

## Conflict Resolution Process

### 1. Overview of the Procedure

This procedure is a guide for [insert organisation name] in resolving conflicts involving any people associated with the organisation.

This process should be read with the Feedback and Complaints Policy & Procedure.

### 2. Considerations

Conflict is a natural part of working as a team or with a group of people. Through sharing our different perspectives on issues and ways of working, we can develop new ways of operating and can benefit from a broadened view.

### 3. Fighting Fair Guide

This Conflict Resolution technique is endorsed by many psychologists, counsellors, doctors, business managers, and teachers.

**Who:** Use it with: your partner, your children, your parents, your work colleagues, your friends, your business negotiations.

**When:** When it's time to take action on your own problem or helping someone else.

**How:** Work on the questions alone or together. Writing down the answers often helps. One or more of these skills will make the difference.

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## Fighting Fair Guide:

- DO I WANT TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT?  
Be willing to fix the problem.
- CAN I SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE NOT JUST MY OWN POINT OF VIEW?  
Broaden your outlook.
- WHAT ARE THE NEEDS AND ANXIETIES OF EVERYONE INVOLVED?  
Write them down.
- HOW CAN WE MAKE THIS FAIR?  
Negotiate.
- WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES?  
Think up as many solutions as you can. Pick the one that gives everyone more of what they want.
- CAN WE WORK IT OUT TOGETHER?  
Treat each other as equals.
- WHAT AM I FEELING?  
Am I too emotional? Could I - get more facts, take time out to calm down, tell them how I feel?
- WHAT DO I WANT TO CHANGE?  
Be clear. Attack the problem, not the person.
- WHAT OPPORTUNITY CAN THIS BRING?  
Work on the positives, not the negatives
- WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE IN THEIR SHOES?  
Do they know I understand them?
- DO WE NEED A NEUTRAL THIRD PERSON?  
Could this help us to understand each other and create our own solutions?
- HOW CAN WE BOTH WIN?  
Work towards solutions where everyone's needs are respected.

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## 4. Definitions

Reflective listening (also active listening) indicates that you are listening to the other person, and taking in what they're saying. This may include feedback such as eye-contact, nodding, or picking out the gist of the other person's message and saying it back to them, e.g. "... so you're feeling disappointed and angry".

Being heard is when people realise that they are being listened to, and that people are actually taking in what they are saying.

Assertive language is saying things so that you're not directly attacking the other person. For example, rather than saying "you really make me angry when you do this", you would say, "I feel angry when this happens".

## 5. Procedure

### 5.1 Awareness & Preparation

This can take some time. People need to enter the conflict resolution process ready to tackle the issues, and reassured about the fairness of the process.

- All parties need to accept there is a conflict, even if they do not feel personally affected.
- All parties need to agree to deal with conflict using the conflict resolution process.
- If the conflict cannot be considered immediately, a suitable time / place need to be made for a conflict resolution session. This needs to be private, neutral and free from interruptions.
- Starting and ending times need to be clear.

#### **Who should be there?**

*All those involved in the conflict should be involved in the resolution.*

#### **Do we need a facilitator or can we do it alone? If we need a facilitator, do we need an outsider or is there someone suitable within the organisation?**

*All must agree on the facilitator. An outside facilitator is strongly recommended for any group conflict.*

#### Support Person

For conflicts between two individuals or in which one person is isolated, it is recommended that a support person or ally be designated to each person, to provide emotional support during the conflict resolution process. The support person's role is not to enter into or be involved in the processes, but simply to

listen and be there for the person. They must also agree to keep all information confidential; it is not their place to impart this information.

### Emotions

It may be appropriate to suggest that people consider finding a way to deal with strong feelings in a safe and independent way before the conflict resolution session. For example, both parties should prepare before the session; they need to think about how they're feeling, be prepared for what emotions the session might invoke and work out if these emotions are appropriate, constructive and useful. People often feel the need to work through their emotions before resolution sessions. Talking to their ally beforehand can be helpful.

## **5.2 One to one without a facilitator**

When conflicts are not major and are responded to quickly, the process can be quite informal whilst still using the basic structure and the primary skills of assertive language and reflective listening. Again, if people wish to have a support person or ally at this meeting, they are entitled to do so, providing they inform the other party in advance, giving them the chance to do so as well.

### **The following guidelines may be helpful:**

- a. Each takes a turn to speak: This can be an agreed upon length of time to ensure fairness if this seems best. People speak of their view of the conflict, their feelings and needs and the effect on them, not the solutions.
- b. The other party reflectively listens: The speaker should be reflectively listened to until they feel heard.
- c. Ownership and responses: Each person has a turn to own their part in the dispute and respond to criticisms made. It may be necessary to have 2 or 3 turns at this until all criticisms and feelings have been heard or apologies given.
- d. Working out solutions: This needs to be a collaborative effort where clear solutions of mutual benefit are worked out.
- e. Follow up: It is important to make a time to follow up and see how the solutions are working out. This can be as informal as a cup of coffee together.
- f. Evaluation: This can simply be answering the question of how did we go and how do we feel now? It is, however, an essential step in the process.
- g. Affirmations: It is good to finish with some positive comments about each other if this seems appropriate.

h. Congratulations and Celebration: It is important to congratulate ourselves when we have reached the end of the process. Maybe a meal together is in order?

### 5.3 Facilitated Resolution

For more complex conflicts, or where one on one resolution has been ineffective, a facilitator should be used to give the resolution a more structured approach. This is especially useful if the whole group is to be involved in the process.

#### a. Setting the scene

The facilitator/s should:

- Introduce themselves.
- Get clear acceptance for their facilitation.
- Check that all agree to be there and that all significant people are there.
- Outline the process, see that everyone understands it, and get the parties agreement to use it.
- Reflective listening and assertive language reminder, people need to be reminded in some way of these essential techniques to help encourage clear communication during the session.

#### b. The negotiation phase

- Make behavioural agreements, for example:
  - Clear ending time
  - No personal put downs
  - All staying to the end
  - No interruptions
  - Break times
  - Tune-in. A pause of silence for everyone to gather thoughts and centre themselves in the present.
  - Timed turns to talk, each person has equal time (unless otherwise agreed to) to speak of:
    - their view of the problem
    - their feelings
    - their needs
    - what they are prepared to own in the conflict

*No Solutions at this stage! Flexibility is needed here.*

*It may take several turns or some people may need extra time. This must be negotiated with the group. Others listen and reflect back what the speaker is saying without answering back until the speaker feels heard.*

After each speaker has been heard, record (on a large piece of paper or whiteboard, for all to see) the major issues they have raised.

### c. Ownership and apology

After people have heard everyone's views, feelings, needs and contribution to the conflict, it is useful to ask people again to own their parts in the conflict and to make any apologies that are required. This is especially important when criticisms have been made to particular people.

*What part of this criticism are they prepared to own and apologise for?*

### d. Group discussion of major issues

After all views, feelings and needs have been heard, and people's parts in the conflict acknowledged, link and group all issues into two or three major issues which can be re-named and recorded separately.

- Prioritise quickly and then tackle each issue separately.
- Brainstorm possible solutions
- Expand range of possible outcomes, encourage wild ideas and exploration of all possibilities.
- Broaden people's perspectives of the available choices.
- Discussion of solutions
- Attempt to merge or build upon ideas, leading to a choosing of solutions.
- Ask people to ask themselves, "*What is best for US?*" not "*What do I want?*"

### e. Implement chosen solution

- What, when, how, who? Write all of this down.
- Repeat process for other issues or make another time to discuss them later.
- Make a definite time for follow up to see how the resolutions have gone.
- Affirm people and the group as often as possible and is appropriate.
- Encourage people to affirm each other.
- Evaluation of session
- Make every attempt to celebrate the outcome.

## **5.4 Inability to resolve conflict**

If the parties and the organisation are unable to resolve the conflict, the facilitator will be asked to report back to the group with recommendations. The group must agree beforehand to be bound by these recommendations.

## 6. Reference

Conflict Resolution <http://www.netaxxs.com.au/downloads.php> Accessed 19th May, 2011.

Conflict Resolution Network. Fighting Fair Guide  
<http://www.crnhq.org/pages.php?pID=11> Accessed 6th October, 2011.