

Conflict Resolution

What is conflict?

In everything that we do there are elements of conflict. What exactly is conflict? Conflict, simply put, is a disagreement between two or more people or groups of people. These disagreements can exist because we all see the world differently. We have different interests, goals, ideas, beliefs, opinions, and needs, and, as a result, we sometimes disagree with other people who have different values or needs than we do.

Why do we see the world differently?

1. We have different information – we notice different things
2. We have different interpretations – influenced by past experiences
3. Our conclusions reflect self-interest

What makes conversations about conflict so challenging?

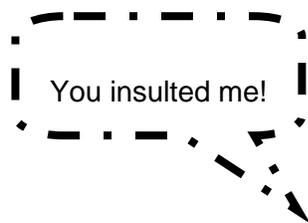
When people think of conflict, they often think of something negative. Many people are frightened by conflict. If we look at conflict as simply a difficult conversation that you have to have with someone, we can then begin to explore some tools that will help us in creating a learning conversation.

Whenever we are dealing with conflict, we must remember that the emotions of the people that are involved in the disagreement will influence what they say and how they react to what others are saying. Therefore, when handling conflict, **we need to focus not only on what is being said, but also on what is not being said** (the actions, body language, or feeling).

Conflict can be divided into three categories:

Resource Conflicts:

These types of conflict exist when there are material things (e.g. food, money, equipment, land, etc.) that people disagree who has the ownership of or access to. Time can also be a resource that results in many disagreements. Information can also be considered a resource that causes many conflicts. Different views on what is relevant or different interpretation of information can lead to many misunderstandings.



Feelings Conflicts:

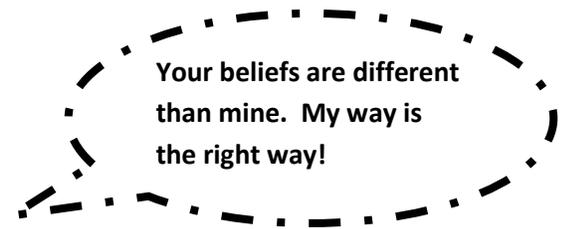
All human beings have emotions and emotional requirements (e.g. love, affirmation, identity, control, and respect). When you are involved in a conflict, your emotions are always involved. Sometimes, conflicts can generate feelings of anger or hurt or revenge that may in fact fuel another conflict around your feelings.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

TRAINING HANDOUT

Values Conflicts:

Due to the nature of how we were raised, each of us has different beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices may be rooted in cultural, ethnic, or religious traditions or political or social affiliation. These kinds of conflicts are often difficult to quickly resolve as they are rooted in historical and long held beliefs.



Responding to Conflict – How can we solve conflicts?

People respond to conflict in many different ways. Some people would much rather avoid talking about a conflict while others want to talk about the conflict immediately. The way a person responds to conflict may be either unconscious or a conscious decision based on past experiences. There is no one way of handling a conflict that is best for all situations. For example, in a situation where safety is concerned, a directive approach may be required. It is important to look at a variety of ways to handle conflict so that we can choose the strategy that will work most effectively with the type of conflict that we are dealing with.

In general there are **six different ways that people respond to conflict:**

1. **Directive:** The person who uses a direct approach to respond to conflict wants to ensure that the problem is resolved quickly. This kind of a person is not afraid to act strongly and take the initiative to solve a problem. During a crisis situation, this can be a highly effective way to respond, however in building group cohesion, a directive approach can sometimes make other people feel left out and can in fact break down group cohesion as people begin to feel unappreciated for their ideas, opinions, and feelings.
2. **Problem-solving:** A person who favours a problem-solving approach to conflict aims to reach a mutually agreeable solution for all people involved in the conflict. Their main concern is that all people involved in the conflict feel involved. This can be very effective when building group cohesion, but tends to take longer than many of the other approaches.
3. **Compromising:** A person who uses a compromising approach tries to find the “middle ground” between the people who are in conflict. The main concern is that the solution is fair to all people. This can be effective, but may result in a decision that is not favourable to any of the people who are involved in the conflict.
4. **Smoothing:** A person who favours this approach to handling conflict is concerned that no one gets too upset or that emotions don't become too strong. The person tries to diffuse the conflict by directing attention to something or someone else.
5. **Avoiding:** This approach to handling conflict involves stepping back from the conflict and letting the people who are in conflict with one another resolve their conflict themselves. A person who tends to prefer to avoid conflicts will also use this approach when faced with a conflict him or herself. They will tend to pretend that a conflict does not exist so that they don't have to face it.
6. **Appealing to a third party:** In this approach someone is brought in to mediate the conflict.

Based on: UNICEF Canada (1997) *Education for Peace and Conflict Resolution: A Training and Curriculum Support Manual*. Toronto, UNICEF. For more information on conflict resolution, see *Confronting Conflicts: A toolbox for understanding and managing conflicts*. Available online [here](#).