

Promoting the Health and Well-Being of families During Difficult Times

Managing Conflict Following a Disaster

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The purpose of this fact sheet is to help families develop skills in conflict resolution, especially at times when they are experiencing stressful situations during a disaster. This unit will introduce a model for understanding conflict: origins of conflict, responses to conflict, and outcomes of conflict. Families will also learn four steps to successfully resolving conflict.

What Is Conflict?

Conflict is defined by the American Heritage Collegiate Dictionary as “fight, battle, war [...] a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands.” Conflict in and of itself is not positive or negative—it is a part of life. Learning how to constructively respond to conflict is essential for improving any relationship.

Origins of Conflict:

Almost every conflict involves an attempt by individuals to deal with their unmet basic needs, their limited resources, or their different values. The following model developed by Bodine and Crawford presents the origins of conflict, responses to conflict, and the outcomes of conflict.

Level 1: Unmet Basic Needs

All individuals are motivated by needs. According to Dr. William Glasser, there are four basic psychological needs that motivate behavior:

- Belonging – Fulfilled by loving, sharing, and cooperating with others
- Power – Fulfilled by achieving, accomplishing, and being recognized and respected
- Freedom – Fulfilled by making choices
- Fun – Fulfilled by laughing and playing

Level 2: Limited Resources

Many individuals experience conflict as a result of limited resources of time, money, and/or property. Conflicts over limited resources may not be resolved unless basic needs are addressed in conjunction with limited resources.

Level 3: Different Values

Conflict involving different values (beliefs, priorities, principles) tends to be more difficult to resolve. When an individual holds a value, he/she has a strong belief that a specific action or quality is preferable to another action or quality. Each individual does not need to change their values to reach resolution yet understanding other points of view is the first step towards resolution.

Responses to Conflict

Soft Response – individuals have a tendency to withdraw, ignore, deny, or give-in to the conflict.

Hard Response – the individual takes their own personal view to the problem. They threaten, push, hit, or yell to try to resolve the conflict.

Principled Response – the individual uses conflict resolution strategies to produce lasting “wise agreements” that address the interests of both parties, resolve conflicting interest fairly, and take into account how others will be affected by the agreement.

Outcomes of Conflict

Soft Outcomes (Lose-Lose or Lose-Win) – neither party involved in the conflict reach a satisfactory resolution for their Unmet Basic Needs. This results in a Lose-Lose or Lose-Win soft outcome. One individual accommodates the other, or the individuals avoid conflict by accommodating other persons. The individual’s conflict is not resolved because there is a sense that their basic needs were not acknowledged or met.

Hard Outcomes (Lose-Lose or Win-Lose) – often results in harmful action that negatively affects everyone involved. The result is a Lose-Lose outcome. The Win-Lose outcome occurs when the more aggressive individual wins and the less aggressive individual loses.

Principled Outcomes are Win-Win – using a conflict resolution process based on principled values can help individuals reach consensus and meet the needs of each individual without destroying relationships.

Understanding Conflict

The following table on “Understanding Conflict” illustrates the three levels of conflict, the responses to conflict and the outcomes of conflict.

	ORIGINS OF CONFLICT	RESPONSES TO CONFLICT	OUTCOMES OF CONFLICT
Level 1	Unmet Basic Needs	Soft Response	Soft Outcome
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging • Power • Freedom • Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawing • Ignoring • Denying • Giving-In 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose-Lose • Lose-Win
Level 2	Limited Resources	Hard Responses	Hard Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Money • Property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatening • Pushing/Hitting • Yelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose-Lose • Win-Lose
Level 3 (Desired Level)	Different Values	Principled Responses	Principled Outcome
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs • Priorities • Principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Understanding • Respecting • Resolving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Win-Win

Adapted from: Bodine , R., Crawford, D., & Scrupf, F. (1994). *Creating the Peaceable School: A Comprehensive Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution.* (p. 92) Champaign, IL: Research Press, Inc.

Four Steps to Conflict Resolution

Step 1 – Separate the people from the problem

Clearly define the problem. Focus on the problem and not the individual. By separating the problem from the individual, everyone can work together to attack the problem, not each other.

Step 2 – Invent options for mutual gain

Focus on identifying options for resolving the conflict as a first step to reaching a decision. Use a brainstorming process to invent a wide range of options. The key rule during brainstorming is not to judge any ideas generated. This broadens the options, because each individual thinks about a problem in a different way. A family may come up with a solution that you did not consider.

Step 3 – Focus on interests, not positions

Interests are the underlying motivations behind a problem. Positions are something the individual decides they want. Focusing only on what you want will not bring long-term resolution. Looking at the basic human need of each individual will help address the real interests and bring final resolution.

Step 4 – Use objective criteria

Using objective criteria ensures that the agreement is fair for everyone involved. This means no one gives in to the other; rather, they agree on fair standards and procedures for work toward reaching resolution.

Source: Bodine, R., Crawford, D., & Schrumpf, F. (1994). *Creating the Peaceable School: A Comprehensive Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, Inc.

Internet Resources

Communicating Under Pressure: Steps to healthy communication that include listening and talking. <http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/ruralroute/communicatingunderpressure.pdf>

Dealing with Couple's Anger: Fact sheet on dealing with couples' anger, including tips on managing anger and health effects of fighting.
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10238.html>

Keep Your Marriage Positive: Information about ways that happy couples relate to each other.
<http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/ruralroute/marriage.pdf>

Manage Anger Through Family Meetings: Fact sheet on managing anger through family meetings, including tips on how to run family meetings.
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10249.html>

Family Communication in Times of Stress: Fact sheet describes healthy ways to deal with stress such as talking it out and listening.
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE2465.html>

When Anger Causes Problems: Information on the early signs of anger and what you can do when you recognize you are getting angry. <http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/ruralroute/anger.pdf>

Dealing with Others' Anger: Fact sheet on dealing with other people's anger, including ideas on how to make a difference and avoid violence.
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10237.html>

Dealing with Our Anger: Fact sheet on how to deal with your own anger, information on how to manage and control self anger. <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10236.html>

Supporting Families Following a Disaster: Fact sheets covering special needs of families during difficult times, http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/supporting_families/

References

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Crawford, D., & Bodine, R. (1996). Conflict Resolution Education: A guide to implementing programs in schools. Access: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/conflic.pdf> 05/10/2002

The American Heritage Collegiate Dictionary. (2002). Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin Company. <http://www.yourdictionary.com>