

Tools for Resolving Conflict

Here are some tools that are useful in uncovering and resolving conflict within the group. Conflict resolution tools generally benefit from strong facilitation. Lay down clear rules and don't let discussions get out of hand. Do not feel afraid to stop the process if necessary.



Mediation: Where two people have fallen out badly, one to one mediation may be necessary. Sometimes it is sufficient to have a single mediator; but if the whole group can be present to hear what is said, it can demonstrate a lot more support for both parties. The exact process will depend on sensitivity to the particular circumstances, but you could try the following: Ask both parties to speak uninterrupted for as long as they like to give their perspective on the situation, using “I feel...” statements. Then clarify any disagreements or facts, where possible. The mediator(s) can then put questions to one or the other of the disputants, to see if there are any points of consensus. Finally if the atmosphere is relaxed enough, participants can talk directly with each other, with the mediator(s) ready to slow down things again if necessary.

Controlled Dialogue: This tool is helpful when two people find it difficult to listen to each other and understand each other's concerns. Form a group of three, one observer and two speakers/listeners. There are three phases to this form of dialogue, each given a set amount of time:

1. The listener repeats word for word what the speaker has said. Only then is s/he allowed to answer.
2. The listener summarises what the speaker has said and then answers.
3. When answering the listener addresses all issues and concerns of the speaker.

The observer makes sure participants stick to the format and helps out if necessary. Particularly in the first and second phase the speaker should concentrate on essential points as listening requires a lot of concentration. You can also use this exercise to practise listening and responding skills in the group.

Sharing Withholds: Withholds are thoughts that we keep to ourselves. They usually have to do with judgements about ourselves, others, or what is happening in the group. There needs to be a climate of generous listening, before sharing withholds is possible. Set up an unstructured round asking people to make statements beginning with: “If I could change one thing in the group it would be...”, “What upsets me about this group is ...” Do not allow anyone to respond to the withholds or start a discussion. Make sure that everyone has a say - it is highly unlikely that someone is completely happy with a group. At the end of the round, see if any themes have emerged and if anyone wants their issue discussed. This exercise takes about 30 minutes depending on size of the group.

Feelings Meeting: Similar to *Sharing Withholds*. A meeting which is solely concerned with feelings. Participants do not have to deal with decisions and actions. Such meetings allow the group to involve and support members as whole people and to resolve concerns, problems and conflicts before they become too serious. It helps to use tools such as talking sticks or go-rounds to encourage active listening. Encourage people to use "I..." statements instead of speaking for other people too. Begin by asking people about where they are at in their lives outside the group, giving everyone a context for their reactions within the group. Listen for what is not being said. Some people/groups find it hard to admit to negative feelings and tiptoe around conflicts. Create a safe enough space so that people feel able to open up.

Energisers and Games

When people stop concentrating or become irritable in a meeting, this could simply be because they've been sitting and listening for too long. A stretch or a game, can re-energise people. Games also help people to get to know each other better and lift the spirits in the group. Be sensitive to the group and individual members - the idea is to relax people, not to make them feel embarrassed or isolated. Don't coerce people into playing games. If people don't feel like playing, they could get themselves a cup of tea or go to the loo. Also remember mobility issues. Sometimes a simple break or a stretch works just as well.

Rain: A facilitator talks the group through this energiser. Get everyone to stand up. Start tapping your head lightly with your fingers imagining soft rain. Let it slowly get heavier the further you move your hands down your body. Let the rain turn into a thunderstorm on your calves. Clap them hard with your hands. Then move your hands back up your body, ending with soft rain on your head.

Waking up in the Jungle: People think of their favourite animal and its noise, and at a signal pretend that they are that animal waking up. As the animals wake up they stretch, move and get louder and louder. A good quick game for sleepy groups.

Green Trousers Game: Form a circle and take one seat away. One person stands in the middle and calls out something like "Everyone with green trousers". Everyone with green trousers then jumps up and runs to a seat vacated by someone else. The person left without a seat remains in the middle to call out something else.

Knot Game: Stand in a circle, close your eyes. Walk towards the centre of the circle with outstretched hands. Find another hand for each of yours. Then open your eyes. Unravel the knot without opening hands. Involves getting physically close to others, stretching, laughing and problem solving. Works best in groups of 10-20 people. Form two knots if necessary.

Pair Tag: In pairs, one is the chaser. With a big group, this allows for lots of hiding behind others - fun and active. Swap partners after a bit.

Animal Sounds: Participants are blindfolded and assigned an animal. The challenge is to use animal noises in order to meet up with other animals of same species. Aim to have at least three animals of each species. Releases energy. Loud, fun, chaotic, then gradually order and unity.

Tools for Evaluating Meetings and Workshops



List the expectations that were gathered at the beginning of the meeting. To what extent were they satisfied or changed as the event progressed? Do the same with goals.



Use the Plus-Minus-Interesting format individually or in small groups. Report back to the whole group. Discuss solutions to problems and their implementation.



Ask everyone to list two or three high and low points of the event.



★ Evaluation allows us to learn from our experiences. It should be a regular part of our meetings and workshops as it give us the chance for honest feedback on the process and content of the event, allowing us to improve in the future.



Draw up a questionnaire and distribute it amongst the participants for filling in.



Have a round where everyone sums up their feelings or ask everyone to write down comments on a large piece of paper.

★ Everyone who participated in an event should be encouraged to take part in its evaluation. Bear in mind that there will be differences of opinion and that it is not necessary for the group to come to agreement on the matter.



Ask “What are you taking away from this session?” This rapid review can help people notice what they have learned.

★ It is important to point out what was successful as well as what could have gone better. Begin with positive evaluations wherever possible.

★ The structure of the evaluation should be planned carefully - how will you draw out what type of information? Keep evaluations of the process and of the content of the events separate.



Use a graph on a large piece of paper representing the entire meeting/event. Each participant, using a different coloured crayon or chalk, draws a line from one end to the other, drawing it above or below a central line depending on how much s/he has enjoyed/gained from the session. The phrasing of the question is important.

