

LESSON 6: COMMUNICATING ACROSS DISAGREEMENT

Goals/Purpose

This lesson provides practical activities that will help group members develop skills to resolve conflicts that are likely to come up in the group. The goal is to provide groups with positive solutions to interpersonal conflict as well as differences of opinion so that the group can maintain its focus and have fun.

Objectives

- Describe how communication affects conflict resolution
- Apply communication skills to resolve conflicts

AGENDA/ACTIVITIES

- Introductions/Icebreaker
- “I” Statements
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Conflict Resolution Scenarios
- Win-Win Resolutions to Conflicts
- Speak Out
- Closing

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

- Make poster of “I” Statements and “You” Statements
- “You” statements (copy and cut into strips)
- Make poster of feeling words (e.g. angry, excited, upset, nervous, happy...)
- Non-Verbal communication statements (copy and cut into strips)
- Copy Scenarios (1 per group)
- Make poster of problem-solving steps
- Make large poster-sized Graffiti sheets
- Identify fun closing activity (see *Icebreakers, Energizers and Team-building Activities* section)

Materials Needed

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Index cards
- Pens/pencils

TOOLS

- AACCESS for Active Listening
- Things to Remember when Resolving Conflicts

The Basics

Making community change is a group process – it involves your group as well as many others with diverse interests, values and experiences. While differences of opinion are a valuable and natural part of any group, sometimes they may also lead to conflict. Conflict can be constructive – and help strengthen the group through communication, compromise, values clarification, as well as build understanding and empathy. It can also be distracting and harmful. You need respond to and work through conflicts so your group can meet its goals and so that people have positive experiences.

Conflicts occur for a variety of reasons. Group members are bound to have different ideas about what issue to work on or how to reach your goals. Different styles may also lead to miscommunication and, in turn, disagreements. Sometimes conflicts happen because youth haven't had many opportunities to be around people unlike themselves.

As the adult leader, be prepared to be actively involved in resolving conflicts – formally and informally. People handle conflict differently, usually based on what their culture and experiences have taught them is appropriate. Some people are direct and bring the problem to the group or person involved to talk about and come up with solutions. Others may avoid conflict, complain to someone else, use the 'silent treatment,' become abusive or make jokes. You need to be able to recognize and handle anger, and then help people move to problem solving.

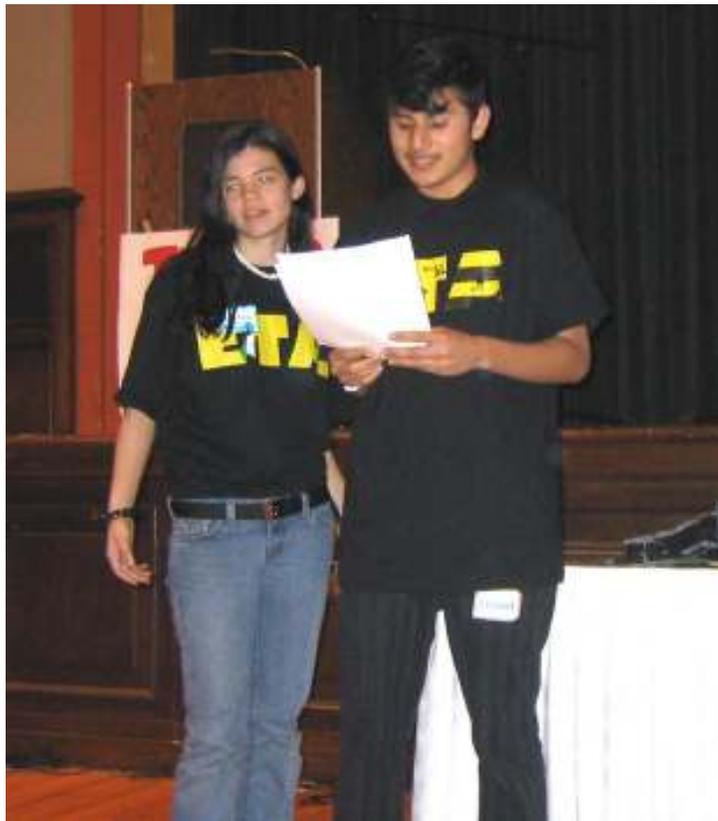
This is where communication comes into play. Actively listening and responding in ways that promote understanding takes practice. This section includes tools to practice communication skills and help lay groundwork for open communication within the group. Since conflict is likely to emerge early on, strong communication skills will be important to help your group work through differences and stay focused. The activities are not designed to be a recipe to follow step by step but as a resource in planning exercises to meet your group's needs.

Be creative in handling conflict -- establish a group process for handling conflict and put your plan into action. For example, a youth and an adult may share responsibility of the role of 'peacekeeper' to help people negotiate conflicts (see *Tools* for handout). Ideally, you want to process group conflicts with the entire group, although you may also need to intervene with some individuals.

Here are some win-win strategies for handling conflict in the group or in other areas of your life (Adapted from Center for Human Development Conflict Resolution Panels):

- Identify common goals
- Stay motivated and committed to working together (There is more to gain by working together to resolve the problem than by working separately)
- Demonstrate mutual trust and respect
- Believe that everyone deserves her/his own beliefs
- Share thoughts and feelings rather than hiding them or bearing resentment
- Show understanding for one another
- Foster mutual commitment to common goals and agree to pursue independent goals

Facilitator Note: Tips for managing conflict have been integrated into other sections including 'decisionmaking,' 'picking a problem' and 'selecting an issue' because there is a strong potential for conflict with these topics. However, this section is an additional resource to utilize throughout the length of your program.



Introduction

2 minutes

Explain that when people work in groups, they are going to disagree. These disagreements come from different interests, values, experiences, and ways of interacting. It is the same in our group. It is important to talk about how to handle conflicts so that we can still have fun and accomplish our goals.

Let the youth know that today you're going to do a few exercises to practice working out conflicts and then decide how to treat each other when disagreements come up.

Reinforce that some people might feel uncomfortable talking about conflict and that's okay – but it's important that we do.

1. "I" Statements

15 minutes

Materials: poster with sample "I" and "You" statements (see below). "You" statements are cut into strips

- a. Explain why "I" statements are helpful:
 - They let the speaker state and take responsibility for her/his feelings.
 - They focus on behavior, not personal judgment.
 - They include feelings about what behavior he/she hopes can be changed.
- b. Review the poster with sample "I" and "You" statements:

"You" Statements	"I" Statements
You never do what you say you will.	I feel angry when commitments are not honored. I would like a partner I can rely on.
You're so rude!	I'm frustrated when people aren't respectful. I'd like us to follow our ground rules.
You never listen when I tell you something!	I feel upset when people don't pay attention to me when I am talking.
You don't know what you're talking about.	I would like people to listen to what I have to say about this.

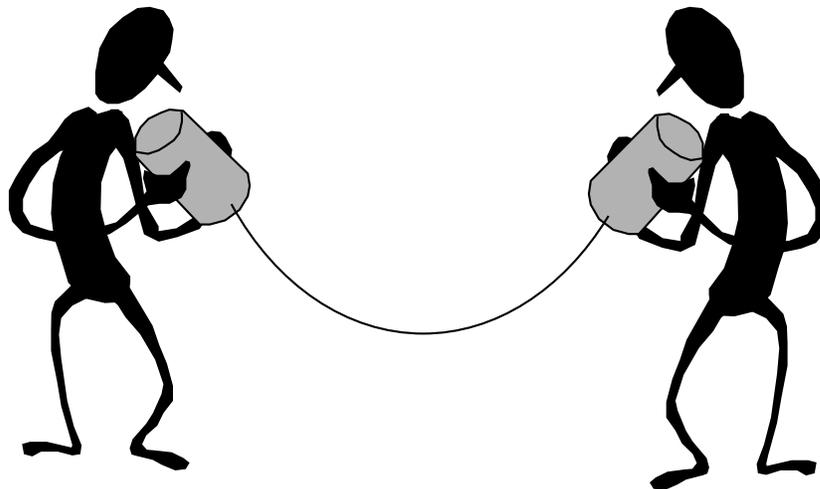
- c. Ask for feedback:
 - Do the "I" Statements seem realistic?
 - Is this different than how you usually talk to people when you are angry? How?
 - Do they seem more helpful in understanding how the person feels?
- d. Explain that now everyone will get a chance to practice changing a "You" statement into an "I" statement. It helps for the facilitator to model for students.

You might also give students time to write down their statement or at least think about what they would say before you go through as a large group.

e. Give each student one of the “You” statements below. Go through each one and ask someone to turn it in to an “I” statement.

“YOU” statements

- You talk too much. Stop interrupting me!
 - You never listen and then you ask questions about what we just talked about!
 - You never help plan but always complain about the results.
 - You’re so moody.
 - That’s a stupid idea!
 - You never think other people have good ideas.
 - You’re always late.
 - You always ask for help and then won’t let me do my job.
 - Why are you looking at me?!
- f. After, ask the group:
- Was it difficult? Realistic? Remind the group that “I” statements can be hard, and that the main goal is to keep communication open for everyone in the group.
 - Do you think you could use “I” statements?



3. Non-Verbal Communication

15 minutes

Materials: Statements cut into strips, poster of feeling words

Before the activity, make sure the poster of feeling words is where everyone can see it.

a. Introduction:

Tell the group that communication is not only about what we say. Ninety (90) % of what people respond to is **how** we say something. This is non-verbal communication (i.e., tone, body language, voice, etc.). This part of communication is very powerful and can make a situation better or worse. So, we're going to practice expressing statements with different feelings.

b. Then, review the poster of feeling words. Ask if **any are unclear?**

Statements:

- We're home.
- I am hungry.
- We don't have school next week.
- Let's go!
- I am going swimming tomorrow.
- Will you help me?
- Stop!
- Leave me alone

c. Distribute one of the statements listed above to each student. Tell them to pick a feeling without telling the group and then say the statement expressing that feeling. Other group members try to guess the feeling the person was expressing. Ask the group if there were any other hints to how the person felt? The same person picks another feeling and repeats statement to express the different emotion. Group members try to identify feeling. Repeat for each member.

d. Debrief:

- Emphasize that we can change how we say things even when we are angry or upset. This can help improve the communication, and make everyone feel better.
- Which non-verbal styles might be roadblocks for communication? Which might help communication?
- When you recognize the other person isn't hearing you, what can you do?

4. Conflict Resolution Scenarios

30 minutes

Materials: Poster of the problem-solving steps (below), 1 copy of the scenarios per group

- a. Explain that there are times when group members may disagree with each other. There are different ways to respond. We are going to practice some common situations when differences could occur, and come up with positive ways to resolve the conflict.
- b. Give each group one of the scenarios below. Ask them to create a role play showing how they would resolve the conflict using the following problem-solving steps:

Identify the problem

Describe possible solutions

Evaluate each option (positives and negatives)

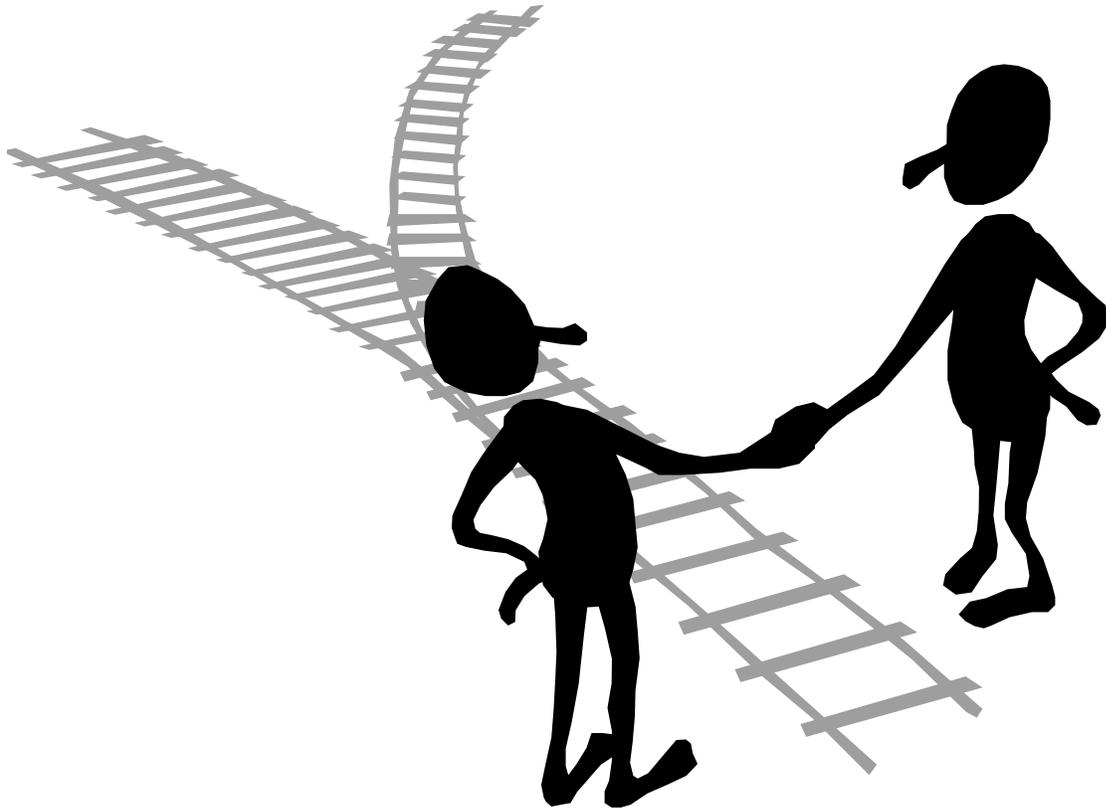
Act on what you decide is the best solution

Learn from your experience

Scenarios:

1. Group members disagree on what problem to take on. One person has had personal experience with the problem and really feels strongly about fixing it. This person is outspoken and sometimes dominates the group.
 2. Your group has worked hard all year, and they've had several wins reaching your goals. Now it's time to plan a year-end celebration. During a discussion about what to do, a group member told someone else their idea was boring and stupid. The other person didn't speak the rest of the meeting but came to you after to say they weren't coming back to the group.
 3. During your community assessment, a community member told you that all teenagers were a problem and that anyone caught loitering should just be arrested.
- c. Give each group an opportunity to present their role play.
 - d. Debrief as a large group. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What other solutions did you consider?

- How did you decide which solution to act on?
- Were there any conflicts in your group? If so, how did you resolve?
- What did you learn? How can we apply this to our group?



5. Win-Win Resolutions to Conflicts

15 minutes

Materials: index cards, pens/pencils, newsprint, markers

Pass out an index card so each person can write down 1-2 ways people should treat each other in the group when they disagree. Give students the option to turn their card in to the facilitator or read it themselves. List the statements on newsprint. Review them as a large group and come to consensus.

6. Speak Out

10 minutes

Materials: newsprint with speak-out statements (below), markers, copies of Group Agreements (optional)

This is a good activity if the large group was involved in a conflict.

Before the meeting, list the following statements on large newsprint for students to fill in:

- One thing I never want to see, hear or have happen again in the group is...
- One thing I can do to make the group fun and positive for everyone is...

a. Summarize the conflict that occurred in the group and resulted in you bringing it back to them. (Be sure to stay neutral.) Express how you felt and how others seemed to feel. (Often people feel uncomfortable when there is conflict and if you noticed that, it is important to acknowledge it verbally.)

b. Give students about 10 minutes to fill in responses to each statement. (You may also give each person a post-it note to write his/her response and add it to the sheet.)

c. As a large group, give each person a chance to say their response to the statements above. Clarify if needed. Decide how to handle conflicts in the future.

d. Optional: Distribute copies of the Group Agreements for each person to sign as contract and collect.

7. Closing

It's a good idea to follow any group discussion about conflict with a fun activity. If you can be outside or won't disturb other people, consider the "Balloon Pop" included in Icebreakers, Energizers and Team-building Activities.

Tools – Lesson 6



Things to Remember when Resolving Conflicts



When talking to group members about their conflict:

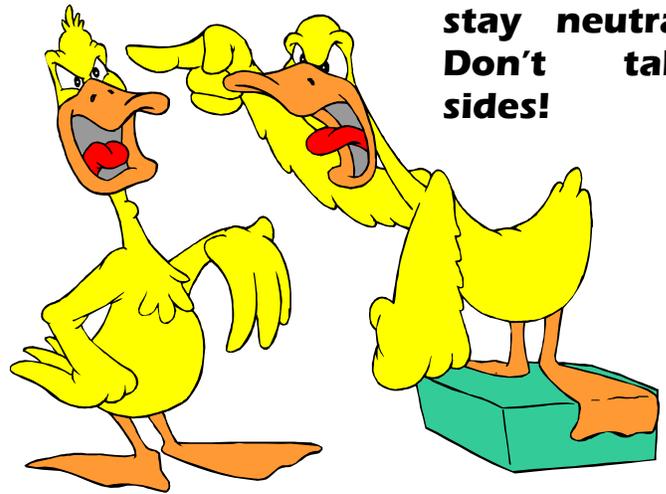
- ✘ Create a safe space. (Let staff know if you need to move to a new area.)
- ✘ Let each person tell you his or her side of the story without being interrupted by the other person.
- ✘ Afterwards, if they are able to talk to each other respectfully, allow them to respond to each other.
- ✘ Help **them** think of a solution or agreement instead of giving advice or solving the problem yourself.
- ✘ If possible, put the agreement in writing.

Throughout the conversation:

- ✘ Keep your own feelings and stereotypes out of the situation.
- ✘ Stay neutral. (Don't take sides).
- ✘ Use AACES active listening.
- ✘ Recognize any positive statements.



**Remember to stay neutral!
Don't take sides!**



YOUR ROLE IN CONFLICTS

As a peacekeeper, you should:

- ◇ Remind people about agreements.
- ◇ Remind people that put downs and other disrespectful comments are not accepted.
- ◇ Help peers resolve conflicts.
- ◇ Ask for help from the group leader or other staff in resolving bigger conflicts.
- ◇ Let the group leader or other staff know about conflicts that occurred.

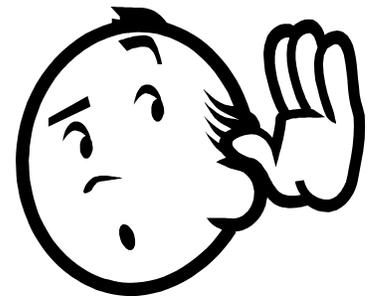
As a peacekeeper, you should *not*:

- ◇ Discipline other group members.
- ◇ Yell at other group members.
- ◇ Try to be their parent.

AACES



for Active Listening



**** Attitude ****

Show that you are willing to understand. Put aside your own feelings and stereotypes.

**** Acknowledge ****

Let people know you want to listen. Show interest but not necessarily agreement.

**** Clarify ****

Ask questions that let the speaker know you are listening, to get more information, and to make sure you understand their story.

**** Empathize ****

Allow the speaker to know that you understand her/his concerns and feelings. You do not need to agree with them to understand.

**** Summarize ****

Review important ideas, facts, feeling, and information. Make sure you understand the main issues. Summarizing a person's statements or issues helps them know the listener heard and understood what he or she said.