Consider this...

Preceptors Can Model Skills
Conflict is a natural part of our daily lives. Health care is particularly prone to conflict because of the complex and intense environment, the reporting and significance of errors, and the disparity of knowledge and diversity among the health care team and the patients.

Conflict is strongly connected to our basic human needs, different values, competition for our time and other scarce resources. Conflict is neither good nor bad. It is manageable.

Managing conflict can have many positive outcomes, such as learning new ways to achieve the same or better results, learning how to collaborate, building stronger relationships and refining communication skills. These outcomes can be helpful both at work and at home. As a preceptor, you have the opportunity to model conflict management skills for preceptees.

Quit Taking It Personally QTIP is an acronym for managing conflict created by Tim O’Brien for: Quit Taking It Personally. QTIP can help you interpret the actions of others in a more positive light. The following examples show how to apply QTIP at work. “Dr. Smith did not change that order to make my job harder”. My preceptee is not trying to drive me crazy by asking hundreds of questions” QTIP can help diffuse conflict at the moment and then enable you to determine how to manage it. You may want to keep a Q-tip® handy as a visual reminder to Quit Taking It Personally.

Preceptor/ Preceptee Conflict
Most of us would prefer to ignore or avoid conflict in the workplace, especially with our new nursing staff… However, there will probably be times when we will have to practice effective conflict management techniques with our preceptees. Using appropriate strategies can reduce stress and lead to a more successful workplace. We can choose our behaviors and plan the best ways to use those behaviors, even in a conflict situation.

Your Nurse Preceptor Academy notebook has a good refresher on conflict management styles and techniques. Practicing and refining your conflict management skills for new situations is a lifelong process.

If there are conflicts with your preceptee, it could stem from different value systems, miscommunication, a lack of knowledge or unmet expectations. The following pointers demonstrate how to manage conflict in this particular situation. Be prepared and intentional. Make notes before addressing a given situation with the preceptee to help keep the conversation on track. Try to assume the positive. For example, if the preceptee is making documentation errors, remind yourself that the preceptee is trying to document correctly. Use assertive communication techniques. Describe what you see in objective, factual terms. Give information to the preceptee without degradation. Maintain eye contact during the discussion. Use active and responsive listening. Avoid using the words “always” or “never”. Don’t place blame in order to avoid the preceptee from becoming defensive and closing the door to communication. If the issue is important or affects patient safety, address it quickly. Validate the situation with the preceptee to ensure you are both on the same page. If the situation is not of great consequence, it may be acceptable to wait until your weekly evaluation meeting with your preceptee. Conduct discussions privately and uninterrupted. Maintain the preceptee’s confidence. Do not discuss the situation with other staff unless information gathering is necessary to complete the picture. Preceptors who successfully model conflict management with preceptees help to maintain and improve their relationship. This also helps preceptees be aware of their own behaviors and their responsibility to manage conflict in their nursing careers.

Conflict does not have to create a negative conclusion. Effective conflict management can empower and facilitate growth in both the preceptor and the preceptee. With practice and reflection, both preceptors and preceptees can successfully manage future conflicts.