

# **COACHING FOR RESOLUTION**

## **TRAINING MANUAL**

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**Prepared by**

***RESOLUTION SKILLS CENTRE***  
**A Program of Mediation Services**

*302 – 1200 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3G 0T5*

• **P** 204.925.3410 • **F** 204.925.3414

• **E** [info@resolutionskills.ca](mailto:info@resolutionskills.ca)

• **W** [www.resolutionskills.ca](http://www.resolutionskills.ca)



## ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

Imagine a colleague, or someone that reports to you at work, or a friend coming to you to complain about someone else. How do you respond? Alternatively, imagine a conflict situation that you aren't directly a part of, but which affects you. Should you get involved in trying to resolve it or will your efforts be seen as intrusive and unwelcome?

These situations are often awkward due to the conflicting desires of showing support but not being drawn into a negative dynamic. Silence can be interpreted as rejection or unhelpfulness, but empathy can be misunderstood as siding with a party. Either response could lead to escalating or complicating the conflict.

This course examines ways of transforming these awkward situations into opportunities for coaching. Coaching enables others to think more clearly and strategically about their concerns so that they can make effective choices and take action to address these challenges – instead of staying in a cycle of complaint. Learning the coaching process helps people become more effective managers, colleagues or friends as they learn to support others in dealing more fruitfully with conflict.

Participants in this course will learn the importance of assessing conflict situations in order to determine the best response. They will also practice the processes and skills needed to be an effective conflict resolution coach.

## ***COURSE OBJECTIVES***

This two-day course provides participants with the opportunity to:

- Understand the role of conflict resolution coach and to become aware of both its opportunities and limitations.
- Gain insight into the areas in their lives in which they play the role of coach, as well as reflect on new opportunities to influence the resolution of conflict in collaborative ways.
- Learn and practice key elements of the resolution coaching process.
- Explore the effect of assumptions about conflict on their responses to conflict, particularly as an informal third-party.
- Increase their ability to analyze conflict situations in the role of an informal third-party.



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# **INTRODUCTION TO RESOLUTION COACHING**





# ***WHAT IS RESOLUTION COACHING?***

## **Definition**

Conflict resolution coaching is an informal third-party approach to supporting and encouraging people in conflict to address their concerns and create joint solutions.

Conflict resolution coaches are drawn into a conflict because of their skill, caring or proximity to the conflict. They act as coaches when people such as family members, workplace colleagues or neighbours come to them with their conflicts. Because of their closeness to the parties involved and the likelihood of maintaining an ongoing relationship with at least one of the parties, coaches are not impartial. This puts them in a unique position to address conflict. Unlike mediators, coaches are able to draw on examples from shared history and highlight a party's previous experiences and successes.

Coaches also have a particularly strong interest in the positive resolution of the conflict, given their closeness to the situation and the participants. It is important, therefore, that a coach doesn't bring his/her own agenda or solutions, or determine what issues are discussed. At the same time, a coach has the ability to bring an understanding of the big picture of the conflict situation and how it may be impacting on the workplace, family or organization as a whole.

## **Opportunities to impact positively on conflict**

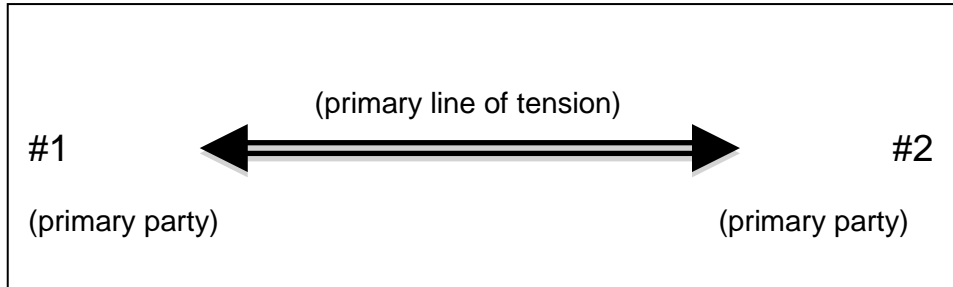
As a conflict resolution coach you can demonstrate a positive, straightforward kind of peacemaking by helping to resolve conflict effectively in your family, workplace and community. Coaching can help people break out of a cycle of avoidance, threats and complaints that undermine and poison relationships. In the role of coach, you can:

- Support people in a conflict to better understand and articulate their own interests
- Help a person consider options for resolving a conflict
- Explore with a person the steps they can take to address his/her concerns
- Prepare people to hear the needs and interests of another party
- Examine what else needs to happen to prevent conflict from recurring

Coaching may be unplanned and spontaneous, such as an informal conversation with a friend in a movie line up, or more scheduled, when a friend/colleague asks to discuss a situation with you. These conversations may be as short as 5-20 minutes or can continue through several meetings over days, months or much longer.

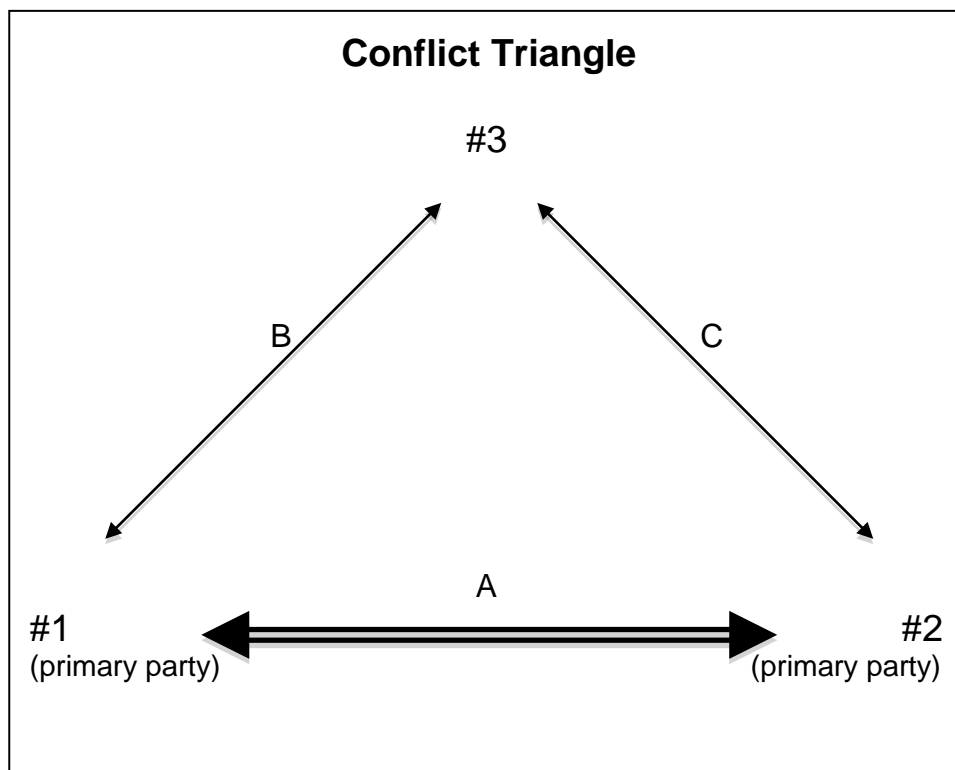
## CONFLICT TRIANGLES AND THE ROLE OF THE COACH

Interpersonal conflict is often thought about in terms of tension or struggle between two primary parties:



Primary parties may be individuals or groups. It is also possible for an issue (such as mental health, stress, etc.) to be a primary party.

As tension builds one or both of the primary parties will tend to draw in a third party (#3 below) to try and create/regain stability in the primary relationship (A below). The conflict resolution coach is a #3.



The addition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> Party to a conflict creates new dynamics and adds two new relationships to the mix (B and C above). Primary parties often expect the #3 to play the role of a fixer or hero figure, especially when that person has a position of power such as a manager or parent.

Number 3's frequently respond in one of two ways:

1. **Fixing:** through advice or direct intervention.
2. **Avoiding:** doing nothing, withdrawing or becoming more hands off.

Both responses leave the #3 vulnerable as follows:

1. The first response often creates the impression of siding with the one party against the other and a new primary line of tension may develop in relationship B or C.
2. The second response often creates the impression of avoidance and lack of care. This can also lead to new primary lines of tension in the B and/or C relationship.

These new lines of tension may become a new focus in the conflict distracting from the original line of tension (A). They also lead to new levels of complexity in dealing with the conflict.

At the Resolution Skills Centre, we believe that effective coaches consciously employ a third strategy that is neither characterized by fixing nor avoiding. We describe this #3 conflict resolution coaching role as **supportive empowerment**.

Effective coaching requires conscious attention to the consequences of one's intervention. Coaches must ask themselves whether they are using or are being perceived as using any of the following potentially destructive strategies:

- Siding
- Avoiding
- doing things for or to the parties

Effective coaches will work to support and seek to empower primary parties to resolve the primary line of tension themselves. They focus on what the parties need so that they can address the tension in relationship A themselves.

## ***SELF-REFLECTION***

Reflect on the last few times when someone has complained to you about another person or approached you about a conflict they have with someone else.

**What kinds of conflict situations do you normally get drawn into?**

**Choose one situation:**

1. How did you respond?
2. What does your response indicate about your beliefs about conflict?
3. After talking with you, what did the person do in relation to the conflict?
4. How have the consequences of this situation shaped your understanding of coaching?
5. What do you assume about your role and responsibility in responding to another person about his/her conflict situation?
6. Can you identify some assumptions you have about your role and responsibilities as a coach?

## ***WHEN SOMEONE APPROACHES US ABOUT A CONFLICT... POTENTIAL PROBLEMS***

When someone approaches us about a conflict, there are a number of potential problems that can occur, depending on how we respond.

1. We feed the person's conflict/take sides.
2. We entrench the person's position.
3. We tell people what to do.
4. We do nothing to help, in our effort to avoid inappropriately telling the person what to do.
5. We end the conversation with the person having a cathartic vent, but making no progress.
6. We own the problem for the person (or worse, we own the problem but are unable to do anything because the person has requested confidentiality).

## ***BASIC ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND RESOLUTION COACHING***

### **Poorly managed conflict usually has negative, far-reaching impacts**

- Although a conflict may start by directly involving only 2 or 3 people, escalating conflict often has a negative impact on the entire work team, family or community.
- As conflict escalates, others are drawn in and usually expected to take sides.

### **Awareness of a conflict is an invitation to participate**

- It is possible to respond without being drawn in to the conflict itself.
- Not getting involved is a form of response and has consequences for those involved directly in the conflict and for those on the periphery.
- People often need to share their story with “bystanders” when they are in conflict.

### **Participation does not have to mean endorsement of one side**

- What an individual does, or does not do, has an impact on the conflict.
- Coaches can positively affect how the person responds to a conflict situation.
- People can provide parties in conflict with the opportunity to think creatively about the situation and explore different options for resolution.

### **One “side” is less than one half of the story**

- Most people only share the part of the story that makes them look good and the other person look bad.
- Nobody sees his/her entire role in a conflict.
- Conflicts need to be understood within a larger context; systems and structures may contribute as much as individual perceptions and relationships.

## **People can solve their own conflicts and restore their own relationships**

- People are problem-solvers in most of their daily roles, both at work and at home.
- The most appropriate resolution comes from those directly involved in the conflict.
- Resolving a conflict builds confidence and skills that can be of use in future situations.

## **Coaching involves providing both support and accountability**

- People want the support of others to help stabilize their conflicted relationships.
- People need to be supported in a caring way to take responsibility for their own actions in conflict.
- Coaches need to help others to think through how to reintegrate or normalize their relationship(s) with others as conflict subsides.

## **MAKING THE MENTAL SHIFT FROM PROBLEM-SOLVER TO EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION COACH**

One of the challenges many people face in taking on the coaching role is that we are more accustomed to trying to solve problems than we are to supporting people to solve their own problems. There is significant societal emphasis placed on being “trouble-shooters” or “fix-it specialists”; unfortunately these roles rarely contribute effectively to the *long-term* resolution of conflicts. To do that, we need skills in assisting other people to build their own capacity to resolve conflicts and solve problems.

### **Tips to help people in conflict find ways to solve their own problems:**

**1. More curiosity/less judgement**

Avoid judging either party involved in the conflict (person approaching you may want you to judge the other disputant).

**2. More facilitating/less owning the problem**

Work toward empowering people to be problem-solvers; help them figure out what they want; offer options on how to proceed.

**3. More listening/less talking**

Sometimes a person can figure out a problem just by talking about it.

**4. More asking questions/less giving advice**

Just by asking questions you can help a person gain new insights into the problem, thus enabling them to move in helpful directions.

**5. More focus on the person you are speaking with/less on the other disputant**

Why focus on the disputant who is not present? There is no way you can assist that person to resolve the conflict when they are not present.



# COACHING MODEL



## ***OUTLINE OF THE COACHING MODEL***

Done well, a coaching conversation will sound fluid and natural. The following outline is not meant to be followed rigidly, but to describe the flow of the conversation. Without this flow, which constantly pushes forward toward resolution, it is easy to get stuck in a stagnant rhythm of complaint and empathize.

In brief, the steps of the process are as follows:

**1. Vent**

Invite the person to speak, listening actively and with empathy.

**2. Clarify**

Name the issues you hear the person raising that s/he needs to resolve.

**3. Imagine**

Highlight the interests and goals that the person has in this situation to help broaden the imagination of how the conflict could be resolved.

**4. Choose**

Explore what the person feels is the best approach (e.g. let it go, talk about it, mediate it, go to a higher authority) for dealing with this conflict or problem.

**5. Prepare**

Coach the person to prepare him/her for the next steps.

**6. Follow up**

Check in with the person later to see how things are going.

**Note:** The coaching process can be paused at any point to allow the party more time to think about the conflict and what s/he needs. Choosing the best way to proceed is a particularly natural break point. If a break is taken – perhaps a few minutes, perhaps a few days – the coach must be sure to check back in and see if any more support is needed. In particular, the coach might be very useful in helping prepare for taking the next steps.

The following pages will provide a detailed look at each of these steps. Frequent roadblocks will be highlighted, along with strategies for getting past them. Additionally, modifying this process for a variety of contexts will be considered.

# COACHING MODEL IN DETAIL

## 1. Vent

The most important and most time-consuming stage of this model is the venting stage. Until people have sufficiently released their pent-up feelings and thoughts, they often find it hard to think clearly and effectively about steps forward. At this point, what the coach most needs to draw upon is patience.

### Additional skills: *Paraphrase*

***Listen with empathy*** – Listen to what the person is saying (verbally, tonally and non-verbally), briefly let them know what you understand and validate feelings as appropriate.

***Ask open questions*** – Keep questions to a minimum and let the person be your guide. If you are curious about something, first ask yourself if it is what the person needs to explore rather than something you need to understand. Ask questions that:

- Assist in bringing clarity to the person
- Highlight something that is confusing to the person (i.e. a contradiction)

You may notice that as you begin to respond with these kinds of questions you may encounter some resistance from the person. The expected response would most likely be support and encouragement for his/her “side”, an escalation with further gossip or rumours or simply listening without trying to move the conversation forward.

### Roadblocks and Strategies:

If someone seems to be stuck at the venting stage – repeating the same material, for instance – there are several steps that the coach may take:

- Summarize what you’ve heard
- Observe, *“You have told me that already... is there something that you think I don’t understand?”*
- Say, *“You say that you just want to let off hot air...I can understand that, but maybe it’s helpful to notice that we’ve often talked about this before. It seems to be occupying a lot of your time and energy. How would it be if you didn’t have this dragging you back anymore?”*

People often talk to others about their conflicts not so much for them to take sides (though that is generally welcomed) but because they need support. Instead of saying, *“Yeah, he is such a jerk!”* try, *“Wow, I’m sorry to hear you’ve been hurt again.”*

If it is your tolerance that has run out, or perhaps your time or energy, you can suggest that you take a break and return to the topic in a few days. Usually the intervening time and the sense of having been significantly heard in the first session will mean that the venter is better able to move forward.

Please see “Approaching the First Person”, in *Skills and Approaches* section (p. 48-49) of this manual for additional information.

## 2. Clarify

In conflict it is often difficult for a person to name specifically what needs to be addressed for the conflict to be resolved. Naming the issue(s) clearly and non-judgementally will help the person in conflict to:

- Put some order to the mess that the conflict has created in his/her life. This approach puts “handles” on the conflict and so helps the person begin thinking about other possibilities.
- Shift from focusing on the other person as the problem, to identifying the problem that they will need to resolve together.
- See a way forward into a conversation with the other person.

Notice that what is important here is what the **person in conflict** needs to address to feel resolved. That may be very different from what the coach might need, were s/he in the person’s situation. Naming the issues also gives the coach a roadmap to refer to as they continue with the coaching process. The coach can keep track of the various issues and make sure that any “next steps” the person takes addresses all of the identified issues.

### **Roadblocks and Strategies:**

In this stage you may experience the following:

- Unable to separate and name the build-up of many issues. Symptom: Vague general statements like *“I just don’t trust her”*.
- When issues are merged with the person, ask: *“What specific behaviours are problematic?”* or *“If you were to wake up 3 months from now and the problems were gone, what would X be doing differently? What would have changed?”*
- Difficulty in separating the “person from the problem.” Symptom: Naming the other person as the issue.
- When trust is identified as the problem, clarify what is it about the other person that causes you not to trust them.

### 3. Imagine

In conflict, people can become entrenched in positions: “This is what **must** happen (usually what the **other** person **must** do) to resolve the situation.” Coaches can help people imagine alternatives by encouraging them to focus on their needs, fears and hopes rather than staying stuck on a single position. Focusing on their own interests opens up more options for solutions and can increase the likelihood of a person getting their needs met in a conflict. Coaches can also invite a person to wonder about the other party’s interests.

Once interests are identified, it can be useful to help the person focus on the future and imagine what things would be like if the conflict was resolved. Help the person to identify what they would hope for, such as “making better decisions together” as the goal. Discourage the person from exploring specific solutions (positions) at this time, until they have had a chance to understand the other person’s needs and perspective and to be heard themselves.

#### **Roadblocks and Strategies:**

A challenge could be:

- If the person is only able to see one way forward, help him/her understand his/her interests (needs and fears) and then move to possible solutions. Often it is helpful to say, *“That is one option. You indicated that you needed.... Can you think of other options that would address your need?”*

Ask the person what they think the other person’s interests are and then ask if they see their solution addressing the other person’s interests.

## 4. Choose

In this step, coaches can help participants decide on their best option for resolving their conflict and the next steps they need to take. Often people at this stage seem to be hoping for advice. There are some significant problems with advice giving, however:

- It may make the situation worse. Remember you likely have less than 1/2 the story. The person talking to you has probably not given you all the information. The information they are most likely to leave out is where they may have responded in kind. Also, the other person's perspective has not been heard.
- It means that the coach is taking ownership of the problem.
- The person receiving advice doesn't have ownership of the solution and therefore may invest less energy in making it work.
- It doesn't give the person involved in the conflict new skills to deal with future situations.
- It may not resolve the issue because the solution is based on a limited part of the conflict.

Instead of giving advice, a coach can try the following questions. Often these questions work better if you begin with some empathy, such as *"Yeah, that is a tough dilemma, I would find that hard too"* and then move on to:

- *"I know that you have solved other tough problems in your life...what have you learned from those that you can use here?"*
- *"If things were resolved what would they look like? What steps would you have taken to get to this point?"*
- *"If you did know what to do, what would it be?"*
- *"If you were giving someone else advice, what would you tell them to do?"*

Often the parties will come to an option that will fall under one of the following headings:

- **Letting it go**  
Many, perhaps most, of our day-to-day conflicts are dealt with this way. It is entirely appropriate to let the conflict go when the matter is not deeply significant, when it is not a recurring problem or when there are extenuating circumstances (the other party in the conflict is under unusual stress, for example).
- **Talking about it with the other party**  
This may be the best option if the relationship is important, the problem is ongoing, the person has the skills and desire to facilitate the conversation or the other party has some interest in seeing the matter resolved.



- **Mediating the conflict**

If the matter of concern is quite difficult, the relationship problematic or the parties need more support, an external mediator may be important to achieve a resolution.

- **Change my own Attitudes, Beliefs, or Responses**

Upon careful reflection, a person may realize that their own understanding of the situation may be flawed, their attitude may be unhelpful, or their words and/or actions are causing problems for others. This is a very challenging task, for our own egos get in the way of recognizing or admitting these kinds of weakness to ourselves.

- **Taking it to a higher authority**

If other options have already been tried and have failed, the issue itself is of great magnitude (such as harassment or abuse) or one party feels that there is inadequate safety to proceed by him/herself, the person in conflict may need to take the conflict to a higher authority, such as a supervisor, a union rep, the police or the human rights commission.

- **Seeking additional support or information**

Sometimes people feel they're not ready to make a decision about how best to move forward, because their situation lacks sufficient clarity. The risk of making things worse by taking steps in the dark is too great. In these cases, gathering the necessary understanding or wisdom from appropriate sources before taking action may prevent a costly error in judgement.

## 5. Prepare

The first four steps of the coaching model are pivotal in shifting the focus of a conflict from 'complain' or 'cope' to resolution. They are important in helping the person in conflict get a sense that s/he has options and doesn't need to feel stuck in unhelpful patterns or situations. The next step, preparing the person to take action, is crucial as it moves the conversation from theory to practice. This step involves actual skill building and planning. Once the person involved in the conflict has identified the best option for proceeding, s/he needs to consider the consequences of that option as well as the approach s/he should take in moving it into practice. The following pages will consider questions to help the person prepare for five of the options that we most commonly see. This is not, of course, an exhaustive list but it does provide frequently asked questions as well as a template for other options.

### A. LETTING IT GO

Even if the person has decided that they want to "let it go," the coach can play a significant role. The coach needs to be aware that "letting it go" may be avoidance in disguise – a person may want or need to deal with the problem but may lack the confidence that they need to do so. A person may be in a pattern of avoiding conflict. In any case, it is of course easier to say that we are going to "let go" of something than it is to actually do the letting go. A coach can ensure that other options have been considered and discarded and that in letting go the person is also moving on.

**Some important coaching questions, therefore, may be:**

- What makes you feel that letting go is the best option?
- How realistic is it to say that you will be able to let this go?
- What is the difference for you between letting this go and avoidance?
- How would you feel if you let this go? How would you feel if you could deal with this effectively?
- What do you need to do to ensure that you have really let it go?
- How will you know if you have/haven't let it go? What will you do then?
- What will you do if this situation happens again?

## B. TALKING ABOUT IT

If the person has decided to initiate a conversation with the other party, areas to explore can include:

- **What makes this the best option?**
- **When and where will you have the conversation?**
- **How will you begin the conversation in a way that might help resolve it?** For example, you might say, *“You haven’t talked to each other since the incident and now you are hoping to talk about it by yourselves. How will you approach Mary about this matter?”*
- **How will you guide the conversation?** Explore the benefits of letting the other person speak first.
- **What are the issues that need to be resolved? What are most important to you?** Assist in clarifying and prioritizing the concerns and issues that need to be resolved.
- **How will you listen to the other side?** For example, you might say, *“When you meet, you will be raising concerns and offering solutions. Mary will be probably be raising concerns and solutions as well. How do you feel about this? How do you plan to respond?”*
- **How will you express your concerns?** For example, you might ask, *“How you can express these concerns in such a way that will help to resolve rather than escalate the conflict?”* or *“How can you talk about these concerns in such a way that your supervisor can hear you?”*
- **How do you think the other person might react/respond to you in the meeting?** For example, you might say, *“Are you prepared for a variety of responses? S/he may express anger or resentment towards you in the meeting. How might that be for you? How would you deal with that?”*
- **What might the other person’s perspective be? How might the other person describe the situation?** Begin to foster the development of empathy by asking them what the conflict, incident or issues might look like from the other party’s perspective.
- **What can you take responsibility for?** For example, you might say, *“As far as your actions are concerned, what do you need to take responsibility for?”* or *“Is there any part of the problem that you see as your responsibility? What part might that be? What are you thinking of saying to the other person about that?”* *“If you could turn the clock back, what might you do differently?”* or *“It is going to be important for Jim to hear you take responsibility for your part in what happened. It might be helpful for you to think ahead about how that can happen.”*

- **Dealing with counter-productive patterns in the relationship.** For example, you might say, *“You said before that you don’t like how Mary talks. How will you feel if you go and talk to her and she cuts you off? What do you want to do if that happens?”* or *“How will you tackle things if Jim just shuts down or agrees with everything you’re saying – just to get the conversation over with?”*
- **Closing the conversation if it’s not going well.** *“What will you do if you think you’re going to lose it again like the last time you talked to her?”* or *“If you need to end the conversation, how can you do it in such a way that it doesn’t put you back another two steps with him?”*
- **Developing a follow-up process or ‘check-in’.** Sometimes people have these great conversations, but a few weeks later they realize that the other person hasn’t really “got it” yet. Sometimes, right in the first conversation, it’s a good idea to agree on follow-up meetings, so that everybody knows that what has been decided on will be evaluated (and maybe clarified). Also, if there’s something you agree to do, but a week later realize that it really doesn’t work for you, the follow-up meeting also gives you a chance to re-negotiate something if you need to.
- **Clarify what role, if any, the coach can play.** Will you need to work with both parties? If so, what needs to be clarified with this person and how will you approach the other party? What will your role be – does it need to include being present as the two meet?

## Skill Building

Often it is helpful to assist people in conflict with some basic listening skills that can help them in their conversation. For conflicts with long histories it can be extremely helpful to illustrate and explain further conflict resolution skills such as Intent-Action-Effect, Positions and Interests and the Conflict Escalation Continuum. (Please see the *Skills and Approaches* section of this manual.)

## Coach’s Role

Resolution coaches can play an important role of mirroring in this stage. One tactic that we have found particularly helpful is to ask the person we are coaching to actually say the words that they might say as they have the conversation with the person with who they are in conflict. Practising actually saying the words has two-fold value. It gives the person we are coaching a chance to be really well-prepared for the actual conversation; they will be less likely to be groping for words. And it gives the coach an easy opportunity to provide feedback: *“When you said this, I think I might feel defensive if it was said to me... How do you think Jim would react?”*

## C. MEDIATION

Conflicts that are too escalated or that have a long history may well require the help of an outside party, such as a mediator. Usually coaches don't act as mediators in conflicts where they are coaching, unless they have been trained in mediation and feel ready to take on the challenge of moving between roles. You can, however, normalize the need for outside help, de-mystify the mediation process, support parties as they prepare for mediation and help them find appropriate mediation resources to turn to.

**The following are questions that it may be helpful to ask someone who has decided to turn to mediation:**

- What makes this feel like the best option?
- How will mediation be arranged, who will make the phone call, who will be called?
- How will this be communicated to the other party?
- What do you need from me? What role is it appropriate for me to play?
- What do you need to do in the meantime? How will you interact with the other party?
- What questions do you have about mediation?

**Once the mediation is approaching, the coach may be able to help the party prepare for the interaction with questions such as:**

- What issues do you need to make sure get addressed?
- How will you say what you need to say?
- What do you anticipate the other person will say?
- How will you listen to the other person?
- What can you take responsibility for?

## D. CHANGING MY OWN ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, OR RESPONSES

In the midst of a difficult conflict or difference of opinions, when it comes to making judgments about who's at fault, or whose thinking or behaviour needs to change, few people are easily able to turn a critical, analytical eye on themselves. Opening ourselves up to the possibility that *I'm* the one who needs to make changes can be a very challenging exercise. Sometimes it means admitting to ourselves that we were wrong, or at least seeing that our contribution to the dance of relationship is not working very well. Regardless, there's personal work to be done in breaking old patterns or habits of thought or action, and learning to respond in new ways.

Blind spots may need to be exposed and acknowledged, which means dealing with one's own sense of identity, ego, and the very human desire to save face and avoid embarrassment. An empathetic coach will discover the importance of finding gentle ways to challenge people on their thinking or behavior while at same time making sure their personal dignity and self-esteem are preserved. The ego is a tender thing; treading too heavily will invite increasing resistance.

If someone is considering making some personal changes, the following kinds of questions may prove helpful:

- What's not working?
- What evidence is there that others aren't happy with your current approach?
- Where might you be going wrong?
- Looking back, how might you play things differently, moving forward?
- What haven't you tried?
- What kind of changes would you like to try?
- Who, if anyone, will need to know that you are changing your actions and/or thinking?
- What kind of feedback might you need? From whom?
- What do you need to do more of/less of?
- Who could help you explore the change options you could make?
- How will you measure the impact or success of your new approach(es)?

## **E. GOING TO A HIGHER AUTHORITY**

Sometimes it is necessary to take conflicts or problems to higher authorities. Situations that involve issues such as discrimination, harassment or racism may need to be taken to a supervisor, the police, an elder, a union representative or the human rights commission.

**In situations such as these, the coach can help the person decide what higher authority is most appropriate and then follow up with questions like:**

- What makes this feel like the best option for you?
- What are the long and short-term consequences of this option?
- Have you had the opportunity to discuss this already with your supervisor (higher authority)? What did s/he do/say?
- What will you say?
- What do you anticipate the higher authority will say? What if that is not how they respond?
- Taking it to a higher authority may mean that there is a decision that goes against you. How will you respond to that?
- How will you manage in the meantime? How will you interact with the other party?
- What do you need from me? What can I do to be helpful?

## **F. SEEKING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT OR INFORMATION**

Often people in conflict need additional information to be able to ascertain what next step they want to take. At this point, they are not yet able to decide whether to let go, talk it out, have it mediated, or take it to a higher authority. There are still too many missing pieces. The resolution coach can play a valuable role in helping the person identify what additional support or information they need. For instance, they may recognize that they may need to gain a new perspective from talking to someone else near to the conflict. Or they may need to verify some facts or check out some assumptions that they are making.

**A variety of questions that may be useful to the coach are:**

- What information (or support) do you need?
- Where can you get that?
- Why does that feel so important to you?

- What if that information simply can't be provided for you?
- What will do you once you have the information? What do you think your possible next steps might be?

It may also be useful for the coach to check back in the future, to see how the next steps are coming and if there is any additional need for coaching.

## **6. Follow up (referred to as Aftermath)**

Because of the proximity that the resolution coach has to the conflict and to at least one disputant, the last step in the coaching process is to check in with the person or persons later on. The coach will be following up on the decision that the disputant has made: to talk about it, let it go, mediate it or take it to a higher authority. If the coach has been involved with both parties, the coach may be exploring what may be needed for any resolution or agreement to be sustainable. This is a very important and often overlooked piece of the process. It is all too easy to feel “Phew, that’s over” -- and avoiding bringing it up again for fear of reopening a can of worms. To the contrary, we believe that if there is a can of worms, better to open it up and know what is inside. In our experience, follow-up prevents future conflicts that might arise over residual misunderstandings.

### **Questions to consider include:**

- Are both parties ready to move on? Do they need more help?
- How and when will agreements be followed up?
- Is more help needed?
- What might others who were impacted by the conflict need?
- What can each person and you, do to ensure the situation is addressed long term?
- How will the group be reacting to the people who were in conflict? What might the group need at this point?
- What ways might the system’s structure and/or culture undermine the sustainability of the resolution? How can this be addressed?
- Do other conflict situations need to be addressed? If so, how can this happen?



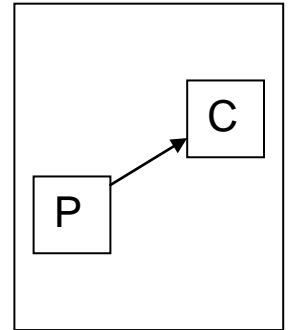
# **APPLYING THE MODEL - SITUATIONAL ADJUSTMENTS**



# COACHING SITUATIONS

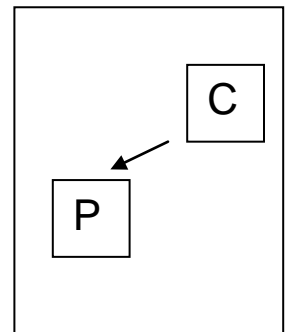
## When a person approaches us

This is a common opportunity to respond to conflict as a resolution coach. A family member, friend, co-worker or neighbour approaches you about a conflict they are experiencing, often simply to talk. At this point there may be a temptation to take sides. Resolution coaching involves actively assisting that person to try to resolve their conflict constructively. This person may be the only party involved in this conflict with whom you speak.



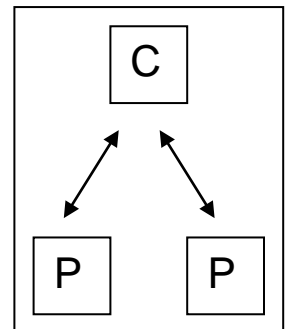
## When we make the approach

You also have the option of initiating a conversation when you are concerned about the destructive impact that a conflict is having on one or more people you know. Working with 2 parties will almost always entail having to approach one party. It is important to make the approach with a clear intent, to clarify what the conflict is about and to determine how best to assist the people involved to approach the conflict constructively.



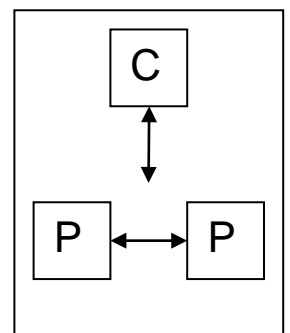
## Working with two (or more!) people

This may happen by request of a person with whom you have talked, or it may be a useful next step to assist all parties to work it out themselves. You may have a responsibility (for example as a supervisor) to ensure that the conflict is resolved positively and that you speak to all parties. When approaching a second party, it is important to be aware of concerns such as bias and confidentiality.



## Intervening in open conflict

Resolution coaches can assist parties caught in the midst of a conflict. Coaches facilitate greater understanding by clarifying misunderstandings surfacing interests and supporting parties to clarify solutions. Resolution coaches facilitate disputing parties through a conflict resolution process similar to a typical problem solving process.



## **COACHING FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING**

One of the most helpful aspects of this model is its ready application to coaching people as they think their way through any problem that life has offered. This model is not limited to situations involving interpersonal conflict – it can be an effective tool any time someone has to make a choice. With problem solving, as with resolving conflicts, people often benefit from a listening ear as they talk the problem out. The coach can also help by identifying and clarifying issues, highlighting goals and interests and then simply asking an open question like, "*What next step might you take?*"

**As the person begins to ponder the next step or steps to take, the coach can continue to play an effective role. Possible questions might include:**

- Why do you think that is what might meet your needs/How does that plan meet your needs?
- When would you take this step?
- What might stop you or get in your way?
- What are the possible ramifications of doing that?
- What would need to happen next?
- What resources (human, material, etc.) do you have to do this? What resources do you need to line up?
- Imagine a time in the future when this problem has gone away... What has happened to bring about that change?

## **WORKING WITH TWO PARTIES**

If you are aware that two people are in conflict and neither of them has approached you, you will have to decide whom to approach first. There's no set way to decide. What is most important is to recognize that at some point, one of the parties may question why they themselves were not approached first. Therefore, it is crucial that you have a clear reason and can clarify your intent, being transparent about what you are doing and why.

Some new things that you may want to take into account when you approach the second person include:

- **Be consistent – use the same basic approach with each person.**
- **Clarify how you know of the conflict and how you got involved.**
- **Inform when you have already talked with the other person.** Often we are afraid of doing this because we think that the person will feel slighted when they find out that they are second. However, there is a good chance that they will find out at some point. If they find out they were second when they assumed (or were told) that they came first, it may lead to greater mistrust. It is better to tell them up front that you have talked with the other person.

Although your approach should differ greatly depending on the context, the following example may provide you with some ideas:

*“Jim, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with Mary yesterday. I asked Mary about it because I ran into her in the hallway. She was interested in trying to resolve the issue and is committed to working it out, but wasn't sure how to approach you about it. I'm wondering if I can be of some assistance to you and her in working this out.”*

### **Confidentiality**

Now that you're working with both people, they may often ask you what the other person has said. They may assume that your role is to pass information from one party to the next. It's important not to do that unnecessarily and to get a clear understanding, from each one, of what can be shared and what remains confidential (for more information, see “Shuttle Diplomacy” on the next page).

## **SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY**

Shuttle diplomacy (being a “go-between”) is sometimes part of being a coach. People in conflict may like the idea of the coach taking messages back and forth, because it takes little effort for them and takes away the need to face the other person. However, because the coach can now become the “mouthpiece”, there are concerns to address before agreeing to adopt this role. It will be important to be very clear about the boundaries to your role as a coach and to ensure that it does not get in the way of the ongoing relationship.

Shuttle diplomacy can be helpful, but only under very limited circumstances; for example, when:

- No other option will work
- The culture of the party/parties dictates it
- It is used as a stop-gap measure to build enough trust so that people can meet in person
- There is some very minimal but important information to share
- There will be no ongoing relationship between the people

Despite the fact that there are a few settings in which this method might be useful, there may be significant enticement to do it. People in conflict would often love others to do their tough work for them! The pitfalls of doing it, however, are many.

- **Parties in conflict may begin to rely inordinately on the coach to communicate for them.**
- **The coach may develop power and/or control in the conflict.**
- **Because it is so much easier for the people in conflict, it can be difficult for the coach to get out of this role.**
- **It can be difficult to create closure.** And they may not be as motivated to resolve the conflict. They can also become dependent on the third party role and reluctant to make the change to resolution together.
- **Challenges arise when the relationship is ongoing.** If the people you are coaching have an ongoing relationship, they need to be able to communicate with each other and without your help. Having them work out the conflict between themselves at some point enhances their ability to work out future conflicts by themselves.
- **It is open to manipulation.** The lack of face-to-face dialogue can reinforce any potential for one person to manipulate the situation. Each person does not get the whole message that is communicated (i.e. just the words but not the tone and body language). Lastly, it becomes even more crucial that the coach be aware of and set aside any bias towards one person or any partiality for a certain solution.

## ***RELATIONAL POWER DYNAMICS***

Considering how interpersonal power dynamics factor into conflict situations is an entire course unto itself. What is of unique significance to the role of resolution coach is the level of power or perceived power of the coach her/his relationship to the disputant(s). Perception is critical here: the coach may feel him/herself to be in a “power equal” position, but others may perceive this differently. In such a situation, their perception is their reality. Power may be positional (the rank of a person in an organization or family), social (in contemporary Canadian society, some groups of people are – unjustly – granted more status than others) and personal (charisma, strength of personality, life experience, ability to communicate etc.).

Consider these possible scenarios:

- A.** The resolution coach has a higher level of power than either of the parties.
- B.** Coach is on a level of power equal to that of the highest power party.
- C.** Coach is on the same level of power as the lowest power party.
- D.** All parties are on a relatively equal power footing.

Relational power will have the least perceived impact on both the conflict and on the role of the coach in this last scenario. Key questions to consider for the first three scenarios include:

- Will attempts to coach be interpreted as coercion?
- Will an inequality in power lead either party to feel threatened (e.g. that his/her job will be in jeopardy)?
- What modifications may be required to create an atmosphere of trust? (e.g. bringing in an advocate, writing a letter of intent together before beginning a coaching conversation)
- Have you been granted a mandate to coach the higher power party?
- Will becoming involved bring risk to you?
- How will the person with the higher level of power feel?

### **Question for reflection:**

*Do you have a sense of the ebb and flow of your relational power within your workplace, community or family? How will that impact the way you approach your role as a resolution coach?*

# ***INTERVENING: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING***

## **A Model**

Sometimes we find ourselves witnessing conflicts as they escalate between others: relatives at the family gathering, neighbours at the community club, or colleagues at a meeting. These are people who normally have a solid relationship but are getting frustrated with each other and tensions are building – in them and in everyone watching. We have identified a three step model for intervening in escalating conflicts that serves to increase understanding between the parties involved, a model closely linked to “Where Does the Conflict Lie?”

**Step One: Listen.** Listen intently for the signs of escalation. Is this a conflict that the parties involved can handle? Or is their frustration increasing as their level of understanding decreases? It can be tricky to choose the right moment to intervene – but it is a good idea not to wait until tempers have escalated too high, or relationships have been damaged. Listen also for signs of “Where the Conflict Lies” as these will guide you in your next steps.

**Step Two: Intervene.** The higher the level of escalation, the more obvious the intervention may need to be. Ideally, an intervention can be made subtly, without participants really noticing anything, (except that tempers have subsided). When you intervene, you will be choosing the action that you take based on where you see the heart of the conflict. Is this a disagreement? A misunderstanding? A difference in styles? Are you noticing a “pinch” but not sure what it is about?

### **Step Three: Options.**

- 1) **Disagreement:** You may notice that people are expressing disagreement with each other by naming positions and neglecting interests. As a third party you may want to summarize the interests that you have heard, increasing the chances that the parties in the conflict will hear and notice these interests.
- 2) **Misunderstanding:** When parties are misunderstanding each other, it can be helpful to paraphrase or to reframe. Paraphrase the party you feel is being misunderstood: it may illuminate where the misunderstanding is occurring, will result in the first party feeling heard and thus de-escalate the situation. It may also be effective to re-frame: to take the ‘sting’ out of a comment and reflect its intent. Or to do a perspective check, “Hmmm... What did you mean when you said that?”
- 3) **Styles:** You likely know these parties well enough to reflect back any style dynamics that you are hearing in the way the conflict is playing out before you. “I can see how this must rub you two the wrong way: Todd you are such a nighthawk and Sue you’re a real morning person.”

**Pinch:** You may notice that one of the parties has experienced a ‘pinch’. This may be an opportunity for you to try a perspective check to the person who has been pinched. “I’m wondering what is going on with you right now?”



# **SKILLS AND APPROACHES FOR THE RESOLUTION COACH**



## **WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN BEING A RESOLUTION COACH**

- 1. Your beliefs and attitudes about being a third-party to conflict in general and this situation in particular.** If you generally find conflict or this specific conflict daunting, you may need to become more comfortable with conflict in order to play this role effectively.
- 2. Your intent in getting involved.** Are you hoping to solve this? Are you hoping to be seen as the problem-solver? Or are you willing and able to play the kind of “back seat role” that coaching entails?
- 3. Your interest in the outcome of the conflict.** A resolution coach may be deeply invested in having the conflict dealt with; due to the relationship with the parties involved, the unresolved conflict may be directly impacting you. If, however, you have a vested interest in **what** the solution is, you need to step out of the coaching role.
- 4. Your ability to remain unbiased in your response to the people involved in the conflict (and their perception of that ability).** Both people will also need assurance that you have no vested interest in a specific outcome and can suspend judgement about what has taken place.
- 5. Your usual role in life (leader, counsellor, problem-solver, advisor).** Some roles pre-dispose us towards a certain way of approaching conflict. If your role in life leads you to give counsel or advice frequently, you will have to make a major intentional shift out of that role.
- 6. Your usual role in relation to the people in conflict** (supervisor, parent, decision-maker, co-worker, friend). If you are normally in an authoritative role for instance, you may need to take steps so that all involved accept your new approach and role.
- 7. Your history with the parties involved in the conflict.** Having had a relationship of friction with one or both parties will likely preclude you from being seen to be an appropriate coach.
- 8. Your status in the organization, family, community, the relative status of the parties and your relationship to the parties.** The “Power Dynamics” page in the *Situational Adjustments* section in this manual expands upon this point.
- 9. Your present energy and availability.** All of us have limited time and energy. If you feel unwilling to take this on, trust your instincts. It’s okay to say “no” or “maybe later.”

## **ROLE OF RESOLUTION COACH**

<b>WHAT EACH PERSON IN CONFLICT BRINGS</b>	<b>WHAT COACH BRINGS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Content</li> <li>▪ Feelings</li> <li>▪ Facts</li> <li>▪ Perceptions</li> <li>▪ Issues</li> <li>▪ Positions</li> <li>▪ Interests</li> <li>▪ Solutions</li> <li>▪ Goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Safety</li> <li>▪ Balance</li> <li>▪ Preparation</li> <li>▪ Communication Skills</li> <li>▪ Encouragement</li> <li>▪ Focus: future and issues</li> <li>▪ Clarification</li> <li>▪ Conflict Resolution Skills</li> </ul>

The role of a coach may be quite different than our usual roles in life – such as counsellor, advocate, decision-maker, ally or judge. Given the newness of the coaching role, it might be helpful to consider a working metaphor to guide you in that role. In preparation, ask yourself, *“What can I contribute to this conversation? What kind of visual picture could help ground me in that endeavour?”* Some ideas are: sounding board, mirror, fellow traveller, spotlight...

## ***TOP FIVE PROBLEMS WHEN WORKING WITH TWO PARTIES***

1. One person wants to know what the other person said.
2. The second person is upset that you spoke to the other person first.
3. The second person asks you to be the messenger.
4. Dilemma ...What do you do with helpful information which is also understood as confidential?
5. Dilemma ...Struggling to avoid aligning oneself with either side...
  - a. Because of how I feel.
  - b. Because they are pressuring me to align.

## **ROADBLOCKS TO RESOLUTION**

Throughout the coaching process, you may find that you come up against roadblocks that prevent the flow of the conversation from moving toward resolution. Here are some suggestions for dealing with specific blocks:

### **The person cannot get past venting.**

The model indicates that in most cases it is not necessary to specifically paraphrase what you have heard, that identifying themes and unmet needs are sufficient for people to feel heard. If this does not seem to be working, sometimes it is important to paraphrase in much more detail to assure the person that you understand what they have shared with you.

### **The person is getting stuck in anger.**

If the situation is still very fresh, be willing to hear the story a number of times. It is not unusual for the full process to evolve over a number of conversations. If you move too quickly the person will resist following your questions.

### **Unresolved past issues keep coming up.**

If it is difficult to talk about the current situation without revisiting old hurts, you may want to use the coaching model on the past issue as a separate coaching conversation. You could also suggest that the person seek additional help to process the past issue (e.g. a counsellor, spiritual director, life coach). Ask the person how the past experience may be impacting the current situation.

### **The person is not ready to resolve the problem.**

There are times when people don't want to resolve the issue because of possible implications. For example, a public sector employee who hates their job or boss but has no transfer options may not be able to imagine leaving the security of the public sector and is blocked in moving forward. This is often an unconscious roadblock. Some people, for numerous reasons, are not willing to take responsibility for life choices. This can be a short-term problem or in some cases a way of living. You can help the person realize that not seeking resolution is also a choice and help him or her know that they can make decisions within the context of choosing to stay that may be more positive.

### **The coach does not have adequate time or energy.**

If coaching the party takes more of your time or energy than you anticipated, be transparent with the party and say, *"I'd like to spend more time on this with you, but my day is full. Can we find a time where we can revisit this?"* If the problem is that the conversations seem to stretch on, you could say, *"I've got 10 minutes to talk right now. Is that OK or would you like to schedule another time?"*

### **You are no longer interested or able to be the coach.**

People can get stuck in the pain (or conflicts) for years. That can be very tiring for the people they are talking to. Again, honesty is the best policy because your tone and body language (meta communication) will invariably send mixed messages to the other person and they may believe or accuse you of being non-supportive (which is generally that last thing we need after listening to the same conversations for hours). Honesty could be as simple as: *“I am currently finding it difficult to support you in this situation. I am finding it difficult to hear your pain and be supportive because of.... I am finding it difficult to hear your painful experiences in a situation that you are choosing to remain in. I’m wondering if we can talk about how we can continue to connect and how I might remain healthy and supportive to you.”* Options here could be that the person broadens their support network, that there is an agreement not to talk about the situation for a period of time. If you simply don’t have the time or energy for it at all, redirect the person to someone who may have the time and energy to assist them.

**The conflict touches on personal issues for the coach.**

If you find yourself getting sucked into the conflict or reacting strongly to the issues take a break and see if you can clarify what issues you need to deal with personally. If you can set those aside, continue the conversation. If they keep coming up, ask yourself what you need to do to attend to them.

**The solution seems unworkable.**

If the person decides on a path forward that you, as coach, find unworkable, ask open-ended questions to ascertain the viability of the plan. Judgement can cloud your ability to question, so remember to stay curious.

**You get invested in a specific solution.**

When you care about people it is not unusual to get invested in a specific solution. There is a tendency to get hooked into the conflict and tensions will develop between you unless the person acts on what you think is the right thing to do. It is critical that you get invested in things you can accomplish versus solutions that are outside of your control. If you can’t see the person remain in the painful situation, admit that and ask the person to not share their hurt for a period of time. Make sure that it is clear why you need to do this so the person does not experience this as personal rejection.

## **REMAINING SUPPORTIVE AND RESPECTFUL**

Your role as coach is to be supportive to the person in front of you, while remaining respectful to those who are absent. How you relate to a person models constructive behaviour and show the one you are with how you would likely respond to the other. By not taking a person's side, you show that you will not be taking the other party's side either. At the same time, you can respond to the person in a way that expresses your empathy for their experience and for the conflict situation as a whole.

Remember to separate the person from the problem.

<b>RESPONSES TO AVOID:</b>	<b>INSTEAD:</b>
Leading with your perspective on the situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Consider if you are bringing your agenda to the situation. Listen without judgement to the person's needs and let them lead the conversation.</i></li> </ul>
Reinforcing the person's perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Validate the person's perspective in a way that does not feed a negative attitude about the other person. Invite person to imagine what other's perspective or concerns might be.</i></li> </ul>
Reacting to negative comments about the other person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Acknowledge impact of other person's behaviour.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Separate the person from the problem.</i></li> </ul>
Fact finding, focusing on your own understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Ask questions that will help the person's understanding of the situation and help get a bigger view of the conflict.</i></li> </ul>
Giving advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Ask an open question to help person explore options for him herself, rather than telling the person what you would do.</i></li> </ul>



## ***PREVENTION OF CONFLICT ESCALATION***

There are many behaviours that keep people from 'nipping conflict in the bud', even when they have the opportunity. In the workplace, employees often assume managers to be more aware of the problem than they really are. Managers may not pick up on the signs of conflict that are evident to other staff. People behave in similar ways in the neighbourhood and in families.

- What are the clues that conflict is brewing?
- What stops you and others from responding to those clues (identify personal and systems constraints)?
- How might your current roles (formal and informal) give you access to assisting others in the resolution of their conflicts?
- How can you as an individual and the organizations you are involved in, be more proactive in responding to the early warning signs of conflict?

## ***APPROACHING THE FIRST PERSON***

Often the coaching conversation begins when someone approaches you to vent. However, there are times when you may want to initiate the conversation. This is especially true if you are working with more than one party in a conflict. People communicate when they are in distress; your son flops down on the couch with a grumpy look on his face or perhaps a colleague walks into the office and is clearly distracted. At other times you may choose to initiate a conversation because you know that there is an existing, unresolved and festering conflict. In our experience, the key to a successful approach is transparency, initial defensiveness or wariness can often be overcome by an expression of genuine concern and a truthful explanation of what has moved you to be involved. A successful approach includes several steps, including the following:

- **Explanation.**

When a third party approaches people who are in conflict, it is often for one of two reasons: the third party is coming to side with them (“Yeah... that so-and-so is a real jerk isn’t s/he?”) or to castigate them (“You were so out of line to do that”). It is unusual – and often a healthy relief – to have someone approach who is simply ready to listen empathetically. Because this is unexpected, however, it is important to explain your rationale at the start: “I’m coming to talk to you because I’ve noticed the conflict between you and Mary and I’m worried about how it is affecting all of us.”

- **Clarification.**

Again, because people will expect you to take sides – that’s what they are used to after all – it can be important to clarify that you simply want to listen and help out where you can, rather than taking sides. If you are in a supervisory capacity, you may want to be especially careful to be clear about this. You may well have a vested interest in seeing the problem resolved (“*I can’t have conflict between team members affecting our work*”) but can allow the process and resolution to remain with the disputants (“*How you work this out is up to you and I am ready to help you two in any way that I can.*”). The other expectation that people will carry is that you come to advise and tell them what to do. Again, it can be helpful to assure them of their own abilities: “*I’m not going to try to tell you what to do – I know that you’re the best judge of that – but maybe talking to me will help you sort some things out.*”

- **Comment.**

People in conflict or struggling with problems often believe that it is their business and not affecting anyone else. This, of course, is simply not true: unresolved conflict takes its toll on all bystanders and on the quality of interaction and work that can be accomplished. It can be helpful to be a reality check for people and remind them of the impact that their conflict is having on others. This also provides a rationale for the involvement of the third person.

- **Confidentiality.**

In order for people to trust a third party, they need to be sure that the third party will keep information private. Especially if you are going to be speaking to both sides of a conflict, you may need to be explicit that all information shared will remain with you.

- **Permission.**

To make a successful approach, the third party coach often needs to ask permission to talk about this and at this time. This might simply sound like this: *“Is now a good time for you to talk about this?”* or *“Do you want to tell me what has been going on?”*

## **RESPONDING TO DEFENSIVENESS**

It is uncommon to approach someone in a conflict situation as a third party coach. Most people assume that getting involved implies judgement (with an expectation that you will chastise them) or “taking sides” (with an expectation that you will reinforce their view of the other party.) When you approach a person in the role of a resolution coach it will be important to be clear about your purpose and obtain their permission to help. Prepare for concerns that may be “blockers” for the person you are approaching.

<b>Block</b>	<b>Think about</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b><i>“What’s it got to do with you? You weren’t there.”</i></b>	How does the conflict affect you?	Describe your experience of the conflict or incident and its emotional impact on you.
<b><i>“I don’t see how you’re involved. I told her how I feel and she can talk to me if she cares.”</i></b>	What is motivating you to approach the person?	Let them know your interests, e.g. what is important to you about the situation, as a co-worker, friend, relative...
<b><i>“Why are you talking to me? It’s too bad you didn’t hear her. She’s the one you should be talking to.”</i></b>	What is your role and your intent?	Let them know you are there to help solve the conflict, or to help staff morale, etc. And <b>not</b> to judge, to align, to disagree...
<b><i>“You know how everyone gossips around here.”</i></b>	What fears may person have about what you will do with information s/he gives you?	Assure confidentiality. Clarify that you will not pass on what is said to you without the person’s permission.

Some more approaches for responding to defensiveness:

- Empathize
- Repeat your intent
- Make such interventions a part of the organizational or family culture
- Recognise that timing is important; things may be too raw right now and you may need to try and come back later or on another day
- Help the person to ‘save face’

*Note: Think about the party/parties involved. What will they be expecting from you if you intervene? Is that the role you intend to play? How will you communicate this to them?*

## ***ASSESSING THE CONFLICT: QUESTIONS***

The degree to which people are involved in a conflict is on a continuum. If two roommates are talking, the need for the coach to assess the conflict is low. Spending too much time trying to diagnose the conflict may encourage the coach to take too much ownership of the conflict itself. In that situation, simple open-ended questions could be useful in moving the conversation forward. On the other hand, managers in the workplace may have a significant responsibility to see that the conflict is resolved. They would benefit from spending some time considering the context and dynamics of a conflict before beginning a coaching conversation.

### **The following questions may be helpful to consider:**

- What is the conflict about (resources, process, values or psychological, relational or identity needs)?
- Who is involved? (If possible, all players need to be involved in an intervention.)
- At what stage of escalation is the conflict?
- How able are disputants to speak to each other, to articulate their own needs and interests, as well as hear the other party?
- What other factors need to be taken into account?
- How do organizational structures and policies come into play?
- Should I become involved? (How does my role in organization come into play?)
- What else do I need to know about the conflict? (e.g. What are the conflict styles of the participants?)

## ***INTERVENING IN CONFLICT AROUND YOU***

Conflict that is not addressed will likely escalate and impact on the people around and on the organization or family as a whole. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to intervene in all conflicts.

**Some questions to ask in considering whether to intervene would be:**

### **YOU**

1. How are you affected by the conflict? How have people's actions impacted you already?
2. What is your role in relation to each person in the conflict? To the organization/group?
3. In deciding to intervene, what is your intent, what are your interests?

### **THE CONFLICT**

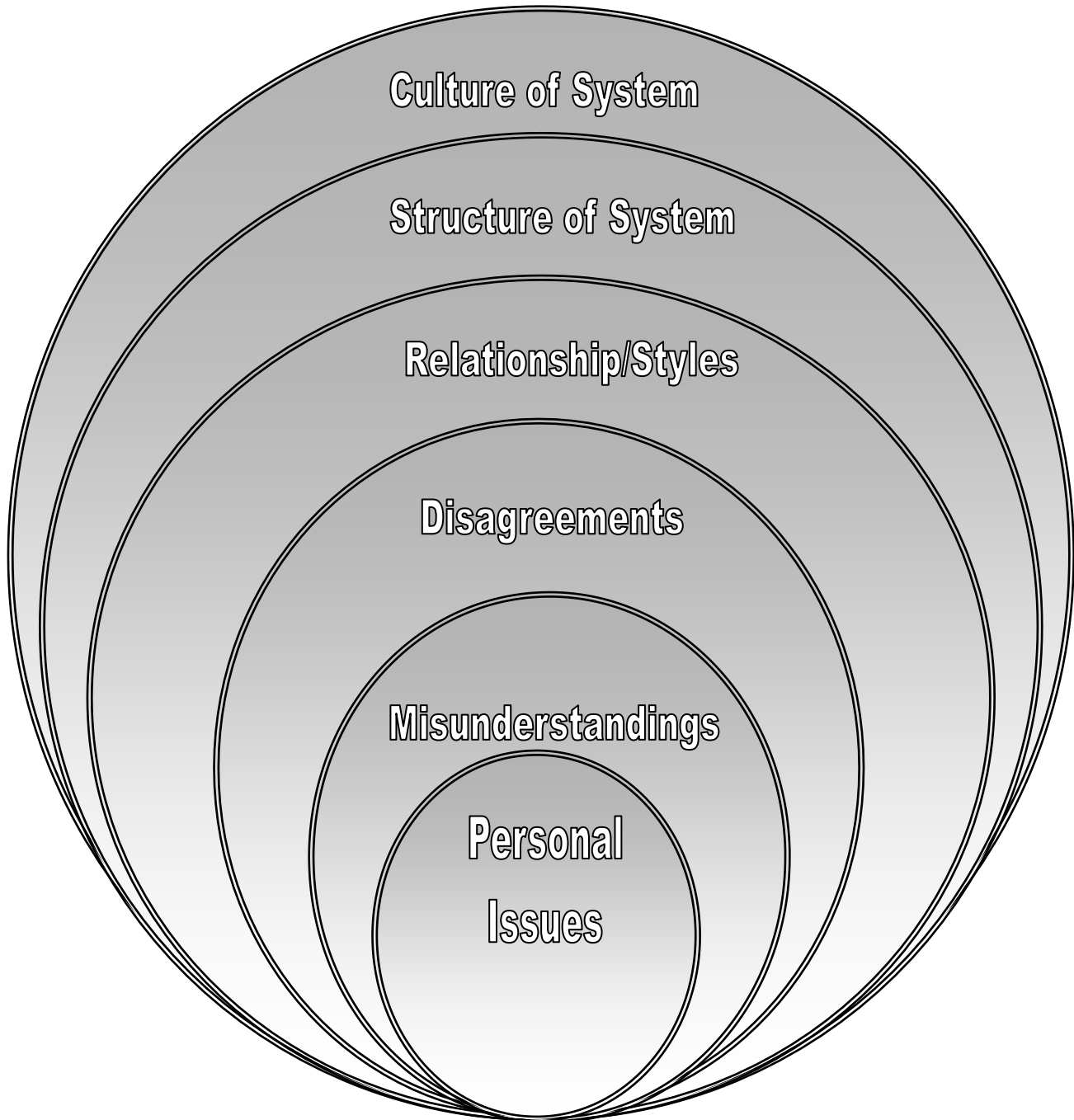
1. What behaviours and situations lead you to think third party coaching is needed?
2. What will likely happen if you do not intervene?

### **THE PARTIES**

1. Who is directly a part of the conflict? What else is going on in their lives?
2. Who else would need to be involved for resolution?

# ***NOTES***

## **WHERE THE CONFLICT LIES: MODEL**





## **WHERE THE CONFLICT LIES**

<b>NATURE OF PROBLEM</b>	<b>DESIRED OUTCOME GOAL</b>	<b>APPROACHES</b>
<b>PERSONAL ISSUES</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, financial health problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal health</li> <li>▪ Increased awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Talk to a friend</li> <li>▪ See counsellor</li> </ul>
<b>MISUNDERSTANDINGS</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Problems with perception</li> <li>▪ Miscommunication</li> <li>▪ People taking things the wrong way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarity, clear up misunderstandings</li> <li>▪ Improve communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explore action/intent/effect</li> <li>▪ Clarify assumptions</li> <li>▪ Be aware of “blind-spots”</li> </ul>
<b>DISAGREEMENTS</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disagreements over specific issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Decision on issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Name areas of misunderstanding</li> <li>▪ Shift from positions to underlying interests</li> </ul>
<b>RELATIONSHIP/STYLES</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individuals not getting along</li> <li>▪ Lack of trust or good will amongst staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Behaviour change</li> <li>▪ Manage diversity</li> <li>▪ Increase trust</li> <li>▪ Closure on negative history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Acknowledge parties’ communication styles</li> <li>▪ Highlight the differences in style/approach</li> <li>▪ Shift judgement to curiosity</li> </ul>
<b>STRUCTURE OF SYSTEM</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rules, roles, policies, set up of organization is causing problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improve organization’s structures (rules and roles)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires involvement of others in the organization or family</li> <li>▪ Assess who has influence and ask if they can be involved</li> <li>▪ Assess what can or cannot be changed</li> </ul>
<b>CULTURE OF SYSTEM</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Values, beliefs and or the culture of organization and profession is part of the problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ System change</li> <li>▪ Develop, Renew, align organizational values/ beliefs/ culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires involvement of others in the organization or family</li> <li>▪ Consider “fit” within organization</li> <li>▪ Cost/benefit analysis of staying in organization</li> </ul>

## WHERE THE CONFLICT LIES: WORKSHEET

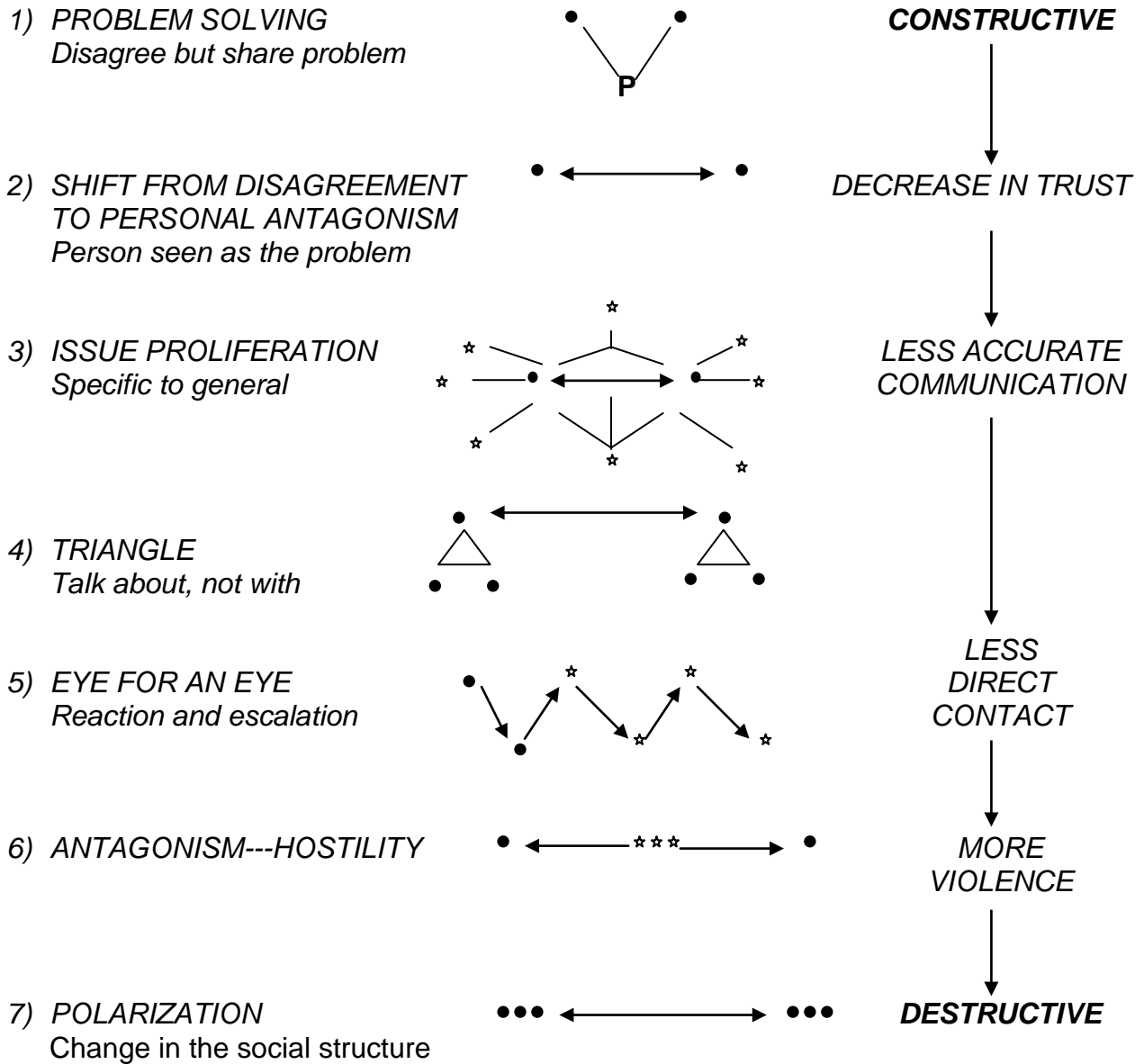
### First Steps:

- *Reflect on your own conflict situation using the questions below (3-5 min)*
  - *Get back together with your triad*
  - *Focus on your real life conflict situations*
- 
- 

1. What are the issues/incident(s) which seem to require an immediate solution/response? (Often these can be identified by the sense of crisis surrounding them.)
2. What about the perceptual level? Are misunderstandings or miscommunications a factor in this conflict?
3. What about personal issues (e.g. mental health, family stresses, addictions, money problems, etc.)?
4. What are some of the relational difficulties/patterns that have contributed to the situation (e.g. chronic poor listening, a history of other pinches/crunches)?
5. How have larger structures (e.g. rules, policies, roles, procedures in the organization/family/group – or lack thereof) contributed to the conflict?
6. Are there ways in which the “big system”/structure (e.g. culture, values, beliefs, and assumptions) have impacted on this conflict? What are the forces which originate beyond your immediate workplace/school/family which may be playing a role?

# CONFLICT ESCALATION AND CHANGE

(Where is it at?)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Lederach, John Paul et al, **Conflict Transformation MCS**, 1989, adapted by Mediation Services.



# **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**



## ***APOLOGIES: RECOVERING FROM MISTAKES***

Accidents happen, errors occur and everyone at times loses their composure and acts out of frustration. Our mis-steps cause some measure of hurt to others. Most of us are more aware of others mis-steps than our own. If we have mis-stepped we often justify our behaviour by minimizing or ignoring what we have done and focusing in on what they have done to us. The challenge is that the other person may believe the same; their action was in reaction to our mis-step. This dynamic often creates stalemates in relationships. Being able to effectively acknowledge responsibility through the process of a well-stated apology is an essential method of ensuring that people recover from their mistakes and are able to return to a stable and productive relationship.

When people tell us their version of events they invariably focus in on what they did right and what the other person did wrong. As resolution coaches we often need to help people take responsibility for their actions. Elements of a good apology include:

- 1. An expression of regret/remorse.** This includes not only acknowledging the hurt but also expressing concern that the person is hurting. “I’m sorry that I hurt you...” or “I regret the impact that my behaviour had...” It is often good to end an apology by stating the regret (or restating the regret), to ensure that this is what people walk away hearing.
- 2. Naming the action.** This involves clearly identifying the action that caused discomfort. Examples could include “The way I have been giving you feedback”, “The angry tone in my voice”, “Forgetting to pick you up”.
- 3. Taking full responsibility for your behaviour.** It is important to separate your behaviour from the behaviour of the other person. (Our actions happen in context, yet if we link our behaviour to the other’s, this is most often viewed as justification. The end result is that rather than hearing an apology, the other person experiences you making the point - again!)
- 4. Steps to prevent recurrence.** If this situation has occurred before, it is important to share what you will do to work at changing your behaviour.
- 5. In some situations, a symbolic gesture of regret** is appreciated. This could include buying flowers, taking a friend out for lunch, a card, etc.

### **IT IS NOT HELPFUL TO:**

- Use the word 'but' in an apology.
- Argue with the person's experience.
- Minimize the level of hurt.
- Blame the other person for your action.
- Use too many words.
- Try to confront the person with what they did to start the conflict (this should be a later conversation).

***A good apology can turn a destructive response into an opportunity for growth.***

## **ACCEPTING APOLOGIES:**

Sometimes people will indicate that the other person has apologized but they are refusing to accept it. It is important for people to acknowledge and accept an apology. It is important to help people explore why they are not accepting apologies. One frequent reason is that people need time to recover from the hurt. I can still accept an apology (an act of the head) and allow my heart to 'catch up' to the decision of my head. Another frequent reason for not accepting apologies is that people are afraid this would mean that they cannot problem solve around what happened. Accepting apologies does not mean that further discussion on the problem is lost. If the behaviour is part of a destructive pattern, conversations around how to change the pattern or conversations around supporting people to make better choices is critical. Responses can be as simple as "Thank you" or "I appreciate your acknowledgement."

## **AREAS OF CONTRIBUTION**

Interpersonal conflict is a relational dynamic – it grows out of the reactions, assumptions and miscommunication between 2 or more people. Blaming conflict on one person alone will not result in a constructive resolution. The concept of contribution makes a difficult conversation more likely to be productive. If we take responsibility for any way we have contributed to the problem, it can radically change the tone of a blame-filled conversation. Often our contribution falls into one of three areas:

### **1. Intentional Acts to Harm**

These are actions that are intended to hurt, inconvenience or demean. These actions are usually done in a moment of anger or when we believe it is time to take a stand. We all participate in these actions occasionally. We generally act in these ways when we feel provoked.



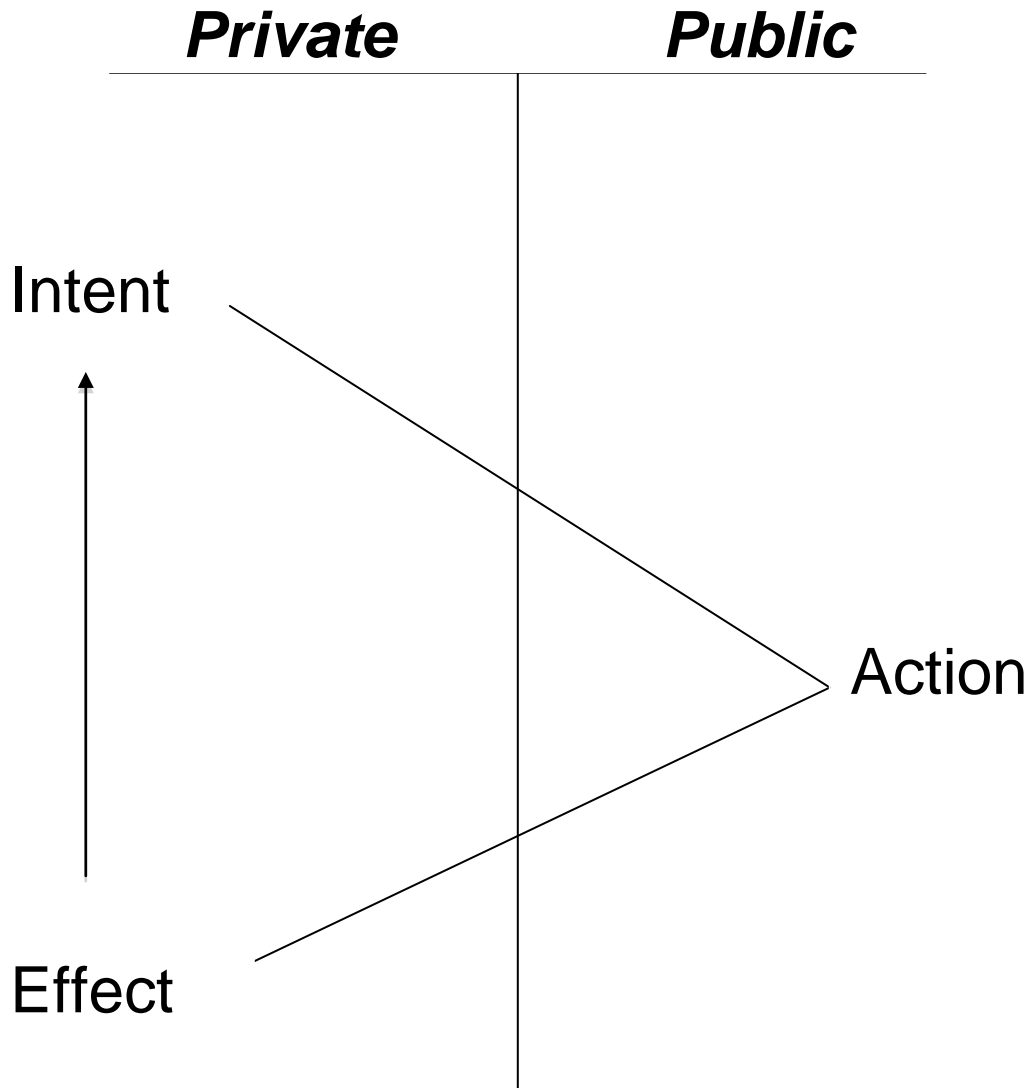
## **2. Unintentional Acts (How most conflict begins)**

These are actions that result in people feeling hurt when this was never our intention. These situations are generally rooted in misunderstandings. Often our unintentional actions have been the catalyst for another person's intentional acts to harm us and we are usually unaware that our behaviour has hurt the other person. This information generally only becomes evident when the other person shares their experience and assumptions. When we hear this information it is often very easy to feel accused and become defensive. Most of us do not take negative assumptions about our positive intentions easily. Yet we all inadvertently hurt others. Taking responsibility for the hurt we have caused others be our part in helping to resolve a difficult situation.

## **3. Process**

These are contributions that often neither person in a conflict has articulated or considered. Difficult conversations can be helped greatly when we take responsibility for our contributions to the negative process. A frequent contribution is the habit of delaying/avoiding having a conversation about problematic behaviour, sometimes for months. The causes for the delay may be our fear of conflict, busy schedule, little contact, etc. Delaying conversations generally just increases both the suffering and of all the parties and the difficulty for each person to speak honestly (without attacking) or hear (without making assumptions). Identifying process contributions would generally happen only when there is nothing else for which to take responsibility.

**INTENT – ACTION – EFFECT**



## ***INTENT – ACTION – EFFECT***

*“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.”  
Anais Nin*

In our daily interactions we often misinterpret the behaviour of others. The assumptions we make are a major contributing factor in the breakdown of communication and the escalation of conflict. When people are under the stress associated with conflict, the tendency to misinterpret each other is greatly increased.

People often assume the other’s intention from the effect that the action has. If someone has been hurt by the actions of another person, the assumption is often that the other has intended the hurt. As well, people assume that others will correctly interpret the intents of actions. If the intent was to help, people may assume others feel helped and are appreciative.

Usually the action itself is the only part that is public. In conflict situations, the gap between intentions and the effects of actions can become wider and wider. An effective approach in resolving conflicts is therefore to support people to make “public” more of what is usually “private.”

As a resolution coach you will hear statements like “I thought that that if I did ....” Such phrases may be indicators of assumptions that may need to be examined. Similarly, coaches will hear people make judgements about the intentions of others based on the effects that their actions had. Coaches can help people to begin the movement from judgement to curiosity to become curious about possible alternative and perhaps even positive intents.

### **More than Words**

Effective communication in conflict situations includes an exchange of ideas, feelings and/or beliefs that result in better understanding between people. It sounds simple, but effective communication in conflict situations does not come easily. In a study conducted by Dr. Albert Mehrabian at UCLA, the act of communication between individuals was divided into words, tone and body language. People communicate much of their intention through words. Yet the impact of the message is gleaned through the speaker’s tone and body language. People experience some level of stress when they are in conflict; this stress changes the tone of voice, the amount of eye contact, posture, etc. To communicate accurately people in conflict need to become more mindful of what they are communicating through their tone and body language. Coaches, acting as mirrors, can help parties in conflict become more aware of how their unspoken signals may be impacting on the other party and on the conflict.

## **NAMING ISSUES**

When naming behaviours or issues it is important to identify them factually without implying negative judgement. A behaviour is a specific action that someone has done and an issue is a pattern of numerous behaviours (e.g. behaviour – you were 15 minutes late yesterday, issue – arriving at meetings on time). People will tend to respond defensively when another person identifies a behaviour that they would like to see changed. When coaching an individual to name the issues it is important to assist them in naming issues so that they do not infer judgement or bias.

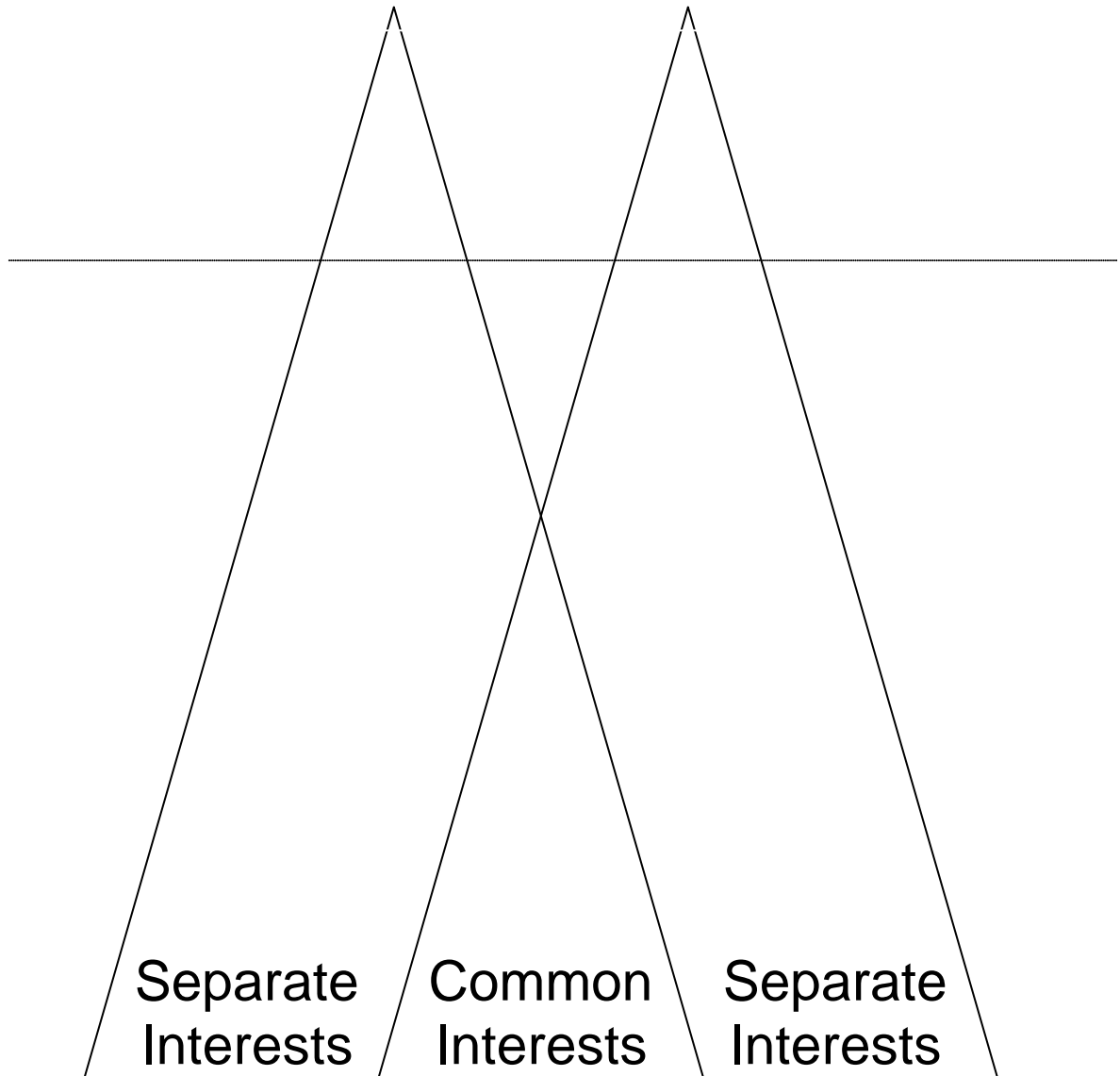
To name issues effectively, choose neutral or positive language, (e.g. “communication” instead of “miscommunication”). The following are some tips for assisting others to identify and reframe issues in a more neutral and helpful way:

1. Remove adjectives like “more”, “less” or “too much”.
2. Leave out pronouns, like “you”, “them”, etc... Pronouns are often experienced as pointing a finger at someone.
3. Use nouns, such as “the meeting”, “the bike”, “protocol”, “our working relationship”, “job descriptions” and “time spent together”.
4. Express the issue in a way that is relevant to both parties if at all possible. Phrase it so that each person’s concerns can be addressed in a discussion on that topic.
5. Ask the person:
  - *“How do you think the other person will respond to the way that the issue is named?”*
  - *“Is there another way that you could identify the topic you want to talk about that is less likely to cause Susan to become defensive?”*
  - *“If Susan had this concern with you, how would you like her to raise the issue with you?”*

<b>NAME THE BEHAVIOUR :</b>	<b>NAME THE ISSUE:</b>	
<b>What happened:</b>	<b>Instead of saying:</b>	<b>You say:</b>
"You told me to 'take a valium' when ..."	"Her inappropriate language"	"The incident" or "what happened yesterday"
"You did not respond to my question."	"The silent treatment"	"Communication"
"You made the comment 'whatever' when I asked ..."	"His attitude"	"Our working relationship"
"The report was not completed on schedule"	"His/her incompetence"	"Job descriptions" or "expectations"
"You did not do your chores last week"	"Laziness" or "not pulling his weight"	"Expectations around the house"
"Not asking for my input"	"Controlling and domineering"	"Decision making"
"Arriving after the meeting started"	"Being late"	"Managing time"

**Position**

**Position**



While a judgemental reaction to another's position often leads to gridlock and frustration, a curious attitude allows us to uncover the interest(s) from which the other person's position stems.

## **POSITIONS AND INTERESTS**

*“What is surface conflict, jagged peaks of icebergs facing off with each other, beneath may be joined when we have eyes to see.”*

Tilden Edwards

One of the keys to conflict resolution, especially in a complex situation, is the identification of the **interests** of each party. Shifting from **positions** to **interests** is crucial for working towards creative solutions that will work for each person in the conflict.

**POSITION** – A person’s position is their solution to the problem.

The reason people are in conflict is because the positions they hold address only their needs.

People can get locked into their positions, often referred to as “becoming positional”. Common motives for becoming positional are the desire to be taken seriously, fear, revenge and expectations. Becoming positional can also be our historical pattern of reacting to conflict. In making the shift from positions to interests, it may be necessary to first acknowledge the position and then address the underlying issues.

**INTEREST** – Interests are the underlying wants, needs, fears, hopes and/or concerns which motivate us to hold our positions. Interests reflect and are shaped by our values and priorities.

Discovering and stating interests allows each person in a conflict to understand what will be needed to create a mutually acceptable and lasting resolution. When people are able to express their interests they also may discover that they share many more values and concerns than they assumed and are subsequently less likely to perceive one another in purely adversarial terms.

Basic human interests, which often come up in disputes, are the need for **power, approval, justice, inclusion, identity and security.**

## **QUESTIONING: A MORE OPEN APPROACH**

In effective conflict resolution, questioning can be used to probe for information. It is **not** used for cross-examination in order to prove a point, to demolish an argument or to get compliance. As with any technique, there are also helpful ways to use questions. When undertaken with care, questioning can help clarify assumptions and uncover vital information.

**Open-ended** questions move away from judgement towards curiosity. Open questions invite a longer response, giving a choice of how to respond and thereby moving the control from the questioner to the responder. This type of questioning may seem risky because the questioner cannot know exactly what direction the conversation will go. Although this may seem to be a disadvantage in a purely adversarial environment, open questioning often results in creation of a more open, co-operative forum. Open questions encourage answers which provide unanticipated information, reveal interests and provide clarity for all involved. Two key operating words to open-ended questions are often “what” and “how.”

### **TYPES OF OPEN - ENDED QUESTIONS** (common “lead in” phrases are highlighted)

**1. Information Seeking** – Probing questions are used to invite the speaker to reveal further information about a subject area:

- *I'd like to hear more about...?*
- *So, how did you react when...?*
- *What's important to you about...?*
- *So, what was going on for you when...?*

**2. Clarification** – Clarification questions are used to seek more specific information and clarify generalizations or ambiguous statements:

- *“When you refer to \_\_\_\_\_, what do you mean?”*
- *“I'm not clear what you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_. Can you clarify that for me?”*
- *“A few minutes ago I think you said that \_\_\_\_\_. What did you mean by that?”*
- *“Help me understand what you mean when you talk about \_\_\_\_\_.”*



**3. Interest-focused questions** – When information seeking and clarification questions do not help us discover the speaker’s interests, one can narrow the conversation with interest-focused questions. Many of these questions simply ask how the position or request relates to the responder’s wants, needs, hopes, concerns or fears:

- ***“How would Chris meeting your request give you more of what you want?”***
- ***“What effect would knowing that Karen had the funding in place have had on you?”***
- ***“What were you concerned would happen if there wasn’t funding line up?”***
- ***“What were you hoping would happen when you told the coach you were unhappy?”***
- ***“What were you afraid would happen if your job didn’t get copied on time?”***

Other questions simply ask what will happen if the position or request is met:

- ***“In what way would that make the situation better?”***
- ***“What would it do for you to get the motion passed today?”***
- ***“What’s important to you about accepting this proposal?”***
- ***“How did you decide that accepting this proposal would be the right thing for your people?”***

**4. Exploring Apparent Inconsistencies** – These questions can be helpful in terms of exploring elements that appear inconsistent and therefore confusing. However, caution is advised here. A questioner can easily slip into a cross-examination mode and can further exacerbate a situation. This type should be used rarely:

- *“Earlier on I heard you say that you don’t want to see any of Dave’s programs cut and now I understand you to be saying that you think your programme should receive priority funding, even if other programmes would have to be dropped. Could you help me understand?”*
- *“When we began talking together my understanding was that it was very important to you that the relationship between you and Chris be maintained. Now it seems like you are saying that you’re not concerned about what his department needs. Tell me what’s going on for you.”*
- *“I’ve heard you say a number of times that you want to pull your son out of soccer because of things you’ve seen that were “unethical”. I’ve also heard you suggest just now that the program was exactly as you expected but that you’re disappointed your child isn’t a better player. I’m a little confused. Could you explain?”*

**5. Brainstorming** – Brainstorming questions are extremely useful once people have begun to better understand one another or as a means of “expanding the pie” (increasing the options people understand to be available). While it is important to be careful not to use brainstorming too early in the process, these questions can be an excellent way to stimulate creative and co-operative thinking:

- *“In light of both your interest in seeing this new project take off and what you suspect is Dave’s interest in continuing traditional core programming, what are some possible directions to go with this?”*
- *“What are the other options available at this point?”*

# **PARAPHRASING**

Paraphrasing is a key conflict resolution skill. Paraphrasing ensures that the speaker will feel heard – a subtle but important point. Paraphrasing is distinct from summarizing or restating, both of which tend to be detailed and longer. With paraphrasing, the listener hears a paragraph and gives back a phrase.

When paraphrasing in a conflict situation:

- genuinely try to understand what the person is experiencing
- attempt to capture the essence of what the person said
- use your own words to let the person know what you think s/he said
- be brief: aim for less than 8 words
- paraphrasing feelings is often more powerful than paraphrasing facts

Paraphrasing is unique. It is a listening skill that helps to:

- create a collaborative tone in the conversation
- catch potential misunderstandings early
- check to make sure you understand the speaker's intent
- allow the speaker to correct you if you have misunderstood something
- avoid thinking of your own response while another person is talking
- convey to the speaker that you are interested in him/her and what s/he has to say
- clarify information
- de-escalate anger
- clarify misunderstandings between others

Typical beginning “tags” for paraphrasing include “So for you...” “Sounds like...” and “Seems...”

## **POSSIBLE PARAPHRASING APPROACHES**

## A Workplace Scenario:

There has always been some good-natured rivalry between the Programming and Administration teams, but recently the rivalry has included some significant tension. An example of this escalation took place recently when a staff member from Programming (Kim) got into a heated argument with an Administration team member (Chris) over the use of the photocopier. After the blow-up, Jamie – who had witnessed the conflict – took on the coaching role with Kim. During the venting stage, Kim said:

“I can’t believe that Chris cancelled my job on the copier! What an arrogant jerk! He knows that sometimes I need to do an emergency job at the end of the day. Because of him my work was late and a client was put out. Why couldn’t he have just waited until my job was done? I mean, it’s not like his job was that important. He just did it to spite me!”

Some possible paraphrases that the coach could use:

*“You’re really annoyed with what happened at the copier.”*

*“You were really upset when Chris cancelled that job.”*

*“Sounds really frustrating.”*

*“It’s important to you that your work is respected.”*

## SOME PARAPHRASING PITFALLS:

- **Only paraphrasing**

Sometimes people want to use paraphrasing to show that they are listening, but their body indicates that they are disinterested or annoyed. This can make speakers uncomfortable, if not angry. Like any communication skill, paraphrasing needs to be rooted in genuine empathy.

- **Reading too much into what the person says**

**Statement:** “I’m not really clear on what his phone messages say. Look at this one here – how am I supposed to understand what that’s about – and if I don’t understand what he is writing, then how can I respond to this appropriately?”

**“Going Too Far” Paraphrase:** “You think that he doesn’t know how to take phone messages.”

**Improved Paraphrase:** “Some of his phone messages have been confusing.”

- **Stating back word for word what the person says—“parroting”**

**Statement:** “She can’t shovel her snow all over my walkway anymore. One of these days I am going to slip and break my neck! Who does she think she is, making this kind of mess? Doesn’t she see what she’s doing to me – or doesn’t she even care?!”

**“Parroting” Paraphrase:** “So, you’re saying she can’t shovel her snow over your walkway anymore because one of these days you’re going to slip and break your neck and that makes you think she’s a disrespectful person, that she is disrespecting you.”

**Improved Paraphrase:** “You’re really fed up with the snow on your walk.”

- **Stating the paraphrase as a solution**

**Statement:** “I am so fed up with my partner; I’m not gonna put up with his crap any longer! He’s just a total dweeb. And the mess he leaves around – it feels like he thinks I’ve been put on Earth to clean up after him. If this goes on much longer I’m going to lose my mind.”

**“Solution” Paraphrase:** “You’re really frustrated with him and you’re thinking of ending things.”

**Improved Paraphrase:** “You’re really frustrated and need something to change.”

- **Repetitive paraphrasing**

Repetitive paraphrasing is stating back what the person says over and over again without asking questions or sharing your own perspective. Remember paraphrasing is only one part of healthy communication.

- **Paraphrasing that is too wordy**

Overlong paraphrases interrupt the speaker’s flow of thought, are obvious and can be annoying. Metaphorically, they remove the speaker from ‘centre stage’ and replace them with the listener.

## **ROLE PLAY INSTRUCTIONS**

Role plays provide an opportunity to integrate and practise theory and skills in real-to-life conflict scenarios. Role playing combines both the theatrical and the personal. You may be surprised how certain situations or roles will engage you in very personal and emotional ways. At the same time, role-plays are artificial situations that permit you the opportunity to experiment, take risks, “rewind” a specific sequence of interactions and practise responding in new or different ways. Role-plays can also be stopped at any time.

### **While Role Playing:**

- Have fun!
- Remember that it is okay to feel uncomfortable.
- Take time to debrief out of your role, particularly if you have become emotionally involved.
- Do something symbolic when moving out of the role-play, like taking off a nametag or shaking hands.

### **As a Coach:**

- Practise different skills.
- Take risks. Role plays are a safe place to make mistakes. Real life may have more serious consequences.
- If you feel stumped, stop the role-play and discuss options.

### **As a person in conflict:**

- Tell your story as you know it. Add details consistent with your part.
- Please don't read from the role description; it's not a script.
- Remember, you have chosen to participate in this process.
- Give the coaches a challenge, i.e. be emotionally engaged and work to have “your” concerns addressed, but don't make the task impossible. Remember you will be the coach next time!
- Do not use your own name. Use nametags and a fictitious name.
- Let the coach know what they did well and what would have been helpful to move you along in resolving the dispute. Often parties are in the best position to give constructive feedback.

**As an Observer:**

- Keep track of time, being sure to stop role play in time to debrief
- Watch interaction, noting what happens in the conversation
- Note what seems to work well, what is helpful
- Note what could have been done differently
- Note dynamics, concerns that you would want the coach to think about
- How did the process work? What steps were followed?
- After the role-play, lead the debrief as follows:

**Roleplay Debrief:**

Each person (coach, person in conflict, then observer) speaks to:

1. What went well?
2. What could have been done differently?
3. Any surprises?
4. Pitfalls to avoid?

In debrief, everyone remember the Constructive Feedback Guidelines (see below)

## ***PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK***

The reason for giving feedback is to help a person to understand the effect of her/his behaviour on another person. In this training, you can help coaches to fine tune their skills by giving constructive feedback on what worked well, and what could be changed, in terms of the effect on the party(s). Giving effective feedback that includes an honest and “critical” dimension, i.e. feedback that is useful, requires a great deal of sensitivity and careful wording of the information so that it will be heard, understood, and acted upon by the recipient. The same communication skills that are essential for the successful coach are also helpful when providing feedback.

The following guidelines may assist you in providing feedback to other participants during the role plays and skill-building exercises that are part of this course.

- Give the information in a caring manner so that the recipient will be able to hear it, understand it and do something with it.
- Don't overload the person with too much information at one time.
- Describe the behaviour that you saw, not your assumptions about its cause or your theoretical analysis of it.
- Emphasize the person's positive actions and responses. Highlight the strengths—where he/she was on target with. We all need to hear what we did right so that we can build on it and keep on doing it!
- Focus on something the person can change about her/his words or actions.
- Be specific and concrete rather than general or vague, e.g. *“About halfway through, when you said that you thought she was lying, I noticed that she looked surprised and reacted defensively. How might you have worded that differently?”*
- Check frequently to see that the recipient of your feedback understands what you are saying and give them the chance to respond to what you have observed.
- Provide feedback in the way you would like to receive it, i.e. in the way you would be able to hear it and act on it!