

CONFLICT WITHIN A GROUP

GOALS:

- To explore the elements of conflict.
- To experience what conflict is and how it can escalate.
- To practise resolving conflict in a group setting.

Note: An excellent resource (not used in this lesson) is the video **12 Angry Men**. The film starts at the end of a court trial and the jury goes out to deliberate on the verdict. The issues of conflict, anger, leadership and looking for consensus are all topics that emerge in this movie.

RATIONALE:

Conflict is part of everyday life and can be viewed as an opportunity for change and growth. However, due to the competitive nature of our society, conflict is often experienced as a contest to be won or lost. Many of us prefer to ignore or avoid the conflict rather than deal with it. In today's workplace, most conflict situations are resolved in a team environment that promotes collaboration and cooperation. Knowing how to deal with conflict will help to promote fairness and develop sensitivity that is respectful of individual differences.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers, storybook (*The Butter Up Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss), a copy of the *Crime & Punishment Instructions and Worksheet* for each participant.

METHOD:

Warm Up: A Tug of War

Write the following quote on the flipchart and ask participants to share their reactions to it.

“When you get into a tug of war, drop the rope.”

Bart Jarvis

EXERCISE 1: STORYTIME

Tell participants that many children's books deal with conflict and that you are going to read them a short story by Dr. Seuss called ***The Butter Up Battle Book***. Read the story with exuberance and exaggeration. Facilitate a discussion in the large group.

Questions to Consider:

- What are your feelings and thoughts about the story?
- What was the moral of this story?
- How did the characters deal with conflict?
- How could the conflict have been handled more effectively?
- How does the story relate to conflict situations you have experienced?

Theory: See Theory Box

Exercise 2: Crime and Punishment

Have participants form small groups of five or six people. Distribute the ***Crime And Punishment Instructions and Worksheet***. Review the instructions with the group. After 25 minutes, ask each small group to share their contributions with the large group.

Exercise 3: How Well Did We Handle Conflict?

Facilitate a discussion in the large group or, if there are too many participants, ask each small group to appoint someone to lead a discussion and report back to the large group.

Questions to Consider:

- What went well for your group or for you as an individual during the exercise?
- What didn't go well?
- How did you handle conflict as a group?
- What did you see happening to the group as a whole during this exercise?

Closer:

Encourage participants to reflect on the experience and respond to the following:

One thing I learned about conflict in a group is.....

One thing I will do differently is.....

EVALUATION:

THEORY BOX

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts are usually over differences in opinions, facts, perceptions or values.

Conflict has the potential to occur whenever two or more people attempt to work together.

Generally conflict occurs when group members are not listening. Conflict also occurs when several group members are not sharing the same information.

Some of the symptoms of conflict are:

- ◆ Intense comments are made
- ◆ People are impatient
- ◆ Ideas are attacked before the person finishes talking
- ◆ People feeling that they are not being understood
- ◆ Repetition of opinions
- ◆ People taking sides
- ◆ Lots of talking, but little movement towards accomplishment
- ◆ Advice giving, finger pointing, use of the word *should*
- ◆ Sarcastic comments

Skills for Resolving Conflict

Attending – Focus your attention on the other person. Encourage others to share their ideas.

Valuing – Show that you respect their positions and them as people.

Paraphrasing – Repeat what you heard others say (in your own words) to show that you are trying to understand.

Questioning – Ask open-ended questions. Be willing to share *your* thoughts and admit to changing your position.

Look for the merit of the other person's thinking before attempting to express your point of view or share information.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT WORKSHEET: INSTRUCTIONS

Say to the group:

You must reach agreement on how to rank the following crimes according to your estimate of the gravity of the offence.

- A (3) must be ranked as deserving ten years to life imprisonment
- B (4) as deserving from two to eight years imprisonment
- C (3) as deserving one year or less, or a suspended sentence

You may add judicial recommendations, for example, suspension of driver's license, psychiatric treatment, etc. (if you have time).

Think in terms of prevention and assume it is a first offence unless otherwise stated.

Agreement means substantial agreement, not necessarily unanimity. Otherwise the group can decide for itself what constitutes agreement and should discuss how best to reach it.

Problems are solved best when individual group members accept responsibility for both hearing and being heard so that everyone is included in what is decided.

The best results flow from a sharing of information, reason and feeling.

Conflict of ideas, solutions, predictions, etc., should be viewed as helping rather than hindering the process of seeking consensus.

You, as a group, have 25 minutes to carry out the following (see next page).



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT WORKSHEET

Crimes to be ranked as:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| A – (three crimes) | 10 years or life imprisonment |
| B – (four) | 2-8 years |
| C – (three) | 1 year or less, or suspended |

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1. Hit and run. Driver knows s/he has hit a pedestrian on a country road at night, but drives on leaving the pedestrian seriously injured. Pedestrian not found until the morning.
 2. Arson. Historic 150 year-old church completely destroyed. No one injured.
 3. Abduction and rape of a 15 year-old girl, kept in confinement for two months.
 4. Armed robbery. Police officer shot in get-away, and remains in critical condition.
 5. Series of false income tax returns. Defrauded the government of \$1,000,000 in the last four years.
 6. Personal possession of heroin.
 7. Couple habitually leaves two pre-schoolers on their own in a frame farm house when they go into town to play Bingo. House burns down one night. Neighbours rescue children.
 8. Third offence for driving under the influence of alcohol. Mother of three killed.
 9. Solicits teenagers (some under 13) for prostitution and pornography. Over 30 teenagers enlisted in one year.
 10. Terrorists hijack a plane that lands in Canada. Pilot injured, but no one killed.
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From the scenarios listed above, indicate the scenario # in one of the columns below:

10 Years to Life

(three crimes)

2-8 Years

(four crimes)

**1 year or less
or suspended**

(three crimes)
