

# MODULE #11: Conflict Resolution and Group Dynamics

## Objectives

- Participants will develop personal and group problem solving skills.
- Participants will learn about the conflict resolution process.
- Participants will learn different styles of handling conflict.
- Participants will recognize conflict as a reality of group work.
- Participants will identify and implement a series of techniques in dealing with conflict inside and outside their clubs.

## Context



*Conflict is inevitable in groups. Conflict can occur when two parties are working towards the same goal and generally want the same outcome, or when both parties want a very different settlement. People will disagree, people will defend their opinions to the death; people will refuse to conform. Conflicts usually result from differences in personality, values or perceptions. However, all conflict is not negative. Conflict is necessary to avoid traps like groupthink. A leader should even encourage conflict, but then a leader should also know how to resolve it. Throughout situations of conflict among people, the leader usually assumes the role of a mediator. This occurs because the leader has acquired conflict resolution skills.*

## Handouts & Resources Needed:

Handout 11.1: Conflicts

Handout 11.1A: Strategies for improving conflict-resolution practices

Handout 11.2: My Problem

Handout 11.3: Steps for Mediation

Handout 11.3A: Mediate

Handout 11.4: Group Conflict Resolution Techniques

Handout 11.5: Tug of War

Handout 11.5A: Exploring Conflict

Handout 11.6: Fighting Fair

Pens/pencils

Rope

Sheet of paper – one for each participant

Journals – one per student

## Activity #1: Styles of Handling Conflict (30 min)

### Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Break into groups of 4 or 5.
- Facilitator explains to participants the definition of conflict and point out that how we think and respond to conflicts is also important (Handout 11.1).

- Have participants read the section on “Styles of Handling Conflict” (Handout 11.1) and discuss the varied styles on how people handle conflict.
- Have participants think about how they would characterize their own style.
- Once participants have identified their style, discuss the strategies to improve their conflict-resolution practices (Handout 11.1A) and discuss.
- Debriefing

Activity #2: My problem (30 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate that even if we believe our problem is too difficult to solve, there may be some way out. This is why asking for help to a person we trust before making difficult decisions may be beneficial.
- Explain that all club members have the potential to effectively communicate and guide each other in solving a problem.
- Handout the problem sheet (Handout 11.2).
- Ask participants to write and describe a problem making sure to stay anonymous.
- The facilitator collects and redistributes the sheets at random among other participants in the group to help find solutions.
- Tell participants to write their solutions to the anonymous problems.
- Collect sheets and review problems and solutions. Combine to be anonymous.
- Engage in a discussion based on the following questions:
  - What they learned from this activity?
  - Does this activity entail how they can help each other in solving each other’s problems?
- Debriefing

Activity #3: Introduction to mediation (55 min) (For advanced students)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Ask participants how many of them have heard of mediation? It is probably that most of them have an understanding of this concept. Tell them that mediation is an alternative form to help empower others to solve their conflicts. Often, we are used to telling others what to do, but that is not always helpful. Tell them that mediation is used by schools, organizations, and courts for solving problems and reaching agreements. The mediator listens and asks questions that help the

individuals solve their disputes. Remind participants that they all have the ability to be mediators.

- Facilitator review Handout 11.3A for further instructions.
- Divide class into groups of 4.
- Provide Handout 11.3: Steps for Mediation and ask participants to read carefully. Tell them that following these steps leads to successful mediation.
- Ask participants to role-play a scenario with a participant as mediator (Handout 11.3A).
- Engage in a discussion based on the questions on handout 11.3A:
  - What did the participants learned from the activity?
  - Can they see the benefits of mediation?
- Debriefing

#### Activity #4: Group Conflict Resolution Techniques (40 min) (For advanced students)

##### Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Begin the activity with an introduction: "In every group conflict may arise from time to time between two or more members. The individuals or groups may have differing views and opinions on the same topic or issue, and it may seem that there is no quick and easy solution to the conflict. We will use a series of techniques to help our group deal cooperatively and creatively with conflicts".
- Provide Handout 11.4 and break participants into groups, asking them to go through each.
- Debriefing

#### Activity #5: Tug of War (55 min)

##### Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Initiate this activity, if possible, by asking for one volunteer. Using a rope, demonstrate to the class what a tug of war is. Each individual pulls the rope from the end attempting to win. Explain to participants that the purpose of this activity is to help us change the way we view and handle conflicts. Have participants read the situations in the "Tug of War" Handout 11.5 and ask them how they would deal with them as an "enemy" and as a "friend".
- Break students into groups of 4 or 5.
- Have participants engage in open discussions regarding questions about internal conflict, conflict between people, and conflict between groups or nations (Handout 11.5A).
- Now that participants have an understanding of tug of war, tell them that there are rules for fighting fair.
- Present the five rules for fighting fair in "Fighting Fair" Handout 11.5B.

- Have participants solve the conflict situations provided in the Handout 11.5C.
- Have participants tell what both people in the conflict situations “won” when the conflict was resolved fairly.
- Debriefing

## Conflicts

### Conflict: A Personal Definition

Conventional definitions of conflict are important to understand, but how we think about and respond to conflict on a personal level is just as important. After all, our style influences how we interpret and manage conflicts not only in our personal lives, but in our work lives as well—when we sit at the table for staff meetings, supervise staff, and develop agreements with other agencies.

How people handle conflict depends on their upbringing, experiences, values, culture, and temperament. Some members of your team may shy away from conflict and give in rather than explore differences of opinion. Others may feel it is impolite to disagree or argue with another person in public. Others may thrive in jumping into the hot seat.<sup>1</sup>

### Styles of Handling Conflict<sup>2</sup>

As you read this section on different ways of handling conflict, think about how you would characterize your own style, as well as the style of one or two particular people you work with.

*Competing* characterizes an individual who pursues her own concerns, sometimes at another person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode in which the individual may use her power skills, and ability to argue to "win," outrank, etc. A person with a "competing" style does not often shy away from conflict. Rather, she uses the situations to "stand up for her rights," defend a position that she believes is correct, or simply win.

*Accommodating* is the opposite of competing. An accommodating person often neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of others. Accommodating may take the form of complying with another person's request (even when preferring not to) or yielding to another person.

*Avoiding* characterizes a person who does not address conflict; she will take whatever steps she can to pretend the conflict does not exist. Avoiding may take the form of diplomatically sidestepping or postponing an issue, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

*Collaborating* characterizes a person who makes every attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies the concerns of all persons.

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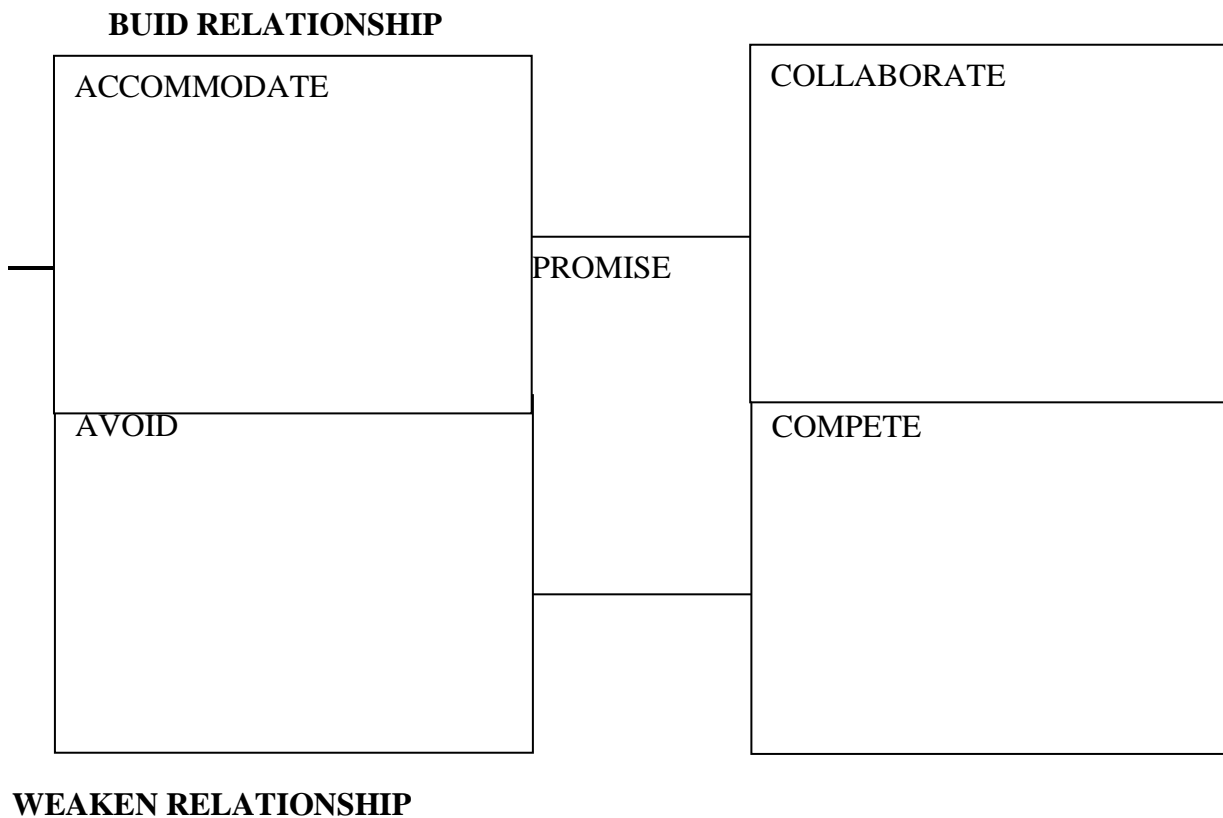
<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Partners in Decision Making, 1993, p. 20

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Personal Conflict Styles Toolbox Activity 6b. 1994

## Handout 11.1

*Compromising* characterizes an individual who falls between competing and accommodating. A person who is compromising wants to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies the parties involved. Compromising might involve splitting the difference, making an exchange or concession, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

### Conflict-Resolution Styles<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Bellard, J. Getting Unstuck: A Consumers Guide to Collaborating Conflict Resolution, 1996. Washington, DC: Corporation for National Service and the National Association for Community Mediation, p.2

## **Strategies to Improve Conflict-Resolution Practices**

Once you have identified your style, consider the following strategies to improve your conflict-resolution practices.

*If you are competing:*

- Let go your position for a moment. Think about what the other person needs and wants.
- Work with others to identify underlying concerns and issues.
- Consider all the options, and how all the parties stand to benefit from each one.

*If you are accommodating or avoiding:*

- Focus on your own concerns. What are your needs and goals?
- Give yourself time to gather data that support your case—your goals and reasons they matter.
- Take a deep breath; calmly state your concerns and why they are important.
- If you sense that a confrontation is brewing, don't just give up. Objectively present your point of view while providing data to support it.

*If you are compromising:*

- Slow down. Don't always choose the fastest solution. Take your time to find alternatives that really work for everyone.

*If you are collaborating:*

- Make your thinking explicit when you're at the table. Help your colleagues understand how you work with others to find solutions that benefit everyone.



**MY  
PROBLEM**



## Steps for Mediation

*First of all, what is mediation? Mediation is the process of finding a solution to a problem between two people that they both agree on.*

### I. Introduction

1. Introduce yourselves as mediators.
2. Ask those in the conflict if they would like your help in solving the problem.
3. Find a quiet area to hold the mediation.
4. Ask for agreement to the following rules in attempting to solve the problem:
  - No name calling**
  - Let the other participant finish talking**
  - Everything said stays confidential after the meeting ends**

### II. Listening

5. Ask the first participant, "What happened?" (Paraphrase)

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6. Ask the first participant how she or he feels. (Reflect the feelings)

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7. Ask the second participant, "What happened?" (Paraphrase)

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8. Ask the second participant how she or he feels. (Reflect the feelings)

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### III. Looking for Solutions

9. Ask the first participant what they could have done differently (Paraphrase).

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10. Ask the second participant what they could have done differently (Paraphrase).

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11. Ask the first participant what she or he can do here and now to help solve the problem. (Paraphrase).

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12. Ask the second participant what she or he can do here and now to help solve the problem. (Paraphrase).

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13. Use creative questioning to bring disputants closer to a solution.

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#### IV. Reviewing Solutions

14. Help both people find a solution they feel good about.
15. Repeat the solution and all of its parts to both people and ask if each agrees.
16. Congratulate both people on a successful mediation.

## Mediate

**Pat and Lou are good friends. Pat broke up with his/her/girl/boyfriend and told Lou the story including all the events that led to the breakup. Later Pat found out the story had gotten around and blamed Lou for the gossip telling him/her never to get close to him/her again.**

Divide the class into groups of four. Two will play the disputants, one, the mediator, and the fourth, an observer. Have the disputants role-play the conflict and the mediator offer help using “Steps for Mediation.”

After the first role-play, have the observer help process by asking the group questions such as: What went well? What could have gone differently? The students can then change roles so each plays either a disputant or a mediator.

Afterwards, ask students: How did they feel when the mediator offered assistance? Did it feel helpful? Like an intrusion? How did you feel when you offered mediation? Can you imagine yourself offering to mediate a dispute in your family? Among friends? Have you ever done that? If so, this is a Conscious Act of Peace.


Finally ask students for one word describing how they are feeling.


## **Group Conflict Resolution Techniques**


1. Define the problem. The individuals or groups should identify the conflict in terms of their own needs. How does the problem affect each person/group? How do they view the problem? How does this view on the problem differ between one another? In defining the problem, the individuals or groups should refrain from making personal attacks or making statements of blame. They should use I-messages, in the following format: "When... (situation or behavior that is causing the problem), I (speaker's feeling), because (consequences of the situation or behavior to the speaker)". For example, "When club members get to the meeting late, I feel irritated because it gives me less time to discuss club business."
2. Restate the problem. Restate the problem incorporating the needs of both individuals/groups. Both individuals/groups must agree with the definition of their needs. Continue this process until agreement is reached.
3. Develop alternatives. Have all participants in the discussion offer their ideas and suggestions as to the best way to solve the problem. No discussion, acceptance, rejection, or evaluation of solutions should happen at this point.
4. Evaluate alternatives. Have all members of the group discuss the pros and cons of each alternative. Eliminate those alternatives that are unacceptable for any reason to any participant. Participants should continue to be honest in expressing their feelings and needs throughout this process.
5. Decide on the best solution. Have participants agree on a solution acceptable to everyone. Make a mutual commitment to try it.
6. Implement the solution. Discuss the implications of the solution. How will it affect everybody? How will it help solve the problem? Set up a time in the future to evaluate how the solution is working.
7. Evaluate the solution. Find out how each person feels the solution is working. Should the solution be adjusted? Does everybody still agree with the statement of the problem? If anyone feels that the solution is not working, or that new problems have arisen; then repeat the process from the beginning.

## Handout 11.5

### **Tug of war**

 In a tug of war, or rope pulling, there is a winner and a loser. It is a contest to determine who is physically stronger. Wouldn't life be simple if we dealt with all conflicts like tug of war? But the strongest person in a conflict is not always right and the bully in a fight doesn't always win fairly.

 When we are angry, we often perceive the other person as an enemy or opponent in a contest. Like a tug of war, we think of either winning or losing. It is difficult to remember that we both have the problem – not “me against you” but both of us tied up together with a common problem to be worked out.

 Remember...when there is a conflict to be solved; you are BOTH responsible for finding a solution.

### **PUTTING IT TOGETHER**

Read the following situations. Explain how you would deal with each:

<b>SITUATION</b>	<b>AS AN “ENEMY” I WOULD</b>	<b>AS A “FRIEND” I WOULD</b>
<i>Someone:</i> calls you a name		
pushes you		
takes your pencil		
steps in front of you in line		
steps on your foot		

Do you treat “enemies” differently from friends? Why?

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## **Exploring Conflict**

Conflicts are sure to happen no matter how hard we try to avoid them. Instead of reacting “blindly”, we can prepare ourselves to become more effective conflict managers. Football players practice, actors rehearse, scientists experiment and we, too, can prepare ourselves to deal “professionally” with conflict when it occurs. Conflicts can take place within a person (internally), between people, and within or among groups and nations.

### **Internal Conflict**

- What are some internal conflicts that people have?
- Describe an internal conflict that you have had. Tell how you resolved it.

### **Conflict between people**

- What are some things that kids often fight about? Adults?
- Have you ever been in a fight? Describe what happened and how you felt.
- Why do you think that some arguments end in violence?

### **Conflict between groups or nations**

- What are some things that groups fight about? Nations?
- Why do you think that some conflicts between groups or nations are resolved peacefully, while others end in violence or war?

## **PUTTING IT TOGETHER**

Study each of the above conflict situations.







- How are they alike? How are they different?

## Fighting Fair

In a tug of war or boxing match, you fight against the other person. However, a real life conflict situation should not be like a tug of war, but should involve you and me working together to fight a common problem.

It is difficult to *fight fair* when we are fighting angry; we feel threatened and often our emotions block our good judgment. Fortunately, there are rules we can learn to *fight fair* in a real conflict situation. By learning these rules we can become capable conflict-solvers and more caring people.

### RULES FOR FIGHTING FAIR:

1.  Identify the problem.
2.  Focus on the problem.
3.  Attack the problem, not the person.
4.  Listen with an open mind.
5.  Treat the other person's feelings with respect.
6.  Take responsibility for your actions.

### PUTTING IT TOGETHER:

Solve the following conflicts, first unfairly and then fairly.

<u>SITUATION</u>	<u>UNFAIRLY</u>	<u>FAIRLY</u>
Two kids want the same book.		
Someone calls your friend a bad name.		
You want to go to the movies; your mom wants you to do chores.		