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STRIVING TOWARD BEST PRACTICE

Dealing with Conflict: Open Communication

Conflict can be a complex issue, but generally is a clash between individuals or groups arising from differences in thought processes, attitudes, understanding, interests, strong emotions, needs, or perceptions. Conflicts are part of life and can be an opportunity, escalation can be managed and there are strategies that help. People are not difficult; it is behaviours that can be difficult. Sponsors need to understand sources of power such as access to resources, unequal distribution of power, position, personality, education, language ability and self esteem.

Key guidelines:

- Be *curious and present*, ask questions, paraphrase, express clearly, do not make unnecessary assumptions
- Have the *courage to give voice to your needs* and preferences
- Have the *patience to listen* and understand another's views, exercise empathetic listening
- Be aware of the dynamics of *what escalates conflict* – defend/attack
- Learn how to *respond to escalation*: C-L-A-I-M
 - Centre and calm yourself-ground in the moment, observe
 - Listen for what is important-active listening skills-show you have heard
 - Acknowledge what you hear and pause for a response-rewrite key points, reflect feelings, reflect values, show you understand, show respect without always agreeing, recognize positive intentions
 - Inquire and ask questions – learn different ways of asking questions, listen for what is under the surface, concern, values, experience
 - Manage your response – choose words carefully, avoid inflammatory language or aggressive behaviour, involve the other person in problem-solving, suggest possible solutions

- Learn to *recognize communication blockers* – advising, analyzing, blaming, cross-examination, being philosophical, defending, denying, diverting, interrupting, judging, and re-assuring
- Watch out for *non-verbal communication* – tone of voice, how loud you are, the rhythm of your speech, facial expression, body movement, posture
- *Quick intervention* – get mutual attention, indicate you are going to listen, restate after each person speaks, begin to problem-solve

Problem-solving ideas:

- Reach agreement on what information is important
- Agree on process to collect information
- Develop shared criteria to assess information,
- Use third party to gain outside opinion
- Use a translator, if necessary, to make sure both sides understand what is being said
- Know each other's needs
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Search for ways to expand options
- Define and change roles
- Identify key values and search for value that can be shared
- Allow expression of emotions and acknowledge them to help defuse them
- Clarify perceptions
- Improve quality and quantity of communication
- Non-judgmentally name sources of irritation and clarify needs

Connections:

- Aman Mediation, www.amanmediation.ca, 416 677-9727, Rola Mustafa, Principal

Reference:

PRSN website on demand training – www.refugeesponsornet.ca, click on Dealing with Conflict; *Open Communication*, October 23, 2024