

Managing and Mitigating Conflict in Health-care Teams Tips

1. How to become self-aware during conflict:

- Listen, ask questions, make a commitment to resolving the conflict
- Pay attention to the way you are when you are in conflict
- Choose to listen and learn – both to your own internal voice and to the voice of your colleague
- Alter the way you act, by exploring options, separating problems from people, exploring the reasons for your own resistance
- Decide to be a leader in your own conflicts

(Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011)

2. Five responses to conflict

- **Avoidance:** withdraw from the situation; maintain neutrality; goal is to delay
- **Accommodation:** satisfy others' needs and concerns over your own; maintain harmony; goal is to yield
- **Aggression/Domination/Competing:** Being assertive and pursuing your own concerns; win/lose power struggle; goal is to win
- **Compromise:** minimally acceptable to all; relationships undamaged; goal is find middle ground
- **Collaboration:** expand range of possible options; achieve win/win outcomes; goal is to find a win/win solution

(Thomas, K. W., 1992)

3. Some steps to help resolve conflict in the workplace:

- *Identify the issue(s).* What is the real problem? Is your perception of the problem different than the other person? Communication is key.
- *Look internally.* Consider your role in the conflict.
- *Handle conflict sooner rather than later.* Resolve a conflict when it starts.
- *Invite the other person to talk about the situation.* Best in an undisturbed location with time to address the issue. Don't interrupt. Let the other person talk.
- *Ask nicely.* If somebody has done something that upset you, simply ask them why. "Say, I was wondering why you did 'X' yesterday" or "I've noticed that you often do 'Y'. Why is that?" are good examples. "Why do you always have to 'Z'!" is less constructive.
- *Observe.* Describe the situation as objectively as possible. What is actually happening? What is the other person doing and, not least, what are you doing? You can say, "I've noticed that you're always criticizing me at our meetings" because that's a verifiable fact. You can't say "I've noticed that you've stopped respecting my ideas" because that assumes something.
- *Brainstorm for possible solutions.* It's essential to set a goal so both parties know the outcome they're aiming for. Ask for specific actions that can be implemented right away.
- *Apologize.* Apologize for your part in the conflict. You're not accepting the entire blame, you're taking responsibility for your contribution to the situation.⁷
- *Appreciate.* Praise the other person in the conflict. This can be difficult as few people find it easy to praise and appreciate a person they disagree strongly with, but it's a great way to move forward. (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011)

4. Some steps to help leadership/managers resolve conflict in the workplace:

- Encourage open communication in the organization. Make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- Encourage an acceptance of different working styles and perspectives. Encourage diversity. Set a good example.
- Be aware of brewing conflict. Are cliques being formed? Have you witnessed arguing or tempers flaring? Nip the problem in the bud.
- Empower employees. Make them aware of policies regarding the handling of disputes, and uphold that policy.

(Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011)

5. Consider a conflict you have recently experienced and ask yourself the following questions, first for yourself then for the other person in the conflict:

- *Issues.* What issues appear on the surface? Or beneath the surface that are not being discussed?
- *Personalities.* Are personality differences contributing to misunderstandings and tension? If so, what are they and how are they operating?
- *Emotions.* What emotions are contributing to your reactions? What is their contribution? Do you think you are communicating your emotions responsibly or suppressing them?
- *Interests, needs, desires.* Have you proposed a solution to the conflict? What deep concerns are driving the conflict? What are your interests, needs, and desires, and why are they important?
- *Self-perceptions and self-esteem.* How do you feel about yourself and your behaviors as you continue the conflict? What do you identify as your strengths and weaknesses?
- *Hidden expectations.* What are your primary expectations and those of your opponent? Have you clearly communicated your expectations? What would happen if you did? How might you let go of false expectations?
- *Unresolved issues from the past.* Does this conflict remind of you of anything you're your past? Any unresolved or unfinished issues? What would it take for you to let them go?

(Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011)

6. What questions should you ask?

- "Can you tell me more about what bothers you about what I did?"
- "How did you feel when I did that?"
- "Would you like to know how that made me feel?"
- "Why is that a problem for you?"
- "What did you mean when you said _____"?
- "What would you suggest I do to contribute to the resolution?"
- "Can you think of any solutions that might be acceptable for both of us?"
- "What would it take for you to let go of this conflict and feel we have resolved the issue?"
- "Would you care to hear how I would like for you to communicate with me?"

(Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011)

7. Barriers to conflict resolution

- Time constraints
- Poor communication
- Unclear roles
- Diversity
- Power imbalances
- Emotionally charged situations
- Fatigue
- Stress
- Avoidance

8. Most conflict arises from simple misunderstandings, poor choices of language, ineffective conflict management styles, unclear roles and responsibilities, miscommunication, and poor leadership. By listening to others, learning to problem solve, talking and exploring options, most conflict can easily be corrected (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011).

9. It is important to change the way we think about our disagreements, and, ultimately, how we behave in their presence. Making this conscious choice is our responsibility, and a demonstration of our willingness to engage directly, constructively, and collaboratively with our colleagues (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011).

10. There is no step-by-step method to conflict that will work for everyone, everywhere and in every situation. The goal is find your own way by moving into your conflicts, seeing what works, what needs to be done differently and being courageous enough to learn and alter your approach as you go (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011).