



# Interpersonal Relations

## Interpersonal Conflict Triggers


### LINKED COMPETENCY: Emotional Intelligence

Everyone has certain things that can trigger an emotional or psychological reaction, often referred to as "hot buttons" or conflict triggers. These triggers can vary greatly from person to person, and can include things like certain words, sounds, or situations. Understanding and recognizing one's own hot buttons, as well as those of others, is an important aspect of effective communication and conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships.

#### OUTCOMES:

- Students will identify potential conflict triggers for both them and others.
- Students will identify compassionate interpretations about conflict triggers to identify, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others.
- Students will choose and justify the most appropriate strategy for regulating their personal conflict triggers.

#### Student Rubric

Building emotional intelligence, specifically with receiving feedback and responding to others				
Exploring				Exploring
				
I am aware of differing emotional states in myself and others.	I am beginning to identify differing emotional states in myself and others and be curious about what I can do to respond in positive ways.	I have accurate emotional awareness of self and practice healthy responses. I often use mistakes as learning opportunities.	I have accurate emotional awareness of self and others and respond in healthy ways. I consistently demonstrate positive thinking and a growth mindset.	

Remind your students to reflect, add, and annotate evidence of competency to their portfolios.

- **Reflect** on their experiences and what they learned through the activities and feedback.
- **Add** evidence of competency to their portfolios.
- **Annotate** the evidence to highlight their specific competency.



## Materials:

- Photocopy of [Hot Buttons Questionnaire](#) (optional)
- Photocopies of the Give One to Get One grid (if using sticky notes)
- Sticky notes or Index Cards
- Blog: [Conflict zen and managing your hot buttons](#)

## Part 1

### Activity:

Optional: You may wish to provide students with the [Hot Buttons Worksheet](#) prior to class so they can identify some of their “hot buttons.”

### Give One to Get One

1. Have students gather in groups of about 4.
2. Have students write down their answer to the following question prompt on 4 different sticky notes or index cards. To save time you could have students fill out the sticky notes ahead of time. Change the question as needed – for example, you may want the question to be specific to “hot buttons” when working in the lab or when completing group work.

What is one “hot button” or conflict trigger for you? In other words, what might a colleagues or peers say is something that triggers a defensive stance from you?

3. Have the students circulate around the room and share their cards with another person who will also share their card. Each person is to explain their hot buttons and then give the other person one of their completed sticky notes. It is important that they share their hot buttons before trading their sticky notes.
4. After the students have exchanged their sticky notes, they are to re-join their small group and share the information they gained from the people they exchanged ideas with.
  - a. First provide each person to read the following blog independently (about 5 minutes): [Conflict zen and managing your hot buttons](#)
  - b. Once the groups have finished reading the blog post, the groups are to:
    - Identify any themes or patterns within the “hot buttons,” if any.
    - What might be the “story people are telling themselves” about why people are doing these “hot button” behaviours?
    - What might be an alternate, and more positive interpretation as to why something might be a “hot button” for you?
    - Identify and share one of your own behaviours that is a “hot button” for someone else.
    - Brainstorm strategies for maintaining calm both a) when you are someone else's trigger and b) when they are yours?





### Wrap-up Summary:

Large group share:

- Ask for volunteers to share strategies they came up with to maintain calm or to change the story they were telling themselves about why they were upset with the “hot button” behaviour.

### Part 2 Optional:

If you are choosing Part 2 your session will be about 30 minutes longer.

For part 2 we will come at conflict triggers from the opposite perspective and go through the same exercise as in Part 1 but this time we will focus on the best experience of group work and what strategies the students would identify as making it work well. Through this activity, students will gain valuable strategies that they can then use in their future group work to prevent conflict.

### Give Two to Get Two

1. Have students gather in groups of about 4.
2. Have students write down their answer to the following question prompt on 4 different sticky notes or index cards. To save time you could have students fill out the sticky notes ahead of time. Change the question as needed – for example, you may want the question to be specific to your discipline.

Think of a time when you participated in rewarding effective group work. From imagining that scenario, **write down two strategies the group used that reduced or eliminated conflict in the group.** It is ok if the strategies were not articulated or seemed to come naturally. However, I can assure you that there were strategies, whether explicit or implicit, that supported the group.

3. Have the students circulate around the room and share their cards with another person who will also share their card. Each person is to explain their strategies and then give the other person one of their completed sticky notes or index cards. It is important that they share their experience rather than just trade stickies.
4. After the students have exchanged their sticky notes, they are to re-join their small group and share the information they gained from the people they exchanged ideas with.
  - a. Groups should
    - Identify any themes or patterns within the strategies.
    - Pick out one or two strategies that they would like to share with the large group.

### Summary

### Instructor Share:

It is important for people to not just identify their own “hot buttons” but to also investigate the source of their reaction. For example, why does the behaviour of one person bother someone so much when another person



does not even notice it? The diversity in each person's "hot buttons" suggests that "hot buttons" are not universal. Invite students to complete a free write as a summary to today's session.

### Individual Reflections:

- What did you discover about yourself or others through this exercise?
- Write down what strategies you will try the next time you experience a "hot button"?

Ask students are practicing their strategies for dealing with their conflict triggers, be sure to prompt them to journal about the strategies they are using for conflict resolution and to upload their self-assessment and reflections in their professional skills portfolio.