

Section 6 Skills for Conflict Resolution

If people go into negotiations in an angry mood or express themselves in confrontational ways, there is much less chance of a successful resolution to a conflict. The following worksheets give some thought to preparing students for the negotiation process.

Notes for Pupil Worksheets (*You may need to scribe for the pupil*)

The **Ups and Downs of Conflict** illustrates how easy it is for anger to build up in a conflict situation and enables pupils to realise that what they say and how they say it matter. In his/her own eyes an angry person is right but in that angry state it is virtually impossible to think rationally. Thus the first step for angry participants is **Cooling Off Time**. Further details of calming procedures and a tutor worksheet on calming down an angry pupil can be found in *Anger Management*, Unit 3.

Learn to Listen. Good listening skills are essential for everyone involved in conflict resolution. It's a good idea to carry out some role-play to help the pupil really understand what is required. For further work on listening skills involving role-plays look at worksheet 14.2.

Prepare Yourself is a planning sheet for an actual negotiation in which the pupil is involved. A student/tutor role-play of the negotiation would considerably add to the effectiveness of the preparation.

The language we use in conflict situations can either inflame or calm down matters. **Explain, Don't Blame** and **'I' Not 'You'**, illustrate how changing from 'blaming' by using the word 'you' to 'explaining' by using the word 'I' can change the whole nature of an interaction.

Handle Criticism. An inability to handle valid criticism demonstrates a basic lack of confidence. The truly confident person can accept valid criticism but reject criticism with which he/she does not agree. This worksheet puts forward an assertive strategy for dealing with criticism coupled with an appropriate use of language.

Don't Obstruct complements the earlier worksheet on listening skills. It is basically explaining the normal rules of conversation where you respect the rights of others.

Notes for Tutor Worksheet

Empathy (Understanding Others). Psychotherapists in relationship counselling commonly use this technique. This will make the pupil really think about how another person in a conflict situation is feeling. It will also help him/her to understand how outsiders view the conflict.

6.1 The Ups and Downs of Conflict

Just like escalators, conflicts can go up and down. When a conflict gets bigger and more intense, we say it **escalates** and when it goes down, we say it **de-escalates**.

Look at this situation and watch how it escalates:

	Alan	Pete
Rudeness	"Move! I sit there."	"Hard luck. You're too late!"
Name calling, threats	"I said 'move', you slug."	"Call me that again and I'll smash your face in."
Fighting	"Just try!" (Alan pushes Pete)	"Take that, you jerk." (Pete punches Alan)

It escalated because neither Alan nor Pete really attempted to avoid a conflict. They both just reacted to the situation and to each other. Neither took charge and tried to calm things down.

Think about the start of this situation again.

Alan is annoyed because Pete is sitting where Alan usually sits. How could Alan express his feelings without allowing the situation to escalate?

Pete is angry because Alan is rude to him. How could Pete make his feelings known and also de-escalate the situation?

In life, conflict situations occur all the time. You probably can't avoid them, but you can learn to manage them.

6.2 Cooling Off Time

Conflicts can't always be resolved immediately. This is particularly true if people are very angry or tired. So sometimes it's better to put things on hold and allow everyone to get into the right mood for sorting out difficult problems. This is called a 'cooling off time'.

Cooling off time can be used for reflecting on the conflict. But remember, you are only seeing it from one side and if you think too much about things, you are in danger of working up your feelings and putting yourself into a bad temper.

The best way of cooling off is to do something that takes your mind off the conflict. You could perhaps:



Can you think of anything that would be a good cooling off activity for you?

Remember: Cool off before you act!

6.3 Learn to Listen

Conflicts cannot be resolved unless people are willing to actively listen to each other. This means really concentrating and trying to understand what is being said. You need to show the speaker that you are actually doing this.

On the grid below there is a list of behaviours that make for active listening. Can you work out why each one is important?

Behaviour	Why is it important?
Sit in a relaxed way.	
Don't fidget.	
Look at the speaker.	
Nod if you agree with something.	
Don't interrupt, wait for a pause before speaking.	
When there is a suitable pause, ask for things you don't understand to be explained.	
Before you explain your own position, summarise what has been said so far.	

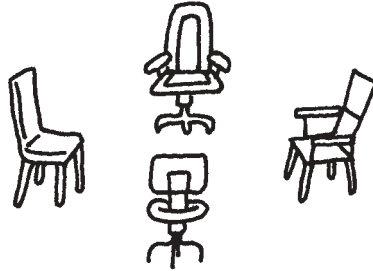
6.4 Prepare Yourself

Discussions where people are talking about their feelings can be difficult, so it's often best to make some preparations. If you know in advance what you are going to say, you are likely to explain yourself in a clearer and more confident way. Also, if you have thought about how you and others may feel during the conversation, you will be able to work out a plan for dealing with strong emotions. For instance, if you know that the discussion might make you tense and angry, you might decide to deal with this by using some relaxation techniques before you start. Use the grid below to help you to think things through.

	Possible ideas	How I have decided to deal with this
How do you think you will feel?		
How do you think other people will feel?		
What will you say?		
What do you think other people will say?		
Are there any other things that concern you?		

6.9 Tutor Worksheet: Empathy (Understanding Others)

Note: Read through this sheet carefully before trying it with your student. Then arrange 4 chairs like this.



This is a script, read the instructions carefully to the pupil, pausing for replies where appropriate.

❖ Sit on chair 1

Think about the person with whom you are in conflict.
What makes your relationship difficult?
Is it to do with the way you behave?
Is it to do with your skills or abilities at something?
Is it about the ideas you have?
Is it about who you are?
Anything else?

❖ Sit on chair 2

Now imagine that you're not yourself, but you're the person with whom you are in conflict.
That person is thinking about you.
Describe your thoughts.
Describe your feelings.
Describe your concerns.

❖ Sit on chair 3

You are now an outsider. You are thinking about the relationship between the two people in front of you. In chair 1 see yourself and in chair 2 see the person you find difficult to get on with.
What sort of relationship is this?
What do you think about these two people?
How do you feel about their relationship?
Can you see any need for change? What? Why? How?

❖ Sit on chair 4

You are now wiser. Be yourself again.
Look at yourself in chair 1 – do you want to change anything?
Look at the other person in chair 2 – do you understand any of their thoughts, feelings, and concerns?
Do you want to make any changes in your relationship? How?

