



How To Deal With Conflict In The Scouting Program



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A LEADER'S GUIDE

Terms of Reference:

1. This is a **leader's guide** ... but who is a leader?

Everyone must show leadership – especially in the management of conflict. A leader must:

- A. Recognize Conflict.
- B. Manage Conflict.
- C. Resolve Conflict.

2. **Recognize Conflict:** Scouting is built on satisfying relationships – conflict is like “sand in the machinery”.

Conflict can be healthy (leading to improvements) or unhealthy (sand in the machinery).

Common causes of conflict can include: colliding interests and/or priorities, misunderstandings, incomplete communication, lack of resources, process of change, personality clashes.

3. **“Third Party” Leader or Mediator.**

When do we need to ask for help in resolving conflict? Here's a helpful test: Is this situation resolvable by. (A), agreeing to disagree, or (B) caught up in irreconcilable differences? If B, you should recruit a third party group leader to find resolution as early as possible.

Sample Troop Discipline Policy

- Rules of the Troop are the Scout Oath and Law! Scouts and their leaders must set an example and be consistent in the application of the discipline policy.
- The discipline plan is intended to be self-enforced by the Scouts, with assistance from adult leaders. Scouts must therefore understand the policy and commit to honoring it.
- Actions beyond verbal warnings are administered by the Scoutmaster or an adult in charge of the meeting or activity.
- As suggested by the points below, there is a great deal of discretion in this policy. This is intentional as many incidents of inappropriate behavior have extenuating circumstances that require a thoughtful and measured response.
- Parents of offending Scouts will be contacted by the Scoutmaster or adult in charge before initiating an action to send a Scout home or suspend a Scout. The rationale for this action is to inform a parent of the behavior and subsequent discipline action of the troop.
- The policy is effective upon its mailing to every Scout and their parent or guardian.
- Every Scout and their parent or guardian are expected to sign the policy.
- Unacceptable behaviors include, but are not limited to; lying, stealing, fighting or failing to follow directions. It is also inappropriate to “talk back” to leaders, or be unkind to any other Scout.
- When a Scout intentionally violates a rule, or exhibits and unacceptable behavior, the leader will not yell or lecture. The leader will obtain the Scouts attention and inform the Scout of what action (or inaction) the Scout took that is in question. The leader will also inform the Scout of the consequences of continuing to perform that action. Consequences are at the leader's discretion and may include, but are not limited to; a verbal warning, a phone call to the Scout's guardians, or a dismissal from the current and/or future meeting or event.
- A severe violation of a rule or behavior, particularly where the safety of a Scout is concerned, may result in the immediate removal of the offending Scout from the meeting or event, and is at the leader's discretion.
- In the event the inappropriate behavior continues the Scoutmaster, in consultation with the offending Scout's Patrol Leader and two other adult leaders, may suspend the Scout from the troop for a specified period of time.
- Leader as described above includes any adult or Scout who is in a position of leadership; such as a Scoutmaster, Assistant Scoutmaster, Patrol Leader, or an adult leading a meeting or event.
- Permanent dismissal from the troop is a last resort, if it serves the best interest of the non-offending Scouts.

refine it. Reading an agreed-upon resolution can prevent future misunderstandings.

Formalize the agreement. You can get oral agreement, or the parties can finalize it with a handshake or sign a written letter of understanding. Even though the agreement is not a formal document, there are times when people feel more confident when they have an agreement in writing.

8. Celebrate and Check In.

When people work through a conflict, it's important to celebrate. This is an easy step to forget. Don't. View it as an investment in people's willingness to resolve future conflicts, preferably on their own.

A celebration ends what was likely a difficult set of interactions on a positive note. Base the celebration on the situation and people. It need be no more elaborate than starting a round of thank-yous or handshakes.

Finally, set a future time – a week, a month, or a few months away – when you will check in with the parties about how their agreement is holding up. This gives you and the parties an opportunity to fine-tune the agreement to stave off future problems and ensure that everyone remains satisfied.

4. Manage Conflict.

This is the crucial “fork in the road”! Will this be “managed” to harness “ownership” and create process improvement, or will it move to the stage of “Resolve Conflict”?

This can also be known as Prevention. Our packs, troops, and crews have the following tools at their disposal to prevent unhealthy conflict:

- A. A strong, identifiable unit committee.
- B. An involved committee chair (not unit leader's spouse).
- C. Regular contact with the chartered partner.
- D. Interviews with new parents and Scouts.
- E. Written policies and procedures:
 - I. Discipline.
 - II. Advancement Practices.
 - III. Attendance Expectations.
 - IV. Financial Obligations.
 - V. Handling of Funds.

5. Resolution of Conflict.

Sooner or later, we all end up here at least once. The following materials are provided to help you move back to the “agree to disagree” stage, or maybe even full agreement.

Word of warning: the alternative to resolution of conflict (irreconcilable differences) will generally mean that the “team” will split up. Unresolved issues between people never go away.

RESOURCES

Reducing Stress and Tension

Know your options.

Stress comes from the feeling that you don't have control. To counter this, know your options for every situation that may occur, and tell others what their options are.

Don't take it personally.

If someone has a problem, don't make it your personal problem. If people get angry at you or become verbally abusive, remember that their emotions are directed at the program or decision you are associated with, not you.

Network.

Work with others around you, and seek support. The best way to increase control over what happens around you is to make sure you have people who trust you. If you have a good rapport with others, you have extra resources that can help you reduce stressful situations.

Empathize with others.

Next time someone gets on your nerves, instead of feeling angry, change that into a feeling of empathy for the other person. Learn to say, "I can see this person's point of view," instead of, "This person is driving me nuts." It's a choice you can make about the attitude you'll have.

Invite questions. After all parties have given their views, give people a chance to ask for clarification.

Discuss and sort issues. Help the parties untangle the web of misunderstanding and break it into distinct issues. Write the issues on the flip chart or erasable board.

Decide which issues to discuss first. It's wise to start with an issue that's easy to resolve. Getting even a simple issue tentatively settled creates a feeling of optimism.

Discuss issues, and generate ideas for solution. This is the creative part of the process. To help parties explore potential solutions, you can reframe issues, ask questions, and politely challenge assumptions. If people get stuck on an issue, put it on hold and move on to the next one. As momentum builds toward resolution, there is a better chance of resolving the sticky point later. There's no need to finalize solutions in this step.

Review the issues and possible solutions. Have the group review the proposed solutions and how they fit together. Modify them as necessary. Sometimes at this juncture new issues arise. As the integration phase proceeds, people grow more optimistic, creative, and clear about what is important to them – and an undiscovered interest may suddenly surface. Be patient, and work on the newly surfaced interest as you did on earlier issues.

Agree to a resolution. When all the pieces have come together, the parties are ready to agree to a resolution. To be sure everyone has the same understanding of the agreement, you can draft the resolution and have the parties

7. Conduct the Process.

Hold a meeting to help the parties find a creative solution to their differences. The basic steps are as follows:

Set up the meeting environment. Have pens, paper, a box of tissues, a flip chart or erasable board, and markers at the ready. Give the participants pens and paper so they can take notes to help them remember points they want to clarify or questions they want to ask. Remind them, though, that you will gather their notes at the end of the meeting to protect confidentiality.

Open the meeting. Welcome everyone, and explain the steps for the meeting, as outlined in Figure 1. Let everyone know the time the meeting will end. Explain that people may ask to take breaks or request caucuses with you at any time. Discuss the basic rules that all conflict resolution meetings follow:

- People must speak respectfully to one another. A common way to ensure respectful dialogue is to have people begin their thoughts with “I.” Using “I” instead of “you,” “he,” or “she” assures they are giving their own perspective rather than blaming or accusing others.
- People are expected to speak and act in good faith – to tell the truth as they know it and to agree only to actions they are willing to do.
- Everyone must keep all information confidential.

Have the parties describe their experiences without interruptions. Have them take turns stating their understanding of the issues and their feelings about the conflict.

Ask what they want you to do.

When you have an angry person in front of you or on the telephone, it can be stressful trying to figure out what the individual really wants. Solve that problem by asking straight out: “How can I help you with that?” or “What would you like me to do about this?” By getting it out in the open, you can start looking for a compromise, and they will realize you are trying to help.

Praise the volunteer.

Use positive comments every once in a while. If people give you a hard time, find something to compliment them about. You might tell them they are obviously concerned for kids or they know a lot about Scouting.

Use the “Columbo” technique.

Remember Columbo, the TV detective? He always seemed so nonthreatening as he asked questions trying to solve the mystery. Pretend you’re Columbo, and ask your volunteers for help in understanding their situation. This technique allows you to gain control over the conversation and thereby reduces the stress associated with it.

Tips For The Group Leader

To handle conflict among your team members:

- **Ask those** who disagree to paraphrase one another's comments. This may help them learn if they really understand each other.
- **Work out** a compromise. Agree on the underlying source of conflict, then engage in give-and-take and, finally, agree on a solution.
- **Ask each** member to list what the other side should do. Exchange lists, select a compromise all are willing to accept and test the compromise to see if it meshes with team goals.
- **Have each** side write 10 questions for their opponents. This will allow them to signal their major concerns about the other side's position. And the answers may lead to a compromise.
- **Convince team** members they sometimes may have to admit they're wrong. Help them save face by convincing them that changing a position shows strength.
- **Respect the** experts on the team. Give their opinions more weight when the conflict involves their expertise, but don't rule out conflicting opinions.

Figure 1: Process Steps Checklist

When you meet with each person involved in the conflict, you will need to describe how the conflict resolution process works. Also repeat this explanation at the beginning of the conflict resolution meeting between the parties.

1. The conflict resolution meeting will open with the conflict manager welcoming people.
2. The group will discuss comfort issues and logistics, including location of bathrooms, refreshments, seating, time limitations, and dates for future meetings.
3. The conflict manager will discuss the ground rules:
 - The goal and benefits of the conflict resolution process.
 - The conflict manager's role as impartial facilitator and the organization's steward.
 - Expected decorum.
 - Confidentiality and concept of good faith.
 - Alternatives to this process.
 - Use of caucus.
 - How the meeting will proceed.
 - The role of outsiders, if any.
 - Questions about ground rules.
 - Any additions to ground rules as discussed and agreed to by all parties.
4. The parties will make an oral or written agreement to participate in and follow ground rules.
5. The conflict manager will briefly describe the conflict.
6. The parties will voice their understanding of the conflict.
7. The parties and conflict manager will discuss and clarify their understandings of one another's perspectives on the conflict.
8. The parties and conflict manager will identify the key interests and establish an order in which to discuss them.
9. The parties will generate ideas for solutions to key concerns.
10. The parties will evaluate solutions in light of the interests they've identified.
11. The parties will select mutually agreeable solutions.
12. The parties will discuss implementation, monitoring, and follow-up to the solutions.
13. The parties and conflict manager will fine-tune and write up the agreed-upon resolution.
14. The conflict manager will initiate a way to celebrate the resolution.
15. The conflict manager will ensure follow-up.

6. Educate Parties, and Get Agreement to Participate

Explain everything that will happen in the conflict resolution process, and ask each person to agree to participate. Figure 1 includes a checklist of steps you will want to cover with the parties. Use this checklist twice – first when you are educating the parties privately and again at the opening of the first conflict management meeting.

Don't Let Personality Stop You

When dealing with people, be ready to react to the action of different personalities. Some examples:

- **Dealing with** the aggressor, who is intimidating, hostile and loves to threaten.

What to do: Listen to everything the person has to say. Avoid arguments and be formal, calling the person by name. Be concise and clear with your reactions.

- **Dealing with** the underminer, who takes pride in criticism and is sarcastic and devious.

What to do: Focus on the issues and don't acknowledge sarcasm. Don't overreact.

- **Dealing with** the unresponsive person, who is difficult to talk to and never reveals his or her ideas.

What to do: Ask open-ended questions, learn to be silent and wait for the person to say something. Be patient and friendly.

- **Dealing with** the egotist, who knows it all and feels and acts superior.

What to do: Make sure you know the facts. Agree when possible and ask questions and listen. Disagree only when you know you're right.

Recognizing When Someone Needs Professional Help

Very few of us are counselors or psychologists, but on occasion we will come to believe that a person needs to seek professional care.

If a conflict is to be resolved, we may have to tell this person that they should consider a “referral.”

Referral is counseling jargon for “approaching someone to try and get them to get some help.” This can be very difficult to do for a number of reasons including being afraid of the person’s reaction, fearing you may hurt their feelings or cause them to leave the group.

Here are some things to keep in mind when approaching someone for referral or approaching someone with whom you need to discuss a conflictual issue:

1. Plan ahead. Outline your points and know what you want to say.
2. Set up a meeting or choose a time that will be relatively private and allow you enough time to discuss things.
3. If the decision to refer is made after a highly emotional event or you feel very angry or upset, wait a reasonable amount of time until your feelings have cooled down some.
4. Be direct.
5. Identify the problems and stick to objective data or descriptions of the undesirable behaviors.
6. Don’t moralize or try and diagnose.
7. Tell what you expect from the person.
8. Don’t threaten.
9. Start and end with a positive comment if possible.
10. Give suggestions for where to find professional help, if appropriate. (Call the 211 Helpline in the Twin Cities metro or most health insurance plans offer an employee assistance plan.)

How much time will the process take? To develop a time estimate, consider the number of people involved, the complexity of issues, and how damaged relationships are. While people need time to air their side, often a deadline helps them stay focused. Use deadlines like a spice – just a little, and at the right moment. Sometimes having a time limit helps people feel good about resolving an issue sooner than anticipated – it sets everyone up as working together to beat the clock. Any time you can get people in conflict to work together or agree – even about the weather – you are reinforcing their ability to work through a conflict together.

How will you handle people’s emotions regarding the conflict? Don’t underestimate the importance of feelings, even if emotions don’t seem strong. Many resolutions hinge on an apology or acknowledgement of someone’s misjudgment of people or events.

In what setting will the meeting occur? The physical setting can influence the process more than you might expect. Be sure the setting is private, comfortable, and free from interruptions. Be sure it doesn’t “belong” to either party. Seat people at angles to one another so that they can choose when and whether to make eye contact. Round and square tables work best.

How will you protect people’s need for privacy and confidentiality? It is usually enough to have people agree orally and in each other’s presence that what is said will remain confidential.

What assumptions are people making about one another? Understanding these assumptions will give you important clues about issues that need to be discussed at the conflict resolution meeting. Dispelling inaccurate assumptions is a major contribution to mending relationships.

Is the conflict interpersonal or is it induced by the system – or both? Be alert to system-induced conflicts and open-minded about changing the systems that create them.

Are there known limitations to potential resolutions that you must impose on behalf of the organization? Some solutions may be limited by finances, policies, mission goals, ethical standards, or legal requirements. Be aware of such limitations before a conflict resolution meeting.

5. Design the Process

Answering these questions will help you plan the best way to bring the parties together to address the conflict:

What are the goals of the process? If the people involved must work together, an important goal will be to reestablish trust and harmony. The goals might include changing or clarifying processes in the organization.

What Will My Style Be?

Each of us has a more comfortable personal style when addressing conflict or confrontation.

Understanding that, we can also choose our approach – control our style.

Here are three alternatives: which one do you think will work best?

HARD APPROACH

- The goal is victory.
- Participants are adversaries.
- Stand hard on the problem and the people.
- Demand concessions.
- Distrust others.
- Dig on and give little.
- Apply pressure.
- Make threats.
- Conceal your bottom line.
- Demand one-sided gains as the price of agreement.
- Look for the solutions you can accept.

SOFT APPROACH

- The goal is agreement.
- Participants are friends.
- Be soft on the problem and the people.
- Make concessions to cultivate the relationship.
- Trust others.
- Be flexible and willing to change your position.
- Yield to pressure.
- Make offers.
- Disclose your bottom line.
- Accept one-side losses to reach agreements.
- Look for the solutions they can accept.

PRINCIPLED APPROACH

- The goal is a wise outcome.
- Participants are problem-solvers.
- Be soft on the people, hard on the problem.
- Separate the relationships from the problem.
- Trust is not an issue.
- Focus on interests, not positions.
- Yield to principle, not pressure.
- Explore interests.
- Avoid having a bottom line.
- Develop a solution with mutual gain.
- Develop multiple options to consider.

included in the conflict resolution meeting, you may need to ask for their advice or opinions as options are being devised.

Are these individuals capable of making rational, informed decisions? After you have named all the individuals, you need to decide whether they are competent to participate in a conflict resolution process. For example, a person who seems overwrought with emotion is still capable of participating; a person who seems overwrought and is acting out violently is not.

What are the power relationships among the individuals? Who has what sorts of power, and who accedes (or does not accede) to that power?

What gender or cultural differences must be considered? Might culture, gender, or other communication differences have created the misunderstanding?

How does each person describe the conflict? Use this information to assess how the parties place blame or claim responsibility in the conflict.

What is each party's position? What solutions do they seek?

What does each party say – or what can be inferred – about their key needs and concerns? Understanding each party's interests gives you a picture of the conflict and may even show you possibilities for resolution.

The way you get to *why* is important. A direct *why* can make people feel you doubt their reasoning, which can make them defensive. Avoid phrases or tones of voice that sound interrogating. Rather approach the question in a conversational manner. You can state, as a guess, what you think a party's interest might be and check it out with them. When people hear their interests articulated, they feel understood. It also becomes clear to them what elements a resolution must contain to satisfy them.

Many people have strong feelings when they are engaged in a conflict. Your recognition of their feelings will usually lower the intensity of the emotion, helping them to think more clearly.

4. Analyze the Conflict.

Your analytic abilities, managerial judgment, and creative thinking are your best tools for analyzing a conflict. Your analysis should answer the following questions:

Can this conflict be handled by this informal process?

Some situations require special processes. Such situations include harassment, discrimination, and involvement of children or vulnerable adults, and evidence of illegal behavior.

Who are all the people with stakes in this conflict?

Revisit the list you created in Step 3 to be sure you know the name of every person who is affecting or being affected by the conflict. In addition to the people who are parties to the conflict, list others who may be affected by or concerned about the resolution. Though they probably won't be

Favorite Scouting “People Rules”

- Always be absolutely, rigidly flexible.
- For rules to work, they must be applied equally to all.
- When in doubt, be open and honest.
- Losing control means exactly that.
- When it looks like the adults may disagree, let the boys decide (when appropriate).

Make It Go Away In Eight Easy Steps!

Managing a Major Conflict – Beginning to End

1. Identify the conflict.

Don't assume it is obvious or simple. Don't assume it is one-sided. Don't wait for people to come to you.

2. Decide whether to intervene.

You may have identified a conflict. Now you have to decide what to do about it. Consider the following questions:

What are the likely consequences of not resolving this issue now? What will be the best and worst possible outcomes if you don't intervene at this point?

Are you the most appropriate person to help resolve this conflict? The general rule is to handle conflicts as far down on the organizational ladder as possible, if appropriate.

Can you be objective about the people and issues?

Can you make the time to deal with the resolution process? Conflict resolution takes time because it is predominantly a communication process. The time investment for an average conflict is as follows:

Gather information from involved parties: 40-60 minutes for each person.

Analyze the conflict and tailor the process: 30-60 minutes.

Brief parties about the process: 30-45 minutes.

Conduct conflict resolution meeting(s): 60-120 minutes each.

If you don't have the time, skills, or objectivity to manage the conflict, find someone who does. If no one with your organization can facilitate the conflict impartially, you may need to find an outside mediator.

3. Identify Parties, Issues, and Emotions.

Once you've decided you will manage the conflict, you need to understand what you're facing. Answer the following questions:

Who has the stake in the conflict? These are the parties.

Do certain groups have the same interests and positions? Think of like-minded groups as one party.

How does each person see the issues in the conflict?

What does each party seek as a solution to the conflict?

How emotional are people regarding the conflict?

Make appointments with known parties to collect information about who is involved, the issues, and their feelings about the situation. Help them uncover their own interests by learning *why* they seek a particular solution to the conflict.