicts does not mean avoiding conflicts. It means to **transform** them from a situation of confrontation to a situation of cooperation.

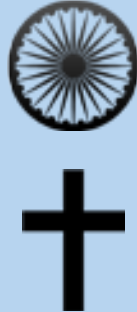
People who have the win-or-lose mentality may think that dealing constructively with conflict is the same as avoiding conflict. To them, the only way to “win” is to fight. “Not to fight” means to lose.

Read the situations and answer the questions after each.

ACTIVITY

AVOIDING A CONFLICT

1. Ah Lat and Phyo Maung are from the same city, but are different ethnicities and have different religions. Ah Lat is Kachin and Christian, and Phyo Maung is Bamar and Buddhist. They never talk about politics or religion. They have opposing ideas about both of those subjects. Therefore, they have agreed to never discuss these subjects and to stay friends.



- Why do Ah Lat and Phyo Maung avoid talking about politics and religion?
- What may be the advantages and disadvantages for their friendship?
- How is society affected if people avoid discussing politics and religion?

2. Ma Shwe Zin and Ko Kyaw San go to the cinema. Ko Kyaw San wants to see a comedy. Ma Shwe Zin would prefer to see a drama. She thinks that giving her opinion will start a long discussion. Therefore, she just agrees to see the comedy.



- Why is Ma Shwe Zin avoiding the conflict?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages for their friendship?
- How is gender connected to avoidance in this example?

- Read the text then, in groups of the same gender, answer the questions.

In many societies, men traditionally have a more dominant role than women. Many women in those societies feel that they have less power than men, and many men feel that they have more power than women.

- Which gender is more likely to avoid conflict? Why is this?
 - In your community, what should a "good" woman do in situations of conflict? What should a "good" man do?
 - What is your opinion about these ideas about "good" men and women?
- Compare the results from the male and the female group. Are they different?

Is avoiding conflict a constructive or a destructive strategy? Why?

ACTIVITY

GENDER AND CONFLICT

DISCUSSION

Think of a situation when you avoided a conflict then answer the questions.

- Why did you do this?
- What did you do to avoid the conflict?
- What happened then? Are you satisfied with the result?

REFLECTION



▲ How do people get hurt when conflicts are destructive?



PREVIEW

What do these pictures say about the costs of destructive conflict?

2.8 – THE COSTS OF DESTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES

The destructive way of dealing with conflicts is not efficient. Firstly because of the danger of escalation and secondly because, often, actors do not have enough power to beat their opponent. In these situations, conflicts can continue for a long time. Neither side “wins” but a lot of energy and resources are used.

Even if there is finally a “winner”, relationships with other actors are often damaged or broken. It is not likely that the “losers” would help or support the “winner” later, when the situation has changed.

It is possible that, with other strategies, the energy and resources could be used to improve people’s lives.

EXERCISE

1. What disadvantages of destructive strategies are mentioned in the text?
2. Think of examples for these disadvantages.



FOCUS ON MYANMAR: "THE WOUNDS OF WAR"

Myo Myint is a former Burma Army soldier. The horrors of war are visible on his body. He has only one arm and one leg. The fingers of one hand are just stumps. He's almost blind in one eye and pieces of landmine shrapnel are still in his body. Myo Myint is one of thousands of men and women scarred for life in Myanmar's civil war. The war has gone on for more than half a century. It is one of the world's longest unsolved conflicts.

Myo Myint's story reflects his country's suffering. When Burma gained independence in 1948, it was one of the world's most promising emerging democracies. It had a potentially successful economy. More than 50 years of civil war and misgovernment have damaged the country and held back its development.

Exact statistics of the dead and injured are unknown. The author Martin Smith says in his book *Burma: Insurgency and The Politics of Ethnicity*, "About 10,000 deaths a year over the last five decades is probably quite accurate."

Myo Myint's army experiences made him an activist for peace. "Who is winning this war?" he asks. "We soldiers – on both sides – our families, and **civilians** are losers."

Two years in hospital in the 1980s gave him time to read and think about war. "I realised that we were killing each other without any reason or hatred. I saw a cycle. We kill the enemy because they are killing us, and they kill us because we are killing them. It's different for those in power. For them, war *is* power. We need to build a genuine peace process to end this civil war."

Source: http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=4588&page=1

PHOTO: THE IRRAWADDY



1. Which costs of the civil war are mentioned in this article?
2. Which other costs do you know?

Are there people who benefit from destructive ways of dealing with conflicts? Give an example for each level of conflict.

DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

MIND MAPPING

Create a mind-map of the main ideas of Chapter 2, "Destructive Strategies." Draw pictures or symbols for each idea. Be creative. Use interesting or funny pictures, and different colours.

Below is an example mind map. It shows "levels of conflict" from Chapter 1 "Understanding Conflict."

