

COMMUNICATION

Activity 2: Managing conflict

Activities to promote adults' personal, social and learn to learn skills

Description of initiatives comprised in this handbook.

Title/name	Managing conflict
LifeComp Skill approached	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-regulation <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility <input type="checkbox"/> Well-being <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Growth mindset <input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Managing learning
Duration ¹	50 minutes
Type of activity	Group work discussion and role playing
Short description	This activity is aimed at highlighting that everybody can experience conflict, regardless of whether it happens in a personal or professional setting. If those situations are handled well they can provide opportunities for personal growth.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn more about communication obstacles • Enhance participants' skills in resolving conflicts and overcoming communication challenges
Setting ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 facilitator • 1 room that allows for group interaction • Chairs arranged in a U-shape to encourage participation and discussion • Projector or large screen if possible
Facilitators' Tips ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage active participation and respectful listening among participants. • Be prepared to provide guidance and support during discussions or activities if participant conflicts arise. • Foster an atmosphere of mutual understanding and encourage participants to consider different viewpoints. • The speaker and listener should take turns in each role so that each has a chance to express his/her thoughts and feelings. The goal of this activity is not to solve a particular problem, but rather to have a safe and meaningful discussion and to understand each other's point of view.
Step by step	

¹ It can be continuous.

² Materials and resources needed to implement it, including financial, human resources and spaces. In case a worksheet is needed, please use the following document to prepare it.

³ What a person needs to know to implement the activity.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The facilitator presents important facts about communication obstacles and resolving conflicts (see the Material for Facilitator worksheet for more information) 2. The facilitator explains the objectives of the group activity and its relevance to their personal and professional lives. 3. The facilitator divides participants into pairs and invites them to choose a potential conflict situation in order for them to be able to apply the knowledge from the presentation. 4. The facilitator presents an example: Your neighbor had a party last night and your whole family could not sleep - approach them to discuss this and let them know you are angry. What approach would you use? What would be the tone of your communication? 5. The participants are encouraged to role play the potential situation, by taking the roles of the speaker and listener and taking turns in each role so that each has a chance to express his/her thoughts and feelings. Either can call for a time-out at any time.
<p>Debriefing:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you consider yourself skilled in resolving a conflict? ● When was the last time you had conflict with a friend or a family member? ● How do you deal with criticism? ● Would you consider yourself a critical person? ● What is your approach to conflict? Avoiding it? Or dealing with it? ● What are the things you wish you did better when you find yourself in a conflict situation?
<p>References</p>	<p>https://extension.usu.edu/relationships/research/effective-communication-skills-resolving-conflicts</p>



Managing conflict – Material for facilitators

Worksheet – Communication

Many people are aware that effective conflict resolution requires communication, but it's important to note that negative communication patterns can actually worsen the situation and intensify the conflict.

Here are some communication challenges that can happen:

Differences in style of communication:

- ✓ Everybody has a unique way of communicating and it is often based on our family experiences, culture, gender, and many other factors.
- ✓ Some of us tend to be more loud, outgoing, or emotional when compared to others. Our past experiences can create expectations that are not usually verbally communicated with others, which can cause tension and misunderstandings
- ✓ Discussing our backgrounds and perceptions can help to clarify expectations to ourselves and others and can help in resolving conflict.

The tone of voice/body language

- ✓ Communication is more than the words we choose to use. When we give a conflicting message in a way where our tone of voice and body language does not match our message, confusion and frustration often follow.
- ✓ It is important to be aware of your tone and posture.

Communication obstacles:

This often happens when two people talk in such a way that neither one feels understood.

Researchers consider four particularly negative styles of communication:

Criticism

While it's natural to have concerns about specific actions, it's crucial to avoid demeaning someone as a person based on those actions. Critiques focus on behaviors, whereas criticism negatively targets a person's intentions and character. For example, a critique can be said as a complaint "I was so worried when you did not call last night to let me know you arrived safely," as opposed to criticism "You never think about anybody other than yourself. You promised you would call when you arrive."

Contempt

It is often displayed through body language like eye rolling, sneering, or using name-calling, sarcasm, and hurtful remarks. It clearly sends a message of disgust and a lack of respect for the other person.

Defensiveness

A common response to criticism and contempt, as it's natural to want to protect ourselves. When we become defensive, we tend to stop listening to the other person's viewpoint, shutting down communication.

Stonewalling

Refers to withdrawing from communication and refusing to engage in discussion. It's akin to the "silent treatment" that young children employ when upset. Without communication, it becomes impossible to achieve conflict resolution.

Some additional examples of communication obstacles include (Miller & Miller, 1997):

- Ordering ("Stop complaining!")
- Warning ("If you do that, you'll be sorry.")
- Preaching ("You shouldn't act like that.")
- Advising ("Just wait a couple of years before deciding.")
- Lecturing ("If you do this now, you won't grow up to be a responsible adult.")
- Agreeing, just to keep the peace ("I think you're right.")
- Ridiculing ("OK, little baby.")
- Interpreting ("You don't really believe that.")
- Sympathizing ("Don't worry, it'll all work out.")
- Questioning ("Who put that idea into your head?")
- Diverting ("Let's talk about something more pleasant.")

Communication obstacles are very common; however, they do not promote healthy conflict resolution and often lead to escalation of the conflict. It is important to recognize them and make efforts to effectively communicate so that obstacles can be resolved.

WAYS OF RESOLVING CONFLICTS:

Soften the approach

- ✓ Start the communication with something positive and first express appreciation, focusing on problems one at a time and taking responsibility for thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ When expressing the problem, starting the message with "I" instead of "You" can decrease defensiveness and promote positive interactions with others (Darrington & Brower, 2012).

Make attempts to calm the situation

- ✓ Try to keep an increasingly negative interaction from going any further by taking a break or making efforts to calm the situation.



- ✓ This is important because when conflicts arise, we often experience intense emotional and physical stress that can impact our ability to think and reason, which can lead to communication roadblocks (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001)

Effective speaking and listening skills

The rules for the speaker include:

- ✓ The speaker should share his/her own thoughts, feelings and concerns—not what he/she thinks the listener's concerns are.
- ✓ Use "I" statements when speaking to accurately express thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ Keep statements short, to ensure the listener does not get overwhelmed with information.
- ✓ Stop after each short statement so that the listener can paraphrase, or repeat back in his/her own words, what was said to ensure he/she understands. If the paraphrase is not quite right, gently rephrase the statement again to help the listener understand.

The rules for the listener include:

- ✓ Paraphrase what the speaker is saying. If unclear, ask for clarification. Continue until the speaker indicates the message was received correctly.
- ✓ Don't argue or give an opinion about what the speaker says—wait to do this until you are the speaker, and then do so in a respectful manner.
- ✓ While the speaker is talking, the listener should not talk or interrupt except to paraphrase after the speaker.

