

Dealing with Conflict

Deal with emotions first

Most conflicts have two parts: the issue of “content” and the emotions aroused by the issue and the conflict about it. Strong emotions interfere with a person’s ability to be rational. We deal with emotions by:

- Identifying and addressing the emotions directly
- Using accurate reflective listening skills
- Talking about the behavior or situation; avoiding “attacks” on the person

Define the problem

This is not as simple as it sounds. There can be as many separate definitions of a problem as there are people involved in the conflict. Much time can be spent solving the wrong “problem.”

- Take time with this step. Get the ideas of everyone involved.
- Define the problem in terms of needs, not the solutions. (e.g. “I need your help” is a solution. “I need to solve this puzzle” is a need.)

Brainstorm

This step can be the most fun. The object is to bring out all possible solutions. No evaluations of any kind should take place during this step – sometimes the “craziest,” off-the-wall suggestion has the gem of a good solution.

Choose the solution

Only now are you ready to look at the range of suggested solutions and discuss which one might be best. Be sure that the solution is chosen together.

Plan the “how” of the solution

Some groups (or individuals) become so elated at having arrived at a solution that they neglect to work out the details of who, when, and how. Continue to revise the “how” of the solutions until everyone is comfortable. If necessary, revise the who, when and how if your first plan doesn’t work.