

## Managing conflict in the group

### Introduction

There is perhaps no greater challenge or more important task in a group than to establish a positive and cooperative group which works well together. In order for a group to be effective, all individuals should try to get along with one another. People have different views and ideas and sometimes people won't agree with each other. Having disagreements is normal.

The most important thing is how your group manages any disagreements, and how as a group you settle the issue. Disagreements and conflicts need to be resolved as soon as possible, so that the group can move on and continue to provide members with a positive and enjoyable experience.

When conflict escalates, it can sometimes be difficult to step back, and consider the other person's perspective. Conflict is a group issue and everyone needs to play a part in resolving it, not just the leader/facilitator or chair of the meeting.

### Let's make it happen

#### Effective strategies for dealing with conflict

- Deal with it as it sooner rather than later: leaving it doesn't solve the problem
- It is also important however to think before you react: consider the options, weigh the possibilities.
- The same approach won't apply for every conflict
- Choose your battles: Let it go if it really doesn't matter; decide if it's a minor or major issue
- Suggest possibilities and recommend ways forward : Positive suggestions are easier to hear and more effective than complaining and criticising
- Speak for yourself: say how you feel and let others say how they feel
- Deal with the problem first and the effects afterwards: For example, if member's arriving late is the problem, disruption is the effect; find ways to encourage members to arrive on time
- Make problem solving a group activity: Groups are far more likely to implement solutions if they had a part in shaping them
- When you're angry, listen more and speak less
- Ensure the method used is fair to all parties to the conflict.

#### Problem Solving Tips

While resolving conflict or solving problems within the group shouldn't be the only goal of a support group, it is something that needs to occur when conflict arises. All members should take part in the problem-solving process so that no single person is seen as the solution to

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their difficulties. It's the facilitator's/leaders job to help members learn how to help each other resolve a conflict with problem solving tips.

- **Clarify the problem that is causing the conflict**

Make sure everyone fully understands what is causing the conflict. If you aren't sure what the issue is, ask questions to get more information.

- **Talk about the alternatives**

Bring up possible ways to reduce the conflict, but be very careful to word them in a way that doesn't give advice. Telling people what to do is not the purpose or responsibility of a support group. It can take away a person's confidence. Try asking members to explain what worked well for them in similar situations. Another alternative is to directly ask the person who has raised the concern what he thinks might work.

- **Choose which option(s) to take**

Have the group discuss the positives and negatives of each suggestion. That way you can then let the person (s) who feel the conflict come to a decision on their own. Some individuals may wish to take some time on their own to consider the possibilities. Let them know that the group cares and wants to know how things turn out.

- **Offer help**

Sometimes members may offer assistance to one another. For example, if the conflict arises because a member always comes late to the meetings, other members might offer to give that person a ride.

### **Reducing the potential for conflict**

The key to reducing the potential for conflict is to ensure a purposeful and well facilitated peer network.

This includes honing facilitation skills such as remaining neutral, seeing both sides, ensuring fairness and natural justice, seeking alternatives and strength based solutions.

It might also be useful to understand what motivates individuals to come to the peer network meeting and increase that role or involvement so there is less time to be creating conflict and more purpose.

### **Where you can find more information**

## QuickGuide

This guide by Cancer Australia for Cancer Support groups provides a summary of competencies for effective facilitators (page 3)

<http://www.healthissuescentre.org.au/images/uploads/resources/A-guide-for-peer-facilitators.pdf>

The Community Tool Box website has great tips on running a peer network conversation and addressing conflict

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

About Leaders is a general website about good leadership that has an article on conflict resolution

<https://aboutleaders.com/5-keys-to-conflict-resolution/#gs.69VXaOY>

Co-authored by [WA's Individualised Services](#)

