Causes of Interpersonal Conflict

To understand a conflict, we must focus on the problem beneath the conflict. We must always ask “What is the problem?”

A conflict can be defined as a clash or disagreement between two or more parties over many issues as follows:

1. Differences between Us
   - Philosophies, thoughts, beliefs, values, worldviews
   - Plans, goals, methods
   - Race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, language
   - Communication styles, dress styles

2. Unrecognized differences

3. Unmet psychological needs
   - Identity is all of the things we identify with which become part of us, such as social groups, friends, foods, schools, songs, dances, etc.
   - Security
   - Control over our lives
   - Recognition, attention, credit
   - Fairness

4. Change and, even more stressful, sudden change can bring about fear, anxiety and conflict

5. Loss such as job loss, divorce, or death can bring about so much fear and anxiety, it can cause conflict, scapegoating, and misplaced anger

6. Ignoring our own basic needs and the basic needs of others

7. Overpopulation and population density denies people enough space to live and promotes competition

8. Competition over jobs, promotions, places on a team, sibling rivalry, girlfriends and boyfriends

9. Moralism which is projecting our own moral standards onto others which occurs because being right is fundamental to our sense of selves
10. Power struggles when people in hierarchal political, military, educational, and corporate organizations foster authoritarian control, monopolize decision-making, and rule unfairly and unjustly for the benefit of the few to the detriment of the many.

11. Third party assistance during conflict is weak and people do not intuitively and spontaneously foster compromise and mediation.

Conflict may be negative or positive depending on how we handle it. It can offer potential for mutual growth if parties work together to solve the conflict, it can be seen as an opportunity to clarify differences, and a chance to cooperate to build a better relationship.