



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with
National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World
and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

LEADER TRAINING GUIDE

Managing Conflict Creatively

Objectives

1. To understand conflict and its patterns
2. To identify methods for handling conflict
3. To become familiar with techniques for creatively managing conflict situations

Handouts

Handout 1 - *The Conflict Cycle*

Handout 2 - *Conflict Resolution Activity* - Problem Letters – 1, 2, 3, 4

Handout 3 - *The Conflict Management Style Survey*

Handout 4 - *The Conflict Management Style Survey Scoring Sheet*

Part 1 - 5 minutes

Read: The objectives of this lesson.

Ask: *What is Conflict?*

What comes to mind when you think of the word "conflict?" (Give participants a chance to answer.)

Say: Conflict is a part of life. One of the reasons people feel that conflict is bad is their belief that harmony is normal and conflict is to be avoided. They fear the confrontation that comes with conflict and because they associate conflict with anger, they consider it destructive. But conflict is normal and happens continually.

A conflict issue can be large or small, interpersonal or between community groups. It can be a situation as simple as a parent wanting a preschooler to eat a food the child doesn't want, or as complex as two countries claiming the same territory. Whether conflict is large or small, it has certain characteristics.

- There has to be at least **two parties** -- two or more people, two groups, two countries, person and a group, or a country and a group.
- There has to be some kind of a **struggle** or threat, either real or suspected.
- There must be some interaction or **interference**.
- The transaction can be **emotional**.

Each person has ways of resolving conflict. How one reacts in conflict situations is due to patterns learned as a child. Everyone was brought up differently, therefore, styles of solving conflicts are different. Those methods of dealing with conflicts may carry over into the way one deals with community conflicts.

Everyone develops a sense of their position in a conflict. Early, they learn to stand firm, avoid confrontation, or try to settle the conflict between the two parties. Ideals are held dear. They are real and important. Other people may look at these ideals as fantasy or useless, but individuals fight to prove their worth.

Ideal images of oneself and the surrounding people exist. How should the ideal mother, father, child, partner, or friend act? What should the family or group be accomplishing? What should the city or country be doing? How does the individual handle the difference between the ideal and what is happening?

How people deal with conflict reflects the values they hold. Does one believe the roles of men and women differ? What emotions can be shown or must be hidden? What issues should be defended? In addition, stress can cause conflict, and it can increase it. The stress of a personal crisis, such as unemployment or a threat to personal safety, makes the situation more emotional. A reaction is tied to a personal pattern for handling conflict. Even everyday stresses can cause or increase conflict.

Part 2 -- 10 minutes

Distribute Handout 1, *The Conflict Cycle*

Ask each person to read one of the descriptions in *The Conflict Cycle*.

Part 3 – 15 minutes

Distribute Handout 2, *Conflict Resolution Activity*. (Decide the number of letters to hand out based on the size of your group.) Have the group break into small groups of three or four people. Give each small group a copy and have them **identify** the conflict cycle that is described. They don't have to solve the problem. They should identify **who** is having the conflict and **what stage** the conflict is in based on what they read from *The Conflict Cycle*. Give them a short time to discuss it in the small group and then have each group give a report to the whole group. Discuss if there is agreement among the small groups on the analysis of the cycle. Be sure to steer clear of situations that can be identified as local.

Part 4 -- 20 minutes

Distribute: Handouts 3 and 4, *The Conflict Management Style Survey and Scoring Sheet*. Follow instructions on the handout.

Say: This is for personal use. Please fill out the form and score it individually. You don't have to share your answers or scores. (After everyone has completed their scoring, **Read aloud:** Category A, B, C, and D from the score sheet.)

Ask:

- What did you find out about yourself when you filled out this survey?
- What did you like/dislike about taking the survey?
- Did your scores reflect how you think you handle conflict or were they different?
- What were some examples of where you thought about doing one thing but did something else?
- What was the outcome?

Say: Most people use a variety of methods for handling conflict. None of these methods is always right or always wrong. Methods 2 and 3 are often most productive. Aggressive behavior usually victimizes others and tends to make people uncooperative. Avoidance behavior usually victimizes one's self and tends to make it difficult for others to know there is a problem.

Say: Most of the messages sent to people about their behavior are "you" messages, or messages that are directed at the other person and have a high probability of putting them down, making them feel guilty, making them feel their needs are not important, and generally making them resist change. "You" messages are usually orders or commands ("Stop doing that! Get into the car!"), or blaming or name-calling statements ("You are acting like a baby! You are driving me crazy!"), or statements that give solutions ("You should forget that idea. You better reconsider that plan."). Therefore, placing the responsibility for behavior change on the other person. Perhaps the worst of all "you" messages is the if...then threat ("If you don't...then I will...").

An "I" message, on the other hand, allows a person who is affected by the behavior of another to express the impact it has on him or her and at the same time leave the responsibility for modifying the behavior with the person who demonstrated the behavior. An "I" message consists of three parts:

- the specific behavior,
- the feeling experienced because of the behavior, and
- the tangible effect on the person affected by the behavior.

Examples of "I" messages might include:

A teacher might say to a student: "When you tap on your desk with your pencil, I feel upset because I get distracted and have difficulty teaching."

A wife might say to her husband: "When I try to help you and you don't say anything, I feel confused because I don't know how you feel about my help."

The "I" message allows the sender to imply, "I trust you to decide what change in behavior is necessary." In this manner, "I" messages build relationships, but equally importantly, they do not place the sender in the position of enforcing new behavior, as is frequently the case with the "you" message.

A guide that some have found helpful in formulating an "I" message is:

When you (**state the behavior**), I feel (**state your feelings**) because (**state the reason**).

Say: Discovering the habits used when reacting to conflict situations gives information about how others are affected. Once the usual style is known, a judgment as to whether it is useful or if another method might be more appropriate can be decided. Learning new methods for resolving conflict provides a way to choose the style best suited to each situation. After testing a variety of techniques, behavior can be changed to become more selective and effective. The changes made in the behavior patterns will frequently produce corresponding changes in the responses of others.

- If you recognize the way you react in a conflict situation, you can ask yourself the question -- Is that the way I **want** to respond?
- If you know there are other ways that might be better in solving the situation, will you be motivated to change?
- You can change your behavior only. But if you change the way you act, does it affect the way others react to you?

Say: Some successful results of conflict resolution can include:

- Better ideas are produced.
- People are forced to search for new approaches.
- Long-standing problems surface and are addressed.
- People are forced to clarify their views.
- Tension stimulates interest and creativity.
- People have a chance to test their capabilities.
- In itself, conflict is neither good nor bad. It is what is done with it that makes the difference.
- More effectiveness can be achieved in conflict situations by consciously selecting behavior, instead of merely reacting based on habitual, unexamined patterns. To prepare for managing conflict creatively, one needs to become aware of the methods chosen when dealing with conflict situations, and then learn new ways of handling them.

Say: In summary, while conflict may seem negative, it is actually a natural event in relationships between people. It can become a liability if it remains unresolved. Depending on how they are handled, conflicts may have negative or positive consequences. There are many approaches to handling conflict. This lesson includes only two. Clashes which are caused by value conflicts, incompatible goals, or other hard-to-resolve differences may require more complex tools, longer negotiations, and possibly a third party.

Evaluation

Please have participants complete the evaluation form. Mail completed forms to Dr. Nancy M. Porter, Extension Family Resource Management Specialist, Box 340753, 235 P & A Building, Clemson, SC 29634-0753.

Source

This lesson was created by Dr. Della A. Baker, State Program Leader for Evaluation, Accountability and Staff Development, Clemson University in May, 2008. It was adapted from materials in the *Managing Conflict Creatively*, Family Community Leadership Project, which was developed by Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor, Community Development, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. This document is FCS9065, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida.

The Conflict Cycle

Tension Development -- As the disagreement or threat begins to develop, the various parties start taking sides. The conflict can appear immediately or over time.

Role Dilemma -- People or groups who are involved raise questions about what is happening, who is right, what should be done. They try to decide if they should take sides, and, if so, which one. (Tension development and role dilemma often occur at the same time.)

Injustice Collecting -- Each party begins to gather support. Each one categorizes the problems, justifies their position, and thinks of revenge or ways to win.

Confrontation -- The parties meet head on and clash. If both parties hold fast to their side, the showdown may cause permanent barriers. Confrontation may be lessened or avoided by one or both parties making adjustments.

Adjustments -- If one party is weak and the other is strong, the strong party can win by **domination**, but the conflict may reappear. If parties have equal power, and neither party decides to change, each party tries to weaken the other. The two parties may choose to **compromise**, each gaining a little and losing a little. The two parties can **collaborate** in an active participation which looks for a solution that takes care of both parties' needs.

In community situations, compromise or collaboration appears to resolve conflict over time. Other adjustments are, at best, short-term solutions. In more intimate situations with family, friends, religious groups, relationship building appears to resolve conflict over time.

Adapted from *Managing Conflict Creatively*, Family Community Leadership Project.



Conflict Resolution Activity

Problem Letter 1 (Street Improvement)

Dear Neighbors,

Have you noticed the wear and tear on all our cars? We know that the little bit of grading on our street isn't enough to take care of the chuckholes and mud puddles.

In the past, we have tried to form an improvement district for our streets, but people have opposed it because of the cost.

Now there are revenue-sharing funds available to help with half the cost. We have to agree to give up some of our front yards, though. Between three to six feet would be needed to widen the street and put in sidewalks.

Some people have been opposed because they'd have to move fences, cut down trees, and shorten driveways. A few are concerned about property values. Other people favor the idea because it will improve the neighborhood, give us sidewalks, and be partially paid for with federal money.

I would like to invite you to a meeting next Monday to talk about this.

Problem Letter 2 – (Unruly Dog)

Dear Neighbors,

Have you been bothered by that noisy dog in our neighborhood? I've been losing sleep! I work at night and must sleep in the daytime.

The young couple next door moved in with a setter that barks and drags his chain back and forth. He even gets loose sometimes and tears up neighborhood gardens.

I have called the dog patrol several times, but they can't do anything. When they have checked, the dog was tied up. They are only responsible for stray or loose dogs. I also checked the noise ordinance and it is too vague in this case.

When I have tried to talk to the young couple about the problem, they think I am giving them a bad time. They say they can do anything on their own property. They are at work all day, so they really do not know about the trouble the dog is causing.

I think this is more than just my problem. I know a couple of you are angry about the dog running through your gardens, and someone else is mad about the "fertilizer" in the yard. I also understand a 4- Her's young rabbits were killed when the dog ran through her yard. Also, Sam's chickens have been bothered.

Let's get together about this next Monday night. I would like to solve this problem.

Problem Letter 3 – (Crowded Classrooms)

Dear Parent,

Have you seen how crowded the first and second grade classrooms are at Lincoln School? A lot of parents think the children are not getting as much individual attention as needed in the first years of school. They say all children will learn better, especially slow learners and those with learning disabilities, if more teachers are hired and classrooms are acquired. As it is now, teachers are busy keeping order, instead of having more time to teach students.

Some parents think that changing the student/teacher ratio by hiring more teachers and needing more classrooms means more costs and higher taxes.

Please come to the Lincoln School PTA meeting next Monday to discuss this.

Problem Letter 4 – (Snack Foods)

Dear Parent,

Have you heard that the school board is going to make a decision about the kind of snack foods the vending machines in our elementary schools will sell? Because some parents have complained about the candy in the vending machines at Union Elementary School, the Board has removed the machines from all the schools in our district.

A policy for the sale of snacks on school property is probably a good way to settle this. But some parents are upset. They think their children will leave the school to walk to the convenience store, and that means they will be crossing busy streets. They worry also about children being late for class because of the electronic games at the store.

Other parents do not want snacks to be so readily available because children have been using their lunch money to buy candy. If snacks are sold at the school, they should at least be nutritious food, they say.

Let's get together and talk about this at next Monday's PTA meeting.

Adapted from *Managing Conflict Creatively*, Family Community Leadership Project.



Handout 3

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE SURVEY

Instructions: Choose a single frame of reference and keep it in mind as you answer the questions. Select a real community issue you have been involved in, related to school, church, civic groups in your community. *Allocate 10 points among the four alternative answers given for each of the fifteen items below.*

Example : When the people I lead become involved in a personal conflict, I usually:

3 A. Intervene to settle the dispute.

6 B. Call a meeting to talk over the problem.

1 C. Offer help if I can.

0 D. Ignore the problem.

Be certain that your answers add up to 10.

1. When someone I care about is actively hostile toward me (yelling, threatening, abusive), I tend to:

A. Respond in a hostile manner.

B. Try to persuade the person to give up his/her actively hostile behavior.

C. Stay and listen as long as possible.

D. Walk away.

2. When someone who is relatively unimportant to me is actively hostile toward me (yelling, threatening, or abusive), I tend to:

A. Respond in a hostile manner.

B. Try to persuade the person to give up his or her actively hostile behavior.

C. Stay and listen as long as possible.

D. Walk away.

3. When I observe people in conflicts where anger, threats, hostility and strong opinions are present, I tend to:

A. Become involved and take a position.

B. Attempt to mediate.

C. Observe to see what happens.

D. Leave as quickly as possible.

4. When I observe another person meeting his or her needs at my expense, I am apt to:

A. Work to do anything I can to change that person.

B. Rely on persuasion and "facts" when attempting to have that person change.

C. Work hard at changing how I relate to that person.

D. Accept the situation as it is.

5. When involved in an interpersonal dispute, my general pattern is to:

A. Persuade the other person to see the problem as I do.

B. Examine the issues between us as logically as possible.

C. Look hard for a workable compromise.

D. Let time take its course and let the problem work itself out.

6. The quality that I value the most in dealing with conflict would be:

A. Emotional strength and security.

B. Intelligence.

C. Love and openness.

D. Patience.

7. Following a serious altercation with someone I care for deeply, I:

A. Strongly desire to go back and settle things my way.

B. Want to go back and work it out, whatever give-and-take is necessary.

C. Worry about it a lot but do not plan to initiate further contact.

D. Let it lie and do not plan further contact.

8. When I see serious conflict developing between two people I care about, I tend to:

A. Express my disappointment that this had to happen.

B. Attempt to persuade them to resolve their differences.

C. Watch to see what develops.

D. Leave the scene.

9. When I see serious conflict developing between two people who are relatively unimportant to me, I tend to:

A. Express my disappointment that this had to happen.

B. Attempt to persuade them to resolve their differences.

C. Watch to see what develops.

D. Leave the scene.

10. The feedback that I receive from most people about how I behave when faced with conflict and opposition indicates that I:

A. Try hard to get my way.

B. Try to work out differences cooperatively.

C. Am easy-going and take a soft or conciliatory position.

D. Usually avoid the conflict.

11. When communicating with someone with whom I am having a serious conflict, I:

A. Try to overcome the other person with my speech.

B. Talk a little bit more than I listen.

C. Am an active listener (feeding back words and feelings).

D. Am a passive listener (agreeing and apologizing).

12. When involved in an unpleasant conflict, I:

A. Use humor with the other party.

B. Make an occasional quip or joke about the situation or the relationship.

C. Relate humor only to myself.

D. Suppress all attempts at humor.

13. When someone does something that irritates me (smokes in a nonsmoking area or crowds in front of me in line), my tendency in communicating with the offending person is to:

A. Insist that the person look me in the eye.

B. Look the person directly in the eye and maintain eye contact.

C. Maintain intermittent eye contact.

D. Avoid looking directly at the person.

14. When someone does something that irritates me (smokes in a nonsmoking area or crowds in front of me in line), my tendency in communicating with the offending person is to:

A. Stand close and make physical contact.

B. Use my hands and body to illustrate my point.

C. Stand close to the person without touching him or her.

D. Stand back and keep my hands to myself.

15. When someone does something that irritates me (smokes in a nonsmoking area or crowds in front of me in line), my tendency in communicating with the offending person is to:

A. Use strong, direct language and tell the person to stop.

B. Try to persuade the person to stop.

C. Talk gently and tell the person what my feelings are.

D. Say and do nothing.

Source: *The 1982 Annual for Facilitators, Trainers and Consultants* by J.W. Pfeiffer and L.W. Goodstein, University Associates, Inc.

Handout 4

Conflict Management Style Survey -- Scoring Sheet

Instructions: When you have completed all fifteen items, add your scores for category A, B, C, and D answers, resulting in four totals. Put these in the boxes below. Then by using the total scores in each category, fill in the bar graph below.

Totals:				
Total Points	A	B	C	D
150				
125				
100				
75				
50				
25				
0				

Category A. **Aggressive/Confrontal:** High scores indicate a tendency toward "taking the bull by the horns" and a strong need to control situations and/or people. Those who use this style are often directive and judgmental. The idea is to straighten out the other person, to argue about who is right, and to be ready to defend ideas forcibly.

Category B. **Assertive/Persuasive:** High scores indicate a tendency to stand up for oneself without being pushy, a pro-active approach to conflict, and a willingness to collaborate. People who use this style depend heavily on their verbal skills to bring the other party around. The willingness to work toward a solution through negotiation is the characteristic attitude.

Category C. **Observant/Introspective:** High scores indicate a tendency to observe others and examine oneself analytically in response to conflict situations as well as a need to adopt counseling and listening modes of behavior. Those who use this style are likely to be cooperative, even conciliatory. Behaviors commonly include a striving to understand and listen, and to put oneself in the other person's place.

Category D. **Avoiding/Reactive:** High scores indicate a tendency toward passivity or withdrawal in conflict situations, and a need to avoid confrontations. Those who use this style are usually accepting and patient, often suppressing their strong feelings.

Now total your scores for Categories A and B and Categories C and D.

Category A + Category B =		
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Category C + Category D =		
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If Score 1 is significantly higher than Score 2 (25 points or more), it may indicate a tendency toward aggressive/assertive conflict management. A significantly higher Score 2 signals a more conciliatory approach.

Source: *The 1982 Annual for Facilitators, Trainers and Consultants* by J.W. Pfeiffer and L.W. Goodstein, University Associates, Inc.



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Lesson Evaluation

Title _____

Presenter _____

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement below by circling the appropriate number that represents your response.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
The information was easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
The information was relevant.	1	2	3	4	5
I gained knowledge as a result of this presentation.	1	2	3	4	5

As a result of this session, I plan to...(Describe how you plan to use what you have learned.)

Please add any comments, suggestions, or other ideas on the back of this sheet.