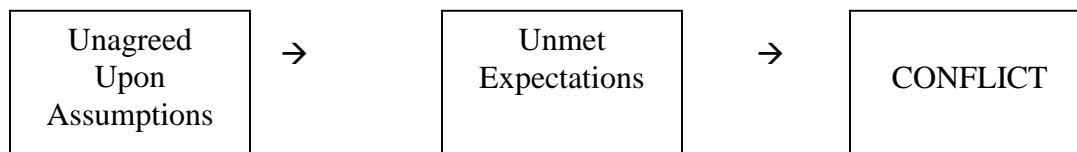




Community Support Nights Preventing and Dealing with Conflict

I. Preventing Conflict

Although conflict is inevitable, some conflict that occurs in community is unnecessary and can be prevented if the community or a member can determine its causes. Knowing the root of a conflict is also helpful in bringing a conflict to positive ends once it has occurred. The following model for conflict is a useful tool for breaking down conflict in order to become aware of the causes:



Think of a time recently in which you came into conflict with a housemate, coworker, or family member.

- ☉What were the events leading up to that conflict?
- ☉Were there assumptions that you or the other person(s) made regarding one another's behavior?
- ☉Did those assumptions prove correct or incorrect?
- ☉How could this information help you to prevent conflict with this person in the future? If you wish, discuss your experience with the group.

Other questions to consider and/or discuss:

- ☉Have you, as a community, established rules and procedures that structure your day-to-day living and set clear expectations for your interactions with one another?
- To what extent is your household a comfortable and safe environment in which all members of your community can express their thoughts and opinions?

II. Dealing with Conflict

Once conflict does arise, address it. Unacknowledged conflict is likely to cause tension that eventually escalates to a point where conflict becomes difficult to deal with in a constructive manner. Consider the following styles of managing conflict:

- What is your usual style?
- Under what circumstances might you use different styles?
- The styles of your community members?
- How might you all make conflict constructive in your community?

Conflict Styles (*Adapted from DW and FP Johnson, Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*)

1) Withdrawing:

- Tend to stay away from the issues over which the conflict is occurring, and from the people with whom they are in conflict.
- May feel it is hopeless to resolve conflicts.
- Personal goals and relationships are forfeited.

2) Forcing:

- Tend to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept one's own solution to the conflict.
- Seek to achieve their own goals at all costs.
- Goals are paramount, with relationships of little importance.

3) Smoothing:

- Desire is to be accepted and liked.
- Relationships are of primary importance, goals are of little importance.
- Believe conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony, and that conflicts cannot be discussed without damaging relationships.

4) Compromising:

- Moderate concern for goals and for relationships.
- Seek a compromise – give up part of their goals and persuade the other person to give up a part of his or her goals.

5) Confronting:

- Highly value their own goals and relationships.
- See conflict as problems to be solved.
- Seek solutions that achieve their own goals and goals of the other person.

Tips for effective communication in addressing conflicts:

- 1) Describe behavior or characteristics that can be changed.
- 2) Be specific ("please keep your shoes off the stairs" vs. "contain your mess.")
- 3) Be descriptive rather than evaluative ("you left a dish in the sink" vs. "you're lazy.")
- 4) Time it appropriately – not when you're about to explode.
- 5) Check to make sure communication is clear in both directions.
- 6) Asking, "Why?" isn't that important – this isn't amateur psychotherapy.
- 7) Don't use it to dump your feelings. Who are you trying to help?

- From Robert Bolton, Ph.D.'s *People Skills*