



Grevillea Consultants

*Seminars for Thriving  
Communities and Organisations*

# **Conflict Management**

## **Participant Workbook**

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## Introduction

This book is designed to accompany seminar processes, such as discussions, interactive activities, worksheets and/or articles. It is not intended to be a stand-alone manual. It is a collection of notes for the material covered in the seminar so people can participate easily in the conversations and activities without worrying about jotting everything down.

The Managing Conflict seminar is a structured conversation around some key themes. These themes are:

1. How conflict happens
2. Self-management during conflict
3. Creating win-win outcomes
4. Using your emotional intelligence
5. Useful tools for structured conversations

There are also suggestions at the end of the book about where people can look for extra help and resources.

As the seminar is usually scheduled for three hours, not everything included in these notes will be covered. The range and depth of material covered will be determined by the needs of the group in any particular seminar.

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# 1. How Conflict Happens

## *The conflict cycle*

Conflict doesn't happen as a random event. There are often phases that conflict passes through, which are overlooked. Developing awareness of these phases can help you identify growing conflict and make choices about how to deal with it.

Elizabeth Bolton provides this model of how conflict develops.

- |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Tension Development  | People start to take a position or side as they become aware of emerging or possible disagreements. This can be a gradual or instantaneous process.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2. Role Dilemma         | People try to work out what they should be doing in this situation. They want to figure out what is happening. They want to know who or what is right or wrong. They make decisions about their role in the situation and what they should do.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 3. Injustice Collecting | People start noticing and remembering the reasons they might be aggrieved and why the other party is wrong. This is a process of justifying the position and role they chose.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 4. Confrontation        | The parties confront each other in some way. The situation may resolve if some or all people adjust but could also last a long time if no effective adjustments are made.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 5. Adjustments          | <p>Several adjustment options are available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Dominate      The stronger party may force the outcome but it might not be sustainable. (win-lose)</li> <li>b. Stalemate     Parties with equal power who refuse to change may lock into a long term conflict. (lose-lose)</li> <li>c. Compromise   Parties may agree to trade off wins and losses and settle for getting some but not all of what they want. (shared win-lose)</li> <li>d. Collaborate   Parties may work together to find an outcome that meets everyone's needs. (win-win)</li> </ul> |

## Exercise 1 – Mapping the growth of a conflict

Select a conflict you have been party to:

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Make notes about when you observed the different stages occurring and how they happened.

1. Tension Development

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2. Role Dilemma

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3. Injustice Collecting

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4. Confronting

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5. Adjustments – What adjustments did you make?

a. Dominate ☐ (win-lose)

b. Stalemate ☐ (lose-lose)

c. Compromise ☐ (shared win-lose)

d. Collaborate ☐ (win-win)

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## ***Eight causes of conflict in the workplace***

This list is a combination of ideas from Art Bell and Brett Hart. Opportunities for conflict can emerge from any of these. They can apply to non-workplace settings as well.

1. Needs – competing for resources, recognition, power and influence.
2. Styles – different personality types and work preferences.
3. Perceptions – different interpretations of decisions and events.
4. Goals – different responsibilities or priorities for shared situations.
5. Pressures – competing demands on the same person or resources.
6. Roles – one person with multiple roles or several people have the same role.
7. Personal values – misunderstanding or rejection of others' values.
8. Unclear policies – changing, inconsistent or absent policies leading to uncertainty and conflicting decisions.

## ***Neighbourhood triggers for conflict***

The Canberra based Conflict Resolution Service identifies six different ways people view the home and neighbourhood. These different values can readily lead to disputes.

1. A base to return to at the end of each day
2. Somewhere to be with family and friends, to hang out and have fun
3. A retreat or a sanctuary that is quiet and peaceful
4. A workshop, a place to do hobbies or to create or fix things
5. A workplace, building a business and working from home
6. A home in a beautiful street with other nice houses and neat gardens

## ***Common sources of conflict in the home***

The Victorian government's Better Health Channel lists various examples of conflict triggers in the home.

Stage of life or relationship triggers:

1. Learning to live as a new couple
2. Birth of a baby
3. Birth of other children
4. A child going to school
5. A child becoming a young person
6. A young person becoming an adult

Family situation triggers:

1. Separation or divorce
2. Moving to a new house or country
3. Travelling long distances to work
4. Commuting interstate for work
5. Change in financial circumstances

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Understanding the stress and disruption caused by these can explain why they become triggers for conflict. Keeping an eye on stressors in the home can help avert or prepare for conflict.

## ***The stress-outburst cycle***

This cycle is often present in situations where people find themselves in repeated episodes of conflict. It is often present in domestic violence situations. Its significance is that it is not a particular decision or event that triggers the conflict but the way people deal with stress and discomfort in their lives. The cycle breaks when an effective way to deal with stress and stressors is adopted or when one party walks out on the relationship.

The cycle usually follows this sequence.

1. Feel calm and peaceful.
2. Stress builds as life and relationships continue.
3. An outburst to release stress occurs, attacking others or perceived stressors.
4. Feel remorse for the outburst and harm, apologising and making up.
5. Return to calm and peaceful, repeating the cycle of steps 1-4.

A key trap in this cycle is that outbursts are seen as independent events rather than just one part of an ongoing cycle. The calm and peaceful or remorse segments do not mean everything is ok. It just means that the build-up of stress has not yet reached the outburst threshold or has dissipated due to the outburst. Until the whole cycle is recognised it is unlikely that the underlying cause of mismanaged stress will be identified and addressed. In the meantime, other people may be feeling guilty, thinking it is their fault the outbursts occur.

## ***Reactions to different levels of conflict***

The Conflict Resolution Network lists five levels of intensity for conflict and how people might react.

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Discomfort       | You might dwell on a situation because it doesn't feel quite right. You might not say anything about it but you feel uncomfortable.                                                                                                                            |
| Incident         | You might engage in a short, sharp exchange with someone. There are no lasting emotional consequences for you. You didn't like what happened and may have snapped at someone or confronted them about it.                                                      |
| Misunderstanding | Someone misinterprets what you are doing or you misinterpret someone else's actions. You tend to keep focusing your thoughts on what happened, trying to work out what is going on and how to solve it.                                                        |
| Tension          | You have developed a negative view of the other and different experiences are interpreted as evidence that reinforces this view. The relationship and dealings with the other party become an ongoing source of worry or concern.                              |
| Crisis           | A major escalation event has occurred leaving you or the other party thinking of extreme measures, like quitting work, ending the relationship or causing harm. Communication is dramatic with intense expressions and gestures either considered or executed. |

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## Exercise 2 – Mapping a stress-outburst cycle

Think of a situation where you deal with frequent outbursts, either by you or someone else.

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Now map how it occurs, preferably over more than one time around the cycle.

| Round 1                  | Round 2                  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Calm and Peaceful     | 1. Calm and Peaceful     |
| 2. Stress Build-up       | 2. Stress Build-up       |
| 3. Outburst              | 3. Outburst              |
| 4. Remorse and Making-up | 4. Remorse and Making-up |

What might help break the cycle?

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## ***Defensive responses if conflict feels threatening.***

Our minds and bodies have defensive programs that evolved over millennia. These were reactions that worked well for our ancestors, keeping them safe from predators and other threats so they could breed and raise a family. This is why these defensive responses are so strongly a part of us.

The common experience is the fight or flight mechanism. Either one produces adrenalin and shuts down unnecessary mental and physical functions. Our system is primed, focusing only on survival. We use this focus and strength to fight off the attack or flee the threat.

There are also other defence mechanisms that are more obvious in other species but still occur in our own as well. This is a loose description of them and how they might apply to us when dealing with conflict. The key message is that if you see any of these in yourself or others, then a threat has been perceived. People become defensive and until people feel the threat is gone, it might be hard for them to engage in calm, problem-solving activities.

| <b>Defence</b> | <b>Primitive</b>                                                                                             | <b>Modern</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Flight         | Run faster than the predator (antelope).                                                                     | Move or keep away from places or events where you might have to deal with the threat.                                                                                                                                                     |
| Fight          | Trapped so attack the threat (claws and teeth).                                                              | Use every aggressive tactic to intimidate or force the other party to back off.                                                                                                                                                           |
| Freeze         | Stop in your tracks to avoid movement that will attract the attention of the predator (poultry).             | Avoid eye contact, do not act on requests and contribute nothing to meetings or other conversations.                                                                                                                                      |
| Feign          | Play dead so the predator thinks you may be a contaminated carcass (opossum).                                | Make yourself seem irrelevant to current issues. Avoid involvement or showing any signs of interest.                                                                                                                                      |
| Fade           | Use camouflage to fade into the background to make it too hard for the predator to find you (lizards).       | Send out signals to make it look like you are agreeable and complying with the wants of the other party. Avoid declaring your own beliefs.                                                                                                |
| Fake           | Puff up and pretend to be something bigger than you are to scare off the predator (frill neck lizard, frogs) | Sprout your credentials and experience to put people off challenging you. Get the cool car and designer clothes, not because you appreciate them but to make others defer to you.                                                         |
| Yuck           | Release an odour or substance to make you too unpleasant to eat (skunk, pee, vomit).                         | Use languages or behaviours that make it too difficult for the other party to persist in trying to deal with you. This could explain some early adolescent dress codes and attitudes. They are defending their space to deal with things. |

The intensity of the defence mechanism can be quite surprising. However, once you realise that they are designed to overwhelm the threat this intensity makes sense. In other words, the prey is fighting for its life, the predator only for its next meal. The prey only has to make it too risky or too much effort for the predator for the defence mechanism to succeed.

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## Conflict strategies for different situations

Daniel Robin nominates five different conflict strategies people use. These can link to three practical options about engaging in conflict. He suggests that people tend to rely on one or two strategies and might benefit by practicing the different strategies.

| Conflict Strategy |                                                                                                                                                 | Option |               |           |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------|-----------|
|                   |                                                                                                                                                 | Engage | Do-Not-Engage | Negotiate |
| 1. Confront       | Gently confronting a person can lead to collaboration. If you find you hurt people when confronting, try using one of the other styles instead. | ✓      |               | ✓         |
| 2. Compromise     | Use for a quick resolution through bargaining and mutual giving-up. It doesn't solve core issues but prevents further escalation.               | ✓      |               | ✓         |
| 3. Collaborate    | Work together to develop win-win solutions. Over reliance on this style can lead to wasted time resolving small issues that warrant the effort. | ✓      |               | ✓         |
| 4. Accommodate    | Listening without resistance when the relationship is more valuable than the issue.                                                             |        | ✓             |           |
| 5. Avoid          | When there is no way to win or a cooling off period is needed.                                                                                  |        | ✓             |           |

The Engage option is used when you think you have the capacity to get to a result in a given situation.

The Do-Not-Engage option is a conscious, deliberate choice not to struggle, to protect the relationship or to stop adversarial, win-lose dynamics. In other words, rather than get caught up in ineffective conflict, call off the game and walk away rather than join in.

The Negotiation option is useful when you think you are in a position to offer the person a better alternative to their current best outcome. It is also relevant when there are no better alternatives, the task or issue is important or it can help resolve misunderstandings.

## Exercise 3 – Conflict strategy preferences

Rank the strategies from 1 to 5 in your order of preference and comfort.

|             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Confront    | <input type="text"/> |
| Compromise  | <input type="text"/> |
| Collaborate | <input type="text"/> |
| Accommodate | <input type="text"/> |
| Avoid       | <input type="text"/> |

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What could you do to help you practice and become comfortable with the two strategies you ranked as least preferred or comfortable?

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### **Neighbourhood conflicts**

The Canberra Conflict Resolution Service offers these suggestions for managing neighbourhood conflict.

1. Get to know your neighbour
2. Consult with your neighbour before you take any action that may impact on them.
3. Take your neighbour's concern's seriously, even if they seem small issues to you.
4. When people feel heard and understood it is easier to work through a problem.
5. Don't assume the other person knows there is a problem – often they don't.
6. Sometimes it is a simple misunderstanding.
7. Discuss your approach with friends or family. They may have some useful ideas.
8. Make an attempt to talk or write to your neighbour before involving authorities or other agencies.
9. Remember to focus on the problem not the person.
10. Work on what you can change, not what you can't.
11. If you and your neighbour cannot agree on a change, try implementing some strategies to reduce stress.
12. Ask for help, seek advice.

### ***Benefits from healthy conflict***

Conflict is not always a bad thing. While poorly managed conflict can be destructive, well managed conflict can be an opportunity for improvement and building stronger relationships, trust and intimacy.

Here are some benefits that conflict can bring.

1. Brings discontent and difficulties into the open so they can be addressed.
2. Working disagreements to a win-win outcome can build a stronger relationship and more durable situation.
3. The challenges of conflict can shake people out of a rut and open up new possibilities and better ways of doing things.
4. Conflict can lead people to open up to each other, enriching their relationship and building understanding and acceptance.
5. Conflict can be educational and lead to changes in behaviours. It can open people's eyes to the consequences of their behaviours on others and lead to changes to accommodate others.

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## Exercise 4 – Recognising successful conflict

Identify occasions when you have engaged in conflict that produced better outcomes for you and the others involved. Make a note of what made the outcomes constructive.

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## 2. Self-management During Conflict

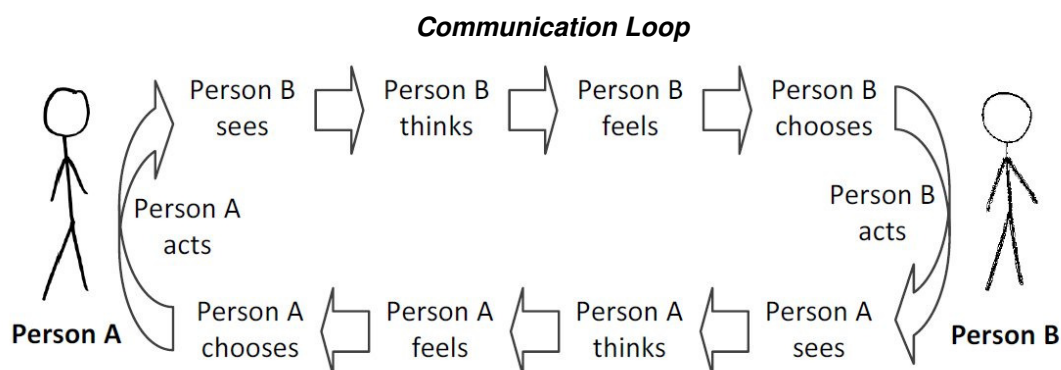
*Where could I possibly find the leather  
To cover the whole surface of the earth?  
But with the leather just on the soles of my shoes  
It's the same as having covered the entire earth's surface.*

Shantideva 5:13

### Self-awareness during conflict

During conflict it is possible to be so focused on the issues or the behaviour of the other parties that we lose self-awareness. When this happens we limit our choices about how to handle the conflict. We also run the risk of engaging in behaviours that aggravate the situation and encourage it to escalate.

One of the simplest devices for maintaining self-awareness while also becoming aware of the conduct of other parties is to use a basic communication loop.



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This loop illustrates the different steps that happen during communication. Often these steps are automatic and happen so quickly that people aren't aware that they are happening at all. They think the action and reaction are locked in, as if the people involved have no choice in the matter.

Starting with Person A, we see that Person A does some kind of action. It may be words, gestures, an activity or a decision.

Person B becomes aware of this, maybe immediately in a face to face situation, maybe later on in an organisational or distant setting. However Person B 'sees' what Person A does, it triggers a series of internal processes.

Person B thinks about what happened, applying their beliefs, values and assumptions to Person A's action. This might be quick, happening in an instant, such that Person B isn't even aware that they are even interpreting what Person A did. Person B may experience their judgement as if it is an inseparable part of what Person A did and not a conclusion they constructed with their thoughts.

Person B then develops an emotional response based on what they think. Again, this can be so quick that Person B isn't even aware that there are perceptual (see) and interpretative (think) steps involved. Their experience may be that their emotional response is the first response to Person A's action and is a pure, unfiltered response to that action. However, the see and think steps each provide an opportunity to misread Person A's action, depending on what was actually perceived and what information could be drawn from it. Pretty well at all times, Person A's internal agenda (thoughts, feelings and intentions) are hidden and Person B's beliefs about them are almost entirely made up, based on the interpretation of the visible actions.

Person B then makes a choice. Again, this can be so quick that Person B might not even be aware they made a choice. They might feel their own action which follows is a natural and necessary response to Person A's action. There are several problems with this. One, Person B is in denial of their own choices. Two they project responsibility onto Person A. Three, they adopt a reactive role in the relationship. It is important to remember at all times that there is always a choice about what to do, even if none of the obvious choices are attractive.

Finally, Person B acts. These steps may have taken all of a fraction of a second or may have taken weeks or longer. It depends on the proximity and speed of events. With regards to rapid interaction, the sooner people can slow things down the sooner they can become more aware of their internal dynamics and focus on making constructive choices.

Now Person B has acted, the cycle continues with Person A seeing, thinking, feeling and choosing. In a heated exchange or a situation where there is little communication between parties, it is easy to see how communication can get out of hand, conflict escalate and parties start to feel hurt and locked into defensive behaviours.

## ***The value of active listening***

Active listening is where the person listening gives out signals to show they are paying attention and taking in what the other is saying. Without active listening the speaker cannot know if the message has been received and how it has been interpreted. Active listening shows people are being taken seriously. It provides opportunities for making sure messages are received accurately. Bob Dick developed the LACE acronym to help people listen well.

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- Listen** First show you are listening. Face the person if possible. Give eye contact. Use your posture to show attentiveness. Sometimes it might be suitable to start by saying, "I'm ready to talk now," "I'm listening now," "I want to hear and understand what you are saying" or some similar statement to get things started.
- Acknowledge** While the person is speaking, show some acknowledgement. This usually involves nodding your head or making sympathetic noises (like "mmm", "ah" or even "yes" or "no"). It might sometimes include paraphrasing but this fits more with the next step.
- Check** This involves making sure you have heard what is being said. At this stage avoid questions, because questions shift the agenda from what the speaker is thinking and feeling to what you are thinking and feeling. Here you want to understand what they think and feel in their communication. The usual technique is to paraphrase and reflect back to the speaker what you have heard. Try to use as much of their vocabulary as possible. Use sentences like, "What I am hearing you say is..." The object is to demonstrate you have heard and understood what they are saying without blocking the flow of what they still have to say. This gives them the opportunity to correct anything you have misheard.
- Enquire** This is the last step and if all goes easily with the first three you may not even need this step. This step is used when the other steps still leave you uncertain about what is being said. So you ask questions to clarify, not challenge, what is said. For example, "If I hear you clearly, does this mean...?" or "Perhaps you could explain to me what you mean by..."

## ***Dealing with rehearsed defences***

Sometimes people deal with conflict using deeply ingrained, habitual routines. Their feeling of being threatened by the situation or their need to keep control over their lives and environment may be so strong that they retreat to rehearsed routines. However, these routines might exclude constructive, win-win outcomes.

In these cases you may need to adopt a gentle but stubborn stance, holding your ground until the other party realises they will have to try something different here. Of course, before they do this they might intensify their routines, making them louder or stronger, in the hope that more of the same will get them a result. You will need to show calmness and confidence if this happens, even if you are feeling knotted up and vulnerable on the inside.

### **First, Second and Third Person Skills**

Using grammar, the first person tense is "I", the second person tense is "you" and the third person tense is "he, she, it, they". These grammatical tenses provide a way to make choices about how you communicate, especially when dealing with a party that is using ingrained and non-constructive routines.

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- First Person** Here you use “I” statements. You don’t make statements about the other person. Examples are, “I need to address this issue,” “I feel strongly about this and need to deal with it,” or “I feel hurt and want to feel confident and safe.”
- Second Person** Here you use “you” statements but carefully crafted and linked back to an “I” statement. It is important to avoid blame or appeasement and to stay true to your needs without attacking the other. Examples are, “When you do x, I feel y,” “When you say it doesn’t matter, the consequences for me are z,” or “When you yell and make accusations I find it hard to understand you because I feel knotted up inside.”
- Third Person** Here you step out of yourself and imagine you are looking at the situation from the outside. You imagine yourself in the position of an onlooker seeing you and the other party as “they”. From this perspective you can ask, “What do they need?” It might be more first or second person communication. It might be a change in the process, more information or time to cool down. You can do this exercise in your head or maybe engage the other party in this. For example, you might say, “Looking at how this conversation is going, I think we might need some more information to help us resolve it.”

## Exercise 5 – Practice scripts for first and second person skills

Think of several situations where you wanted to manage conflict better. Select whether statements in the first person, second person or both would have helped. Write down what you could have said.

Context One (ie. what the other person is doing or saying):

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| First Person Statements | Second Person Statements |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| What you could say:     | What you could say:      |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |

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Context Two (ie. what the other person is doing or saying):

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| First Person Statements | Second Person Statements |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| What you could say:     | What you could say:      |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |
| <hr/>                   | <hr/>                    |

### The Broken Record Technique

Sometimes, when the other party is locked into a non-constructive routine, you might need to adopt the broken record technique (perhaps we should call it the 'repeat function' technique to bring it up to date). Here you adopt a position to calmly repeat a non-threatening message about what you need in the situation. You persist with this until the other person is ready to acknowledge it. For example, "I need to talk about this when we are calm," could be used as the response when a person is worked up. You could try something like, "I hear what you are saying but I still need to speak to the manager if you can't refund my purchase," when someone is not hearing what you are saying or responding to your need. You repeat these or similar statements until the situation calms down, changes or you choose to withdraw so as to address it another time.

Regardless of the technique you use when faced with a rehearsed defence routine, repeat your desire for a win-win outcome and explain why the current situation doesn't meet that. Basically, you are trying to get through to the person that you want to handle the situation differently to get an outcome you can be satisfied with.

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### 3. Creating Win-Win Outcomes

#### *The logic of win-win*

People often believe they can go for an “I win, you lose” outcome when faced with conflict. This might even be effective for low level conflict with relationships that are transitory or not valued. But even here, the broader cultural consequence if everybody choses win-lose solutions is such that life becomes degraded for all.

Ultimately the win-lose outcome is an illusion and is little more than a variation of the lose-lose outcome. The table below shows why.

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I win, you lose  | I feel good in the short term but you are not committed to the outcome so I have to invest resources protecting my ‘win’. You however, feel free to undermine it and undo it whenever it suits. |
| I lose, you win  | I feel bad and have to make an effort to live with an outcome I don’t want or else try to undermine your win. You are now locked into defending and protecting your outcome.                    |
| I lose, you lose | Well, we both blew it and no one was satisfied with the outcome. Does anything more need to be said?                                                                                            |
| I win, you win   | With both parties getting a satisfactory outcome, rather than defending it from threats, they can build on it, cooperate and share the benefits.                                                |

Even if it is not a cultural norm, logic, history and social sustainability point to win-win solutions as the only truly sound resolution to conflict.

Part of getting to a win-win result is to focus on the outcome rather than trying to win the argument. Keep asking yourself, “where is this going?” so you can keep your mind on the end goal, the win-win. It is too easy to start trying to score points rather than build a solution. Even a partial solution still gets everyone closer to a satisfactory outcome. The experience of a positive step forward can build confidence and motivation to continue working together for an even better result.

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## Exercise 6 – Win or lose analysis

Think of a conflict situation you are familiar with. Describe the possible outcomes from a win or lose perspective.

| I win, you lose  | I lose, you win |
|------------------|-----------------|
|                  |                 |
|                  |                 |
|                  |                 |
|                  |                 |
|                  |                 |
|                  |                 |
| I lose, you lose | I win, you win  |
|                  |                 |
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How could you communicate the logic and benefits of this analysis to the other party or parties involved?

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## ***Building in reconciliation and redemption***

Sometimes there is real hurt and loss of trust between parties. It was not just a misunderstanding or competing interests. People got hurt and people got blamed.

If hurt and mistrust are obstacles to building a win-win solution then reconciliation is needed. Our society and religious institutions often talk about forgiveness but it is very difficult to work out what steps to take. The following table offers some ideas but in the end, reconciliation is not done to a formula but through the affected parties working together to rebuild the elements of a trusting and cooperative relationship.

### **Steps to Reconciliation**

- 1. *See the true value of things***

**Choose to reconcile** This may be the hardest step of all. It involves putting a break on the momentum of the conflict or habit of poor relating. How each person reaches this step can be puzzling or even surprising.

The goal here is to help a person see that the benefits of continuing harmful practices are less than the benefits of reconciling and building healthy relationships.
- 2. *Cease causing harm***

**Apologise and/or forgive** Statements of apology and forgiveness are declarations of the intent to stop causing harm. What was done might not be undoable but at least we can stop harming each other.

The feelings here can be simple or complex. There can be relief, doubt, fear, happiness, disappointment or mistrust, just to name a few.
- 3. *Heal the wounds and recover***

**Heal** Trust, feelings and maybe even physical health have been harmed. People need to heal. Some hurt heals quickly. Some takes a long time.

Sometimes people feel helpless. Also, the hurt they experience can reflect what is missing in the relationship. Restoring confidence is part of the healing process and will link to the rebuild.

The priority in this step is to support the healing process for people who have been hurt. Some form of restitution might happen when possible.
- 4. *Build a more aware relationship***

**Rebuild** The people involved now know they can hurt each other. They can also work together on how to relate with each other in a healthy way and reduce the risk of future harm.

People cannot go back to a pre-conflict state. There is no return to innocence. The pre-conflict period was a time when people did not fully understand how they could hurt each

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other. Now they know more about each other they can factor these experiences into their relationship. There is now an opportunity for real, earthy human relationship. Of course, some people choose to hope and trust that they have reached a point in the relationship where they will not harm each other in future. Only time will tell.

Sometimes the rebuild is détente or separation. When people cannot find a way to feel safe with another then distance and reduced contact might be the most responsible way to rebuild the relationship.

## Exercise 7 – Experiences of reconciliation

Think of an experience of successful reconciliation. What happened that made it successful?

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## *Managing escalation*

An important decision is when to escalate and de-escalate.

Skilled negotiators sometimes adopt a strategy of matching the other party's level of intensity. If the other party wants to start table thumping then the negotiator does too. The idea is to test to see if the other party is really willing to go for broke or if they will back down. If they back down, which is the hoped for result, then the negotiator backs off also. Then both parties are able to enter into a more cooperative and calm conversation. Be careful about adopting this strategy. If the other party doesn't back down then you could end up in an extremely intense situation that could get out of hand.

More common, and usually safer, is to pitch your intensity a little lower than the intensity of the other party. Your strategy is to try and encourage them down to a calmer, less intense level of interaction. As they come down, you pitch a little lower again until you reach the level you are comfortable with and think will facilitate a constructive conversation.

Active listening can be helpful for de-escalating the intensity. Statements like, "I hear what you are saying about how upset you are about what has happened," can demonstrate both that you are listening and acknowledging what they are saying. Once people realise that you recognise what they feel they have less of a need to keep reinforcing it. It can be quite dramatic how quickly the intensity drops when a person realises the other party is listening and acknowledging their feelings and point of view.

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## 4. Using Your Emotional Intelligence

*You must be the change you want to see in the world.*

Ghandi

Emotional intelligence is an emerging research area. As such there is a great deal of work yet to be done to pin down what the intelligence is (or even to confirm its existence), how it can be measured and what it can predict. Every model and instrument produced so far is subject to serious criticism.

For our purpose here, we take a skills approach, rather than a trait approach. This means we are talking about areas you can focus on and skills you can develop. The areas we suggest are those that some researchers claim link to improved likelihood of success. As the research settles down, it may turn out that some of these skills are more learned behaviours or personality attributes rather than a form of intelligence. Our concern is simply, do they help you get a result? Keep in mind though, over reliance on some skills can reduce your effectiveness in those situations where other skills would be more useful.

This table outlines the key components of some of the dominant instruments for measuring emotional intelligence. It shows how the field of emotional intelligence still has a fair amount of variance in it.

### Salovey and Mayer

Perceiving emotions  
Facilitating thought  
Understanding emotions  
Managing emotions

### Goleman (ESCI)

Self-awareness  
Self-management  
Social Awareness  
Relationship management

### Bar-On

Intrapersonal  
Interpersonal  
Stress Management  
Adaptability  
General Mood

## ***Deal with internal dynamics***

When dealing with a conflict situation, pay attention to the role of internal dynamics. This includes self-awareness and how you perceive the other person's thoughts and feelings.

Look for opportunities to practice your self-awareness for what you are feeling. Don't wait until you are in a conflict situation because the obvious strong feelings and reactions might mask some of the more subtle but important feelings. Learn to recognise when you feel anxious, confident, threatened or strong.

Train yourself to ask what the other person might be feeling. This doesn't mean you ask them outright, though sometimes you might. Rather, as you pay attention to them, try to tune into the emotional content of what they are saying, not just the cognitive material.

The following overview of key emotional families may help you. For each one, the level of intensity will vary. For example, happy can include low level contentment through to high level ecstasy. Anger can vary from minor discomfort to outright fury.

This overview also includes some suggestions about how you might address the feeling, in yourself or others, in the context of a difficult conversation.

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|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Happy</b>     | Acknowledge the relief or satisfaction they feel because you are addressing the issue. Remain grounded without letting a wave of relief and goodwill distract from your purpose and make it easy to avoid difficult issues.                                                         |
| <b>Sad</b>       | Acknowledge the disappointment or deflation. Encourage the person to address the issue by showing your dedication and confidence that by dealing with the issue in a practical way it can be resolved.                                                                              |
| <b>Angry</b>     | Acknowledge the anger or frustration, recognising their belief that they shouldn't have to face this issue. Hear their objections and reassure them that your goal is to resolve the issue so everything can settle down and people can get back to good work and outcomes.         |
| <b>Afraid</b>    | Acknowledge that the issue might be intimidating or threatening. Share your conviction that you can work with them to build a solution that will safely resolve the issue.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Confused</b>  | Recognise that they find the issue baffling or inconsistent. State clearly your commitment to clarify it and deal with it in a clear, step by step way.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Confident</b> | Acknowledge their confidence that they can manage the issue. Explain clearly that you still need to work on the issue with them so you can feel confident it will be resolved and can answer to your supervisor.                                                                    |
| <b>Uncertain</b> | Recognise that they are unsure whether they can deal with the issue. Reaffirm your commitment to work on it with them until a workable solution is developed and in place.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Disgust</b>   | Recognise that they don't want anything to do with the process of dealing with the issue. Reassure them that you mean no harm and that you will proceed in a calm and considerate way that doesn't avoid the issue, that respects their integrity and develops a workable solution. |

## Exercise 8 – Tracking emotional pathways

Think of a conflict situation you have dealt with. Map out the emotional sequence you went through and what was happening at that point in the conflict.

Situation:

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### ***Exercise social responsibility***

Use your emotions and the emotions of others to facilitate a good outcome. Conflict is not the time for emotional self-indulgence. Petulance, fury and terror hardly facilitate a cooperative relationship dedicated to solving problems.

Even when you feel strongly, ask yourself, what is the best way to express these feelings that will lead to a constructive outcome? The frameworks described in previous sections can help here.

Get in the practice of checking your feelings and the assumptions and beliefs that led to them. Keep in mind that there is always a choice about how you will act, no matter how intense your feelings.

If the other person doesn't appear to be managing their emotions or is making non-constructive choices about how they express them, then it is time to remember the first and second person skills and the broken record technique. Telling them to calm down or stop what they are doing is likely to escalate the behaviour in many situations. But some first or second person statements, in a non-threatening, non-appeasing way, may help calm things down.

Be willing to take the time needed to resolve the situations. Sometimes situations escalate because people feel compelled to resolve it quickly, pressured by deadlines and appointments. When this happens, the schedule becomes the priority and people's feelings and needs get pushed aside. Ironically, this is likely to enflame things, making it harder to resolve the issue and increasing the amount of time needed. In other words, be willing to slow down so you can resolve it quicker.

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Lastly, if the situation has legal implications, get qualified support. This might seem strange in the context of emotional intelligence but it is a factor for social responsibility. The more serious a situation is the more you need to adopt deliberate and structured processes. This might include record keeping, witnesses and mediation. Buying into feelings of frustration, a need for rapid gratification or a self-image of being able to handle any situation on your own, is neither emotionally self-aware nor socially responsible. When the stakes are high you owe it to yourself and the other parties to ensure the processes are just and fair.

## ***Handle being in the situation***

Being aware of your feelings is one thing. Managing yourself in an intense situation while you have these feelings is quite another.

Identify and practice the skills and routines that help you reduce stress. Some stress is good. It motivates us to act. Too much stress is unhealthy and potentially lethal. The goal is to get a good outcome, not a heart attack or to be so distracted as to have an accident.

Some of the routines that can help calm you in an intense situation are:

1. Breathe! Obvious but easily forgotten. Slow, deep breaths can quickly focus you and help to calm down.
2. Exercise. Go and burn up the excess adrenalin. Nowadays you don't have to wrestle the sabre tooth tiger, you only have to talk with it.
3. Reframe. Put the issue into context. Develop a set of questions that help you to do this, such as, "Is this important enough to fight over?" or "What's the worst that could happen if this doesn't go well?" Questions like this will help separate out the issues to focus on and the ones to walk away from.
4. Feel. Don't try to repress your emotions. You don't have to explode. You always have a choice about how you express them. But if you repress them they don't go away. You only add an internal conflict to your burdens. Feel your emotions, let them run their course and learn from them.

When you find you are prone to bursting into tears or fits of rage, these might not be an expression of what you feel so much as an expression of stress and being overwhelmed by the situation. If this is the case there are two things to attend to. One is get yourself into a position where you can feel a bit more confident and less stressed, in other words, try to find a way to deal with the situation that you can manage. The other is to go beyond the feeling of being overwhelmed and locate the unresolved feelings that led to it. If the feeling of being overwhelmed is protracted, consider getting professional support from your doctor or counsellor.

## ***The influence of personality***

People have different personality types. Differences in thinking and feeling lead to different styles of relating, processing information and dealing with issues. It is important to take these into account. The fact the other person is doing things that seem odd or frustrating to you does not mean they aren't seriously trying to resolve the issue with you. It could be simple that they process it differently.

Some of the differences may look like these:

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1. An extravert may want to discuss the issue as they process it. An introvert may want to withdraw to work out what they think and feel about it.
2. A sensate person may want to go through every little detail, while an intuitive only wants to deal with the broad issues.
3. A thinking person may want to analyse the facts while a feeling person may want to reconcile things with their values.
4. A judging person may want to make instant decision while a perceptive person may want to mull it over for several days.
5. A head person may see a problem as a lack of facts, a heart person may see it as a troubled relationship while a gut person will see it as a power imbalance and matter of safety.

As you discover more about people you will find the many ways we are constructed differently, which leads to different priorities and processes for dealing with issues. Practice recognising the different personality types and learn how to have effective conversations with them honouring their priorities and preferences. This will increase your dexterity to work with others and resolve issues quickly.

One model of personality, the Enneagram, identifies three underlying drivers beneath different personality types. These are anxiety, anger and fear. People often don't acknowledge the presence of these feelings in themselves. However, being aware that these deeply ingrained filters may influence how people interpret things, it may help to ask these questions:

1. What outcomes could this person be anxious about?
2. What is this person experiencing that they are angry about?
3. What is happening here that this person is afraid of?

There are also some personality types that use conflict to build trust and intimacy. While this might seem strange to other personality types, the basic thrust is that challenging each other, even if it leads to conflict, is a way of testing people's sincerity, openness and trust. How we manage ourselves in conflict creates a transparency and raw honesty that polite conversation and the usual social protocols might conceal. Of course, over reliance on this strategy can lead to isolation and mistrust. However, if you find a person is frequently provocative and challenging it might not mean they are against you but rather they are exploring their relationship with you. It is an invitation for openness and trust.

## ***The impact of life stages***

Keep in mind also, that people pass through stages. These will influence their level of engagement, optimism and energy. Here are two common sets of stages people experience.

1. Aging. Adolescence, child bearing, midlife, late middle age and old age all affect how a person experiences the world. For example, situations that hold no fear in youth can seem fearful for a parent or an elderly person. Adolescents often go through chemical changes that affect their sleep patterns. They are also in a critical stage for consciously developing their identity. In midlife a person is dealing with how they feel about their quality of life and how they are using it.
2. Work. When a person works they are usually in one of four situations, depending on how long they have been in the job. When they start a job they are usually enthusiastic and confident. This can quickly decay into a period of low confidence and struggle as they learn the ropes. They can then spend a volatile period with mixed success and failure before settling into a stable time of general confidence and productivity.

Keeping in mind the kinds of issues people experience at different stages can help you understand what they might be looking for while resolving an issue.

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## 5. Cognitive tools for addressing issues

### **FIDO**

This acronym was promoted by Bob Dick for effective communication. FIDO stands for feelings, information, decisions and outcomes. It is a sequence of steps that can be used to work through difficult issues. The process starts by going backward through the acronym to check what is needed for a good decision. Once people recognise what is needed for the decision, move forward through the acronym to make the decision.

The process goes:

1. Outcome – clarify what outcome you both/all want.
2. Decisions – identify what decisions are needed to reach this outcome.
3. Information – identify what type of information is needed for these decisions to be made well.
4. Feelings – check and resolve any feelings that could make these steps difficult.
5. Information – gather and go through the information to check it and understand it.
6. Decisions – use the information to make the decisions.
7. Outcome – check whether a satisfactory outcome has been reached. If not, go back in the process to check whether something is left undone. This could include:
  - a. How realistic are the expectations about the outcome?
  - b. Do the decisions address all the issues that need to be resolved?
  - c. Is the information gathered adequate or accurate?
  - d. Have all relevant feelings been addressed?

A simple rule is that when feelings start to dominate, they trump everything else and you move to the **F** part of the process, after which you can resume the process.

### **De Bono's thinking strategies**

Edward de Bono has spent his career focusing on ways to improve thinking. Here are two of his frameworks that people generally find helpful.

#### **Six Thinking Hats**

In this framework, de Bono encourages people to take on different thinking roles, that is, wear different hats. These thinking roles help individuals or groups to look at an issue from different angles. This produces a rich resource of information that can help people reach better conclusions than they would if they stuck to their one or two preferred ways of thinking. The six hats are:

- |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| White | Facts and figures – like white light it has no bias to any colour but casts light on what is there. It is impartial and looks for objective information. Data, sources, reliability and measures are types of information the white hat addresses. |
| Red   | Emotions and feelings – like the red of anger or alarm, this hat looks for the emotions involved. What do people's feelings highlight about the situation? What hunches and intuition point to issues or unresolved questions?                     |

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|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Black  | What could be wrong – like the dark shadow or gloomy cavern, this hat seeks out what is going wrong. This is the deliberate negative thinking of the devil's advocate. It looks for weaknesses and errors in the thinking that put the result at risk. It might address the method used or the outcomes of past experiences.                                            |
| Yellow | Positive speculation – like the warm sun, this hat is about looking for the positives and what benefits are possible. It looks for reasons and logical support to reinforce constructive outcomes. It is open to speculating how the result can be achieved.                                                                                                            |
| Green  | Creative and lateral – like fresh vegetation, this hat is about growth, creativity and new ideas. It deliberately looks for new options, thinks laterally and provokes thinking about alternatives to past and current ways of dealing with things.                                                                                                                     |
| Blue   | Thinking design and guidance – like the blue sky which covers everything, this hat is about rising above individual thinking preferences and looking at how the different hats are being used. Is there sufficient balance between thinking hats? Is there sufficient depth? It guides the process to ensure effectiveness, summarises it and captures the conclusions. |

As you can see, the six hats framework captures many of the separate elements mentioned earlier and places them in one, manageable process.

## Exercise 9 – Six hats analysis

Think of a conflict situation you are familiar with.

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Look at the issue using the six hats.

**White**

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**Red**

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**Black**

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**Yellow**

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**Green**

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**Blue**

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What does this analysis tell you about how the parties involved were dealing with the issue and how they managed the conflict?

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A simpler but very useful framework is de Bono's plus-minus-interesting. It's goal is to try and go beyond the common yes-no, good-bad dualism that contaminates so much thinking. It does this by using three columns.

The third column is about relevant information that is neither positive nor negative but is important for managing the decision. It might be stakeholders, budgets or laws that will all be a part of the decision but in themselves are neither a plus or a minus. This helps people get out of the plus and minus dualism and start to see the decision more broadly. By separating out the non-contentious facts people can put things in perspective and create more openness to possible solutions.

Using the same situation as used in exercise 9, analyse possible solutions using the plus, minus, interesting technique.

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## 6. Extra Help and Resources

### ***Support for particular situations***

Sometimes conflict is too intense for you to manage or has significant relationship or legal consequences. These are some examples of the types of services you might be able to access if you need professional support.

In some settings, such as a workplace, there may be mediation or counselling services that you can access. There is also a chain of command that might be able to help resolve issues.

For community issues there may be community leaders or groups that can help. For issues that are high risk or have serious legal consequences there may be government mediation services or legal aid that can help.

There are also many private providers of counselling, coaching or legal services that may be qualified to help your situation.

Finding the support relevant to your situation can feel daunting. Accessible places to start may be your corporate intranet or your local government offices. If you don't know which department to go to your local representative's office usually has people who know the system and may be able to point you to the relevant service. Scanning the internet or community papers can also point to community or professional organisations that might be able to help as well.

### ***Further reading***

Below is a list of resources you can read if you want to explore further the material covered in this workbook. There is a deliberate emphasis on internet resources as books and journals might not be readily accessed.

Sometimes webpages change or close so not all resources are always available. If you find a site has closed, try a Google search using the reference here as sometimes there is a mirror site or another site with the same or similar material.

Many more resources can be found on university, government and community websites.

Bolton, Elizabeth, *IFAS leadership development: Managing conflict creatively*. University of Florida, IFAS Extension, 1986, 2009. Accessed June 2012, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/he746>

Conflict Resolution Service. This Canberra community organisation has pamphlets available about community conflict. Accessed March 2012. <http://www.crs.org.au/>

de Bono, Edward, *de Bono thinking systems*. This site introduces several of de Bono's thinking tools. Accessed June 2012. <http://www.debonothinkingsystems.com/home.htm>

Dick, Bob, *Communication skills*, Action Research and Action Learning for Community and Organisational Change. 1997. Accessed March 2012. <http://www.aral.com.au/resources/communicn.html>

Gatlin, Julie, Allen Wysocki, and Karl Kepner, *Understanding Conflict in the Workplace*. University of Florida, IFAS Extension, 2002, 2008. Accessed June 2012, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hr024> See also, *Managing Conflict in the workplace*. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hr025>

Robin, Daniel, *When to engage, when not to engage*. Accessed June 2012, <http://www.abetterworkplace.com/085.html>

State of Victoria, *Family conflict – how to cope*. Better Health Channel, 2011. Accessed June 2012, [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Family\\_conflict\\_how\\_to\\_cope](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Family_conflict_how_to_cope)

Taylor, Meredith, *Conflict management and resolution: Can we agree?* University of Florida, IFAS Extension, 2001, 2005. Accessed June 2012, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy047>

The Conflict Resolution Network. This Australian site has various resource freely available about conflict resolution techniques. Accessed March 2012. <http://www.crnhq.org/>