

ANEC - Process for managing conflict – broad range of situations

Author: Andrew King – info@groupworksolutions.com.au

A **Acknowledge that a conflict is occurring.** Until conflict is acknowledged, it runs the risk of exploding. A simple acknowledgement often reduces some of the pressure surrounding conflict and allows an opportunity for greater learning or change to occur. A lot of energy in conflict situations simmers because people feel they have not been fully understood. When conflicts occur in groups, leaders need to acknowledge the issue and the importance of that issue for specific people. Try using the statement... “This is an important issue...”.

N **Normalise the feelings involved in the conflict.** Conflict usually involves intense feelings where someone judges themselves or someone else due to what was said or done. Normalising allows participants to see conflict as a common and normal life experience that allows relationships an opportunity to develop. Emphasise that the importance is on how the conflict is dealt with. This reduces the intensity of the feelings involved and allows the issue to be examined with less emotion. When the conflict occurs between a small number of group members (2-3 people), link its relevance and importance to the other group members and the wider community. This systemic approach to viewing conflict normalises the experience of conflict to being an issue that most people continually learn about. For example, two parents arguing about different approaches to discipline in a parenting group, demonstrate something about how this discussion is occurring throughout the wider community by many other parents.

E **Explore the issues as appropriate.** Exploring the conflict involves understanding the foreground and the background of what is occurring. In a group, it involves allowing the participants directly involved an opportunity to express themselves, as well as inviting observations from other group members. At all times, blame and intellectualisation is avoided or challenged by the leader. Avoid blaming or scapegoating any group member, and if this occurs, return to acknowledging the issue and normalising the feelings. The group leader may decide that due to the issues being too different from the context of the group, they will meet with the people concerned after the group session has ended to discuss the issue further.

C **Recognise what choices exist regarding how to deal with the conflict.** When sufficient exploration has occurred, a decision needs to be made about how to deal with the conflict. These choices need to be clearly understood and the relevant parties take responsibility for what they decide. As a result of the discussion, identify what needs to happen next. These choices may involve:

- the development of a new understanding of each other and the issues
- an agreement that people will ‘agree to disagree’
- a plan to continue to discuss the issue at another time
- clearer ways of working together as a group to achieve a common purpose