

Managing conflict



Many people find conflict uncomfortable and view it as negative. However, if managed appropriately, conflict can have a positive impact on group interaction and on human relationships in general and can be an opportunity for growth.

Groups are complex and represent different social, cultural and historical contexts. Difficult emotions can arise in group situations, particularly if there is a background of long-standing unresolved issues. Conflict can however, provide an opportunity for all participants to be heard more deeply.

The facilitator's role in a conflict situation is to help the group to explore the tensions in a spirit of curiosity and support rather than fear. You need to provide confidence that conflict can have a positive outcome.

- Encourage participants to ask questions that aim at understanding other perspectives rather than judging them.
- Try to stay connected with all parties, treating them with equal respect and maintaining ease and a sense of lightness.
- Keep the group focused. You may need to suggest that the group stay with a particular line of discussion, asking others to hold their questions and comments unless they build on the topic being explored.
- Conflict frequently repeats a familiar pattern. Be mindful of how unconscious patterns may be impacting the discussion.
- You may need to:
 - Divide the group into its various factions and work privately with each subgroup to see how they are doing and/or have a deeper conversation about the dynamics that you have observed.
 - Call upon someone in the room who you feel can offer a new perspective, which can help the group to go deeper without re-stimulating hurts. Ask an open question: "I wonder if you have a perspective on this that could shed new light?"
 - Try and introduce humility, lightness and fun. Remember, it is not your job to figure it all out. Remain transparent. You will not have all the right answers or all the right moves all the time.

You are trying your best to be of service to the group.

When you feel stuck, say so – ask others to join in. For example: you might try:

Please note: these resources are a compilation of our individual and collective knowledge and research. Every effort has been made to reference resources. Please notify Community Waikato should you identify any referencing omissions.

“Right now I’m not really sure how to serve the process/move forward. Does anyone have a suggestion?”

Please note: *these resources are a compilation of our individual and collective knowledge and research. Every effort has been made to reference resources. Please notify Community Waikato should you identify any referencing omissions.*