

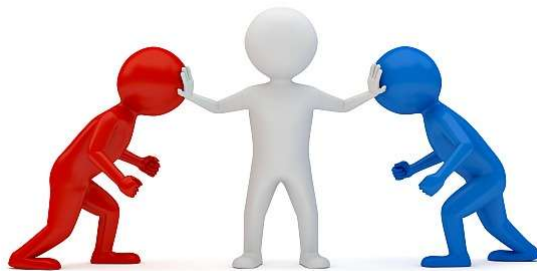
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1

What is conflict?

(noun: a serious disagreement or argument; a dispute, quarrel, squabble, disagreement, or difference of opinion)



2



Conflict is...

- A clash of interest
- A struggle between people or an internal struggle
- A conflict is more than just a disagreement...it is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat (**whether or not** the threat is real!)

3



- Conflicts continue to fester when they are ignored
- We respond to conflicts based on our **perceptions** of the situation, not necessarily to an **objective review of the facts**.
- Conflicts trigger strong emotions that can be "reactive"
- Conflicts can also be seen as an opportunity for positive growth...

4



- Can you think of a time or an instance where you experienced conflict?
- How were you feeling emotionally? Did you have a pit in your stomach? Heaviness in your chest? Were you feeling anxious and nervous? Did you want to turn and run? Or charge into the ring with gloves on with the Rocky theme playing in the background?
- Fighting and disagreeing with others can be frustrating and scary...can produce either a "fight" or "flight" response

5

Interpersonal Conflicts

- There are times when people simply don't get along. These are conflicts that happen because of misunderstandings, miscommunications and naivety about other people. **Conflict arises from perceptions/assumptions, not reality.**

Example: A stakeholder in a case does not see the value in a CASA because they **"assume"** this is just a volunteer and really not a party to the case who knows anything about how the system works. This individual may not know about the 30 hours of training each volunteer has to endure to be sworn in by the courts.

- How does it make you "feel" when you do not feel valued or heard?



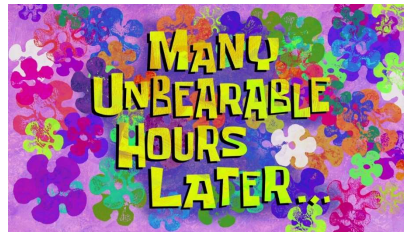
6

Inter-Dependency Conflict

- One person needs to complete specific tasks before another person can complete a new task.

Example: CASA cannot make a decision on whether they agree with a placement until a home study has been done and the results have been shared. We need the information for our report to the court.

So we call, email, text our CPS caseworker...and we wait, and wait, and wait...



7

Conflict of Processes and Style Issue

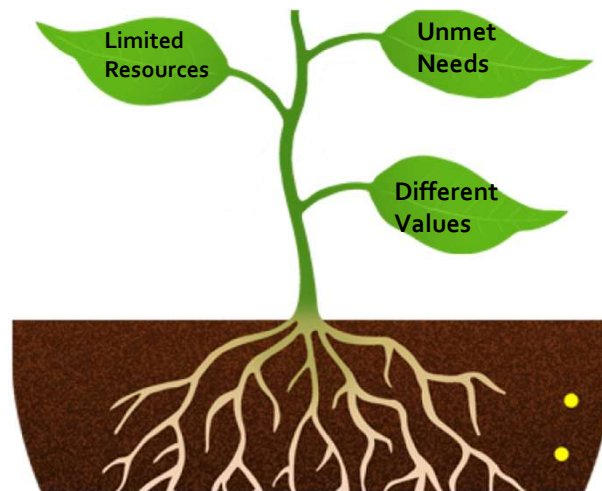
- How things get done is not necessarily the same for everyone. The simple variation on how the same task is accomplished could be frustrating for one or both parties. Establish an agreement regarding the expectations of all involved up front

Examples:

- CPS does not appear to be dedicating as much time and attention to a case as CASA would like for them to (could be a "tortoise and the hare" scenario)
- CPS does not text or email with updates...you feel you always have to initiate (may operate on a "need to know" basis)
- A supervisor has an advocate that does not return calls and therefore must not care about the case (maybe there is something going on in the advocate's life that would explain)
- My supervisor wants me to enter into Optima as things happen. I prefer to do it all at the end of the month. Could there be a compromise?

8

Roots of Conflict



9

Limited Resources

Resources are like time, money and property

- Having demands on our **time**...not enough time
- having limits on our **money**...not enough money
- having challenges to our personal **property**...someone borrowing something of ours and not returning it, or returning it damaged

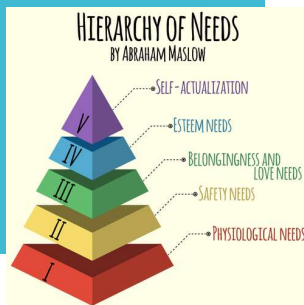
All associated with having limited resources and possibly creating conflict created from stress or anxiety

NOT HAVING ENOUGH OF....

- Creates stress, anxiety, fear of not getting something done...

10

Unmet Needs



- We all have needs: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual
- Our needs drive our actions...so when we feel our needs are not being met this can lead to conflict
- We must identify which needs are not being met
- We also must assess if this is a “need” or a “want”...very different...and this assessment can help clarify a conflict

11

Different Values

- This is where our “shoulds” live
 - You “should” act this way; you “should” do it this way; you “shouldn’t” say this; you “shouldn’t” wear that... **When we are “shoulding” on ourselves or others, things can get messy**
- This is also the place where “isms” live: racism, sexism, ageism...where they are created and get challenged
- This is where our culture, experiences, values and beliefs come into play...

Our PERCEPTIONS ...are an observation or a concept; a capacity for comprehension...how we SEE and EXPERIENCE something

12

The Initial Approach to Conflict

- When conflict occurs, the first thing to remember is to remain calm, cool and collected



- More often than not...the conflict is not about you...it is not about the “person” but about the “problem”

13

How does conflict begin?

- Conflictual communication begins and perpetuates
- Dysfunctional communication often contains 3 distinct elements:
 - What was **SAID**
 - What was **HEARD**
 - What was **MEANT**
- In conflict, typically all three are different and contribute to the origin and escalation of an argument

14

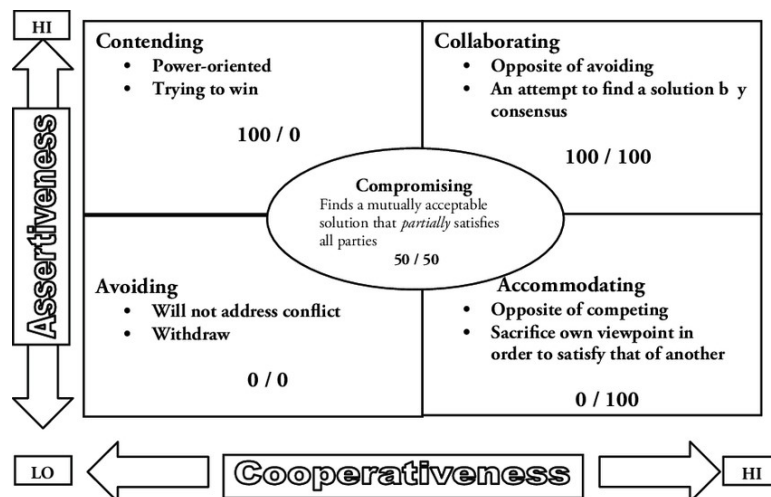


The goal is to:

- De-escalate conflict and to resolve disputes amicably
- Help by communicating more effectively from a place of calm
- Help explore possible ways to move forward
- Help get to the core of the dispute
- Create a safe space of tolerance and respect for honest communication and for airing emotions...allow all to release feelings in a safe space
- Separate the "people" from the "problem" so the focus is on the problem and **NOT** the people.
- Use "active listening" (ex: "Let me see if I understand what you are saying and feel free to correct me if I misinterpret anything you have said")
- Be **EMPATHETIC** and **COMPASSIONATE**. Try to see the world from the perspective of each party
- Conflict is a **CHOICE**

15

The Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument



16

How to Approach Conflict

- First thing...remain **CALM** (even when they are charging)
- Timing: "I can see you are angry...when you are ready to talk I am here to listen"
- NOW's versus LATER's
- Carefully choose your words to be respectful, direct, and that your words convey your **TRUE** meaning (this is **NOT** the time for being passive-aggressive or sarcastic)
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE**
- Take deep breaths, especially when faced with an individual who is escalating and displaying negative emotions
- Silence can be helpful and beneficial. Do not be afraid to pause , collect your thoughts, and develop a slow response. Be intentional and not reactive

17

Accountability



- One of the hardest aspects of conflict resolution is the realization that we are solely responsible for our **OWN** actions
- There is a dangerous cycle of justifying behavior as a reaction to the other individual, instead of taking responsibility for the actual behavior
 - "I did this because they did that, and I am not wrong, they are!"
- What is **YOUR** part in the conflict and take ownership

18



19

The diagram features a solid blue rectangle on the left with the text "Our Perception Is Our Reality" in white. To the right of this rectangle is a list of five bullet points.

- Most individuals are hyper-focused on how they feel as a part of the conflict. They struggle or refuse to understand the other individual's point of view.
- One's **perception** is based on several things: **past experiences**, **current mood and emotions**, **thoughts**, and the **current conflict** with the individual
- The individual's perception is their **REALITY**...and they strongly believe that they are right and justified in their feelings.
- **In order for a compromise to occur, one must accept the individual(s) for where they are and understand their position and feelings.** This allows for the individual to "feel" heard.
- Start to move away from "I am right and you are wrong" (black and white thinking) to a place of understanding and compromise (**LISTEN** and allow each other to speak and validate their feelings...this will create forward movement)

20

Assumption of Intent

- Individuals often assume that they know and understand the intent of the other person who is the other part of the conflict
- "I have been here before...I know exactly what he/she meant when they said that"
- **Assumptions of intent typically originate from previous communication and greatly contribute to the cyclical nature of the conflict.** (:Here we go again...")
- The cycle is difficult to break because individuals continue to draw from PAST conflicts and regurgitate elements that need to remain behind them in the **PAST**
- To move forward, a space for change must be created that is free from assumption of intent. If we always "assume" we know intent, we never provide the individual with any opportunity to be different.

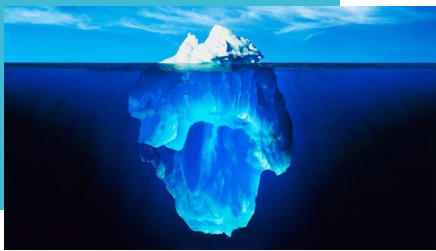
21

Everyone Should AVOID

- "You" statements which lead to almost immediate defensiveness and escalation of conflict
 - "You did this"..."You did that"..."Well, when you..."..."You need or should do this..."
- Use "I" statements and accurately express your feelings and thoughts
 - "**I feel**...(discounted) **when you**...(do not take the time to listen to me" instead of "you are not listening to me"
- Passive-aggressive (a tendency to engage in indirect expression of hostility through acts such as subtle insults) or accusatory statements
 - "Are you planning on getting the court report written *before* the hearing?"; "Are you planning on putting your clothes away anytime soon?"
 - Bringing up past arguments...stay present and current...
- Disrespectful statements that are low in nature and character
- The usage of **ALWAYS** and **NEVER**

22

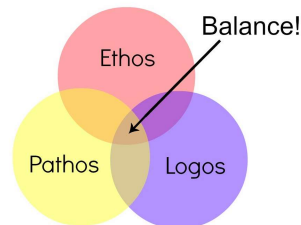
And Focus Instead On...



- Every individual has a “biased fairness perception” or idea of what is right or wrong in their eyes at the beginning of a conflict
 - “This is why I am right...”
- Remain calm and respectful. Do not rise to meet the other individual’s conflict, and do not be afraid to pause before speaking...silence **CAN** be beneficial.
 - “When they go low...you go high.”-Michelle Obama
- **MODEL** the communication and behavior you want to see
- Find goals that everyone has in common.
- Say what you mean, mean what you say, but don’t say it mean
- Realize there are usually deeper issues at work under the surface of the current conflict

23

So... How Do We Resolve Conflict?



- Notice the emotions that come up...take a moment to create a balance between your **emotions**, your **logic** and **empathy**.

Emotions

- Emotions help us identify where our deep values and needs are and help indicate when something needs to change

Logic

- Logic helps us identify the roots of the conflict and to address the challenges they present moving us towards a solution

Empathy

- Empathy helps us understand how others are effected by the conflict and to validate them for feeling that way

24

So... How Do We Resolve Conflict? (Cont.)

- Start an open discussion and dialogue with the individual(s)
 - **Emails and text messages are often misconstrued**, and the meaning is often difficult to understand and ascertain
- Decide if this is a “must resolve now” or “let’s take a break and reconvene at a specified time” kind of issue (difference between “now” and “later” personalities). Do not be afraid to walk away momentarily to gather your thoughts and regroup
- Brainstorm multiple solutions that could provide a compromise. Focus on commonalities rather than differences.
- Pause and take time to carefully craft your next communication...have clarity of “what it is” and “what you want”
- Be strategic and not reactionary
- Remember there are usually two sides to every conflict, yours being ONE of them, ...strive to recognize and understand all points of view

25



It is hard to stay neutral when you are emotionally vested in the outcome of the conflict.

1. Take a step back
2. Take a deep breath
3. Be vulnerable
4. Be accountable
5. Be realistic
6. Trust it is worth it to know and understand both sides
7. Realize in conflict everyone’s resources, needs and values are being challenged
8. Focus on the long term solutions
9. Seize the opportunity for personal growth for future conflict resolutions

26



27