

Managing Conflict

Carers/family/whānau can find themselves in a position where there are different views about what is happening or what is a good idea.

You may find yourself in conflict with:

- the person you care for
- other family members
- supports and services
- people who work for the government.

Conflict does not need to be a negative thing. Conflict can be the place where:

- positions are clarified
- perspectives are shared, and
- new directions are established.

Unfortunately, conflict can also be the place where unnecessary things occur, e.g., people can feel victimised, allies can become enemies and precious resources can be eroded.

What we think (and feel) about conflict, and the skills we have learned, will be the most significant factor in determining whether conflict becomes a place of creativity or something more destructive.

It can be important to remember that partnership and clarity both rely on occasional conflict occurring. Often genuine partnerships need conflict so that the individual views remain distinct and perspectives are acknowledged.

Constructive conflict is when all of the perspectives are valued and a mutual outcome is reached.

Why does conflict happen?

Conflict occurs as a way for people to attempt to influence or achieve what they want. This may be to improve a person's understanding or to have things more the way they think they should be.

Conflict only tends to become messy when there are other elements introduced to this, for example:

Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• that a change will result in less than what people already have
Mistrust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• things are not as they appear
Misunderstanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• different ideas about what was meant/intended

Control issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one of the individuals/groups attempting to control or dominate what is happening
Unwillingness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a person/party is closed to input from others or will not even consider altering their behaviour/practices
Habit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where an individual/group is so used to fighting for what they believe in that permanent conflict is created
Transference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one of the parties is shifting emotions and responses from one situation to another (without realising it).

Unnecessary conflict can appear in a situation where there is:

- mixed expectation
- unclear communication
- stress
- a reactive culture present (in an individual or group).

Managing Conflict

You may have many different and competing demands made on your attention and energy. It can be important to remember conflict can be a healthy and powerful place to learn and develop.

It is natural for people to see the world differently. Everybody carries their own perspective of a situation. People have differing skills to ensure that conflict is creative and constructive.

Core principles of working in (and through) conflict:

- Everyone is entitled to their perspective.
- The way we approach conflict must value everyone.
- Respect is an active (not passive) state.
- Effective resolution is only possible when all parties have a willingness to clarify and resolve issues.

Approaches to managing conflict

1. NEGOTIATION

Negotiation involves us acknowledging that there are differences. We can then talk and work together to clarify points of view, find places of understanding and come up with a way to work together that works for everyone.

Negotiation involves us:

- figuring out what we are wanting in the situation, AND
- being open to what the other person wants.

2. MEDIATION

Sometimes it is useful to bring in a third person (often a person that is respected and who has a high degree of 'credibility'). It is important this person as someone who is fair and has some skills in "working things out". This persons can bring more structure to the discussion.

Mediation does not involve the mediator making decisions about what an outcome should be.

When is negotiation appropriate?

When you need to work something out with another person and there is the potential for conflict. It is sometimes wise to negotiate in order to obtain something new or different.

Am I ready to negotiate?

- Do I:
- know what I want?
 - know why I want it?
 - feel ok about working co-operatively?
 - think I am able to listen to the other point of view?
 - have some ideas / strategies?
 - have a back-up if the negotiation is unsuccessful?

Some Key Points

- **Looking for common ground.** How can my needs and the needs of the other party be met?
- **Making sure I can stay constructive** e.g., making sure everyone is heard, looking for what can be (not what isn't!).
- **Being flexible and creative** – this may mean new options can be discovered.
- **Remembering that the purpose** of negotiation is to maintain, or improve, your relationship and reach a mutual outcome.
- **Keeping my integrity** - be honest about thoughts, feelings and facts.

Keeping track of our behaviour in conflict

Many of us have learned approaches to conflict that make things worse (not easier). Below are some examples of unhelpful approaches and suggestions about how these can be replaced by more useful ways of doing/seeing things:

1. Taking conflict personally; whenever anyone has a different view we take it as a personal attack

Suggestion

See conflict as part of the clarification and growth process.

- Be clear about personal boundaries.
- Be open to the views of others – there is no need for everyone to see things the same way.

2. Attempting to change others

Suggestion

Take responsibility for “self”

- Demonstrate how you believe things can be.
- Suggest alternatives and describe the potential benefits they may have.

3. Reject the worth in a different view

Suggestion

Accept that people have different perspectives.

4. React to what we see as the “problem”

Suggestion

Look for possibilities. Discover what could work well for everyone.

5. Assume it should be easy to sort something out

Suggestion

The time and energy invested in resolving conflict will probably save considerable resources in the medium and long term.

- Take the time to respond usefully.
- Invest focus and effort in identifying a positive outcome.

6. Feel superior in our “rightness”

Suggestion

- Be open to other ways of seeing and doing things.
- Be prepared to find better ways.

7. Pretend to be interested in resolution when really we are not willing to negotiate

Suggestion

Recognise that it is usually in everyone's best interests to work co-operatively.

8. Blame others

Suggestion

Try to create and keep a constructive approach