

CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION

GOALS:

- To examine how we communicate in conflict situations.
- To explore some common obstacles in the communication process.
- To learn specific techniques to communicate more effectively when in conflict with others.

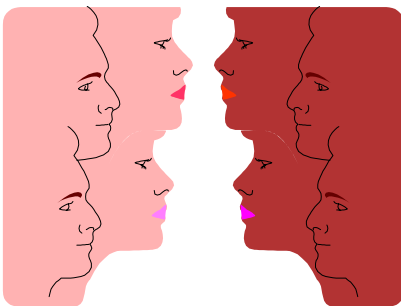
RATIONALE:

Responding to others in conflict situations is a learned behaviour. If we have had difficulties in the past resolving conflicts, we often find ourselves locked into a pattern of avoidance or denial when conflicts do occur. Consequently, this can lead to a sense of dissatisfaction and hopelessness in both our personal and professional relationships. This lesson helps us to identify our unique pattern of communicating in conflict situations, explores some common barriers many of us face and teaches specific assertive techniques to overcome communication obstacles.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart paper, pens, pencils, markers, a box of various objects, copies of the ***Conflict and Communication Styles Questionnaire*** and the ***Resolving Conflict Through Assertive Communication Worksheet*** for each participant.

METHOD:



Warm up: You've Got It, I Want It

Divide participants into dyads. Instruct participants to form two lines with partners facing each other. Have partners decide between themselves who will be **A** and who will be **B**. Ask the **A**'s to choose an object from the box. Explain that both partner **A** and partner **B** want this object very much.

Instruct the **B**'s to start off by trying to get the object from the **A**'s. **REMEMBER** that both partners want the object. Tell participants to use any method they wish (except physical force) to resolve this conflict.

Allow 3 or 4 minutes for the dyads to resolve their dilemma. Then ask the partners to switch roles – now **B**'s have the object and **A**'s want it. Debrief with the large group by asking participants to discuss:

- How it felt when they were the one who wanted it.
- How it felt when they were the one who had it.
- Whether the conflict was resolved and if so, how they did it.
- How they felt about the way they chose to deal with the problem.

Exercise 1: Conflict Questionnaire

Distribute copies of the ***Conflict and Communication Styles Questionnaire*** to each participant. Tell participants that this exercise will help them explore further, the ways in which they typically communicate their needs, wants and desires to others in conflict situations. Ask participants to complete the questionnaire by answering as honestly as possible.

Questions to Consider:

- What did you learn about yourself in terms of how you communicate in conflict situations?
- Did you identify anything you would like to change?
- What communication obstacles do you encounter when faced with conflict?
- What do you find the hardest/easiest to deal with in conflict situations?

Theory: See Theory Box

Exercise 2: Expressing What You Want

Ask partners from the warm up to pair up again. Instruct dyads to revisit the original conflict over who gets the object. Ask dyads to resolve the conflict, this time, using the assertive communication techniques discussed in the theory.

In the large group, ask participants to comment on the following:

Questions to Consider:

- How effective was this technique?
- Were you able to more easily express your needs, wants, position, etc.?
- What other techniques have you found useful?

Exercise 3: Setting a Goal

Instruct participants to think of a conflict they are currently facing. Ask participants to consider what they want to happen in order for that conflict to be resolved. Then, distribute copies of ***Resolving Conflict Through Assertive Communication Worksheet*** to each participant. Tell participants to complete the worksheet as a means of making a commitment to resolve that conflict in the very near future. Invite participants to share their intent with the large group.

EVALUATION:

CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

QUESTIONNAIRE

➤ When I am having a problem, disagreement or am in conflict with someone, I usually . . . (check all that apply)

- Put off dealing with the situation
- Try to meet the other person half way
- Cite authority to show I'm right
- Just give in
- Try to help the other person get what s/he wants
- Complain until I get my way
- Explain my point of view and ask the other person to do the same
- Keep my ideas to myself
- Change the subject
- Try to understand the other person's point of view
- Get another person to decide who's right
- Admit I'm wrong even though I don't think so

➤ The type of person I find it easiest to discuss a problem/conflict with is . . .

Because . . .

➤ The type of person I find it hardest to discuss a problem/conflict with is . . .

Because . . .

➤ Ideally, I would like to communicate my needs during a conflict in the following way(s):

THEORY BOX

- ◆ Conflicts often occur over differences of opinion, facts, perceptions or values. While no one approach or method of resolving conflicts covers every situation, developing the skills of assertive communication can be useful in a great variety of conflict situations.

- ◆ **W. I. N. FORMULA:**

By using a technique called the W.I.N. METHOD, you can focus more easily on the real issue, express how it is affecting you and describe what you would like from the situation.

W stands for **WHEN** . . . When you . . . (state specific behaviour you don't like)

I stands for **I** . . . I feel . . . (express a feeling or thought)

N stands for **NEED** . . . I need/want . . . (specify what you want to change)

Example 1:

"When you don't call and are late for dinner, I am annoyed. I have spent a lot of time preparing the meal and have been waiting for you to come home. I need you to call in future when you are going to be late."

Example 2:

"When you make jokes about people of my race, I feel very upset and uncomfortable. I would appreciate it if you didn't tell jokes like that in the future."

THEORY BOX cont'd

- ◆ When working with formulas like this one, it is important not to be too rigid. The statement must sound natural and genuine. It is not always necessary to describe the behaviour in a separate sentence, it may already be implied. For example, a one-line statement such as ***“In future I’d like you to call when you’re going to be late for dinner”*** implies that the person is late.
- ◆ The “I feel” statement is not always necessary or appropriate in some situations or environments. For example, it would not be appropriate to say to your boss ***“I feel overwhelmed and angry when you give me too much work to do”***. It would be more appropriate to say, ***“I have been staying late for several days now to finish my work. I would like to discuss my workload with you. When would be a good time?”***