



Managing Team Conflict

Some tips to keep in mind when confronted with team conflict:

Allow every member to state his or her opinion. Excluding a member's ideas, even if they are unpopular, will lead to resentment, sacrificing group cohesion.

Don't come to consensus too quickly. Especially when teams are in the "forming" stage, members are so afraid of conflict that they come to consensus on a particular point that is inappropriate or incorrect. This "dumbing down" process hurts the quality of the team's performance and causes members to believe they could do better on their own.

Don't attack a member personally. Members should learn to separate incorrect or implausible ideas or conclusions from the person who states them. Criticisms should focus on task-oriented issues and not on personal attributes. This keeps arguments on a professional level, instead of degenerating into immature name calling, etc.

Summarize the conflict. What starts as a small difference of opinion can soon appear to be a large conflict; therefore, sometimes it is useful to summarize and list what both sides agree about and disagree about. Often, by acknowledging the common ground, factions are better able to compromise.

Switch sides. Blinded by their own ideas, sometimes people fail to see obvious virtues of another person's ideas. As a way to force members to really consider the other side of a conflict, panel members can try to argue the opposing viewpoint. Though it may be difficult at first, it can bring to light a solution that had not earlier been considered.

Tell a joke. When the team atmosphere is tense due to extended conflict, it helps for someone to "lighten up" by adding some humor to the situation. Such brief "tension breakers" can put the conflict into perspective.

Take a break. Sometimes, despite every constructive effort, members cannot resolve a conflict. In this case, the best thing to do is take a break (with the intention of coming back to the issue): move on to another agenda item or get away from one another for a while.

Involve an unbiased third party. A county/DHS staff person can provide an unbiased opinion in a dispute or help mediate a problem. The team should involve the staff person only as a last resort because it could end up causing more harm than good.