

MEDIATION & SUPPORTED CONVERSATION GUIDE



by the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective

This guide is part of a series of resources on Community Organizing:

- Organizing Basics
- Facilitation
- Convening meetings / teams
- How to Start a Successful Group
- Security Culture
- Mediation / Supported Conversation

Check them out at neighborhoodanarchists.org/organizing

Introduction

We want to do conflict well, for tensions between people to be healthy and contribute to personal and collective growth. This is a guide for people helping to mediate or support a conflict resolution conversation. This guide assumes the people involved have already agreed to talk with your support.

The role of a mediator is to provide a supportive space for people to talk, start off the conversation right, intervene as needed, and ensure that everything has been resolved at the end.

Disclaimer: In cases of bullying, abuse, or attempts to dominate/control, mediation is not helpful and is not advised. This guide is for people that seek to have equal power and are having some kind of misunderstanding or hurt feelings that they would both like to resolve.

Conflict Resolution Principles

- We engage to the best of our ability to resolve conflict and seek help when needed.
- We resolve conflicts as close as possible to the people involved. Begin with the people directly involved, and expand from there as needed.
- We have mutual responsibility and care for each other. We act in good faith and work to be constructive, empathetic, and honest. We resolve conflict with both our individual needs and the needs of the collective in mind.
- Disagreements can inspire discussion and learning. However, if a disagreement is blocking progress, is hurtful, or is harmful, then a resolution needs to be found.
- Resolution means the parties involved feel heard, the agreed outcome or change is clear, and normal activity is possible. If a conflict continues to negatively impact an individual or the group, it is not resolved.

- We view each other through the "Green Lens":
 - This person is a hero, whole and complete
 - They have goals, dreams, and a desire to make a difference
 - They have their own answers
 - They are contributing to me right now
 - They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect

Read about the green lens here:

<https://creatingwhatmatters.co.nz/free-resources/the-green-lens/>

Before the conversation

There are some things you can do in advance to set yourselves up for success.

Check in with everyone – It's good to check in with everyone in advance to make sure they're comfortable with you supporting their conversation and ask them if there's anything they'd like you to know in advance. You don't want to get too deep into either side of the story, but a basic overview can be helpful.

Establish norms and expectations – Let them know your process for the conversation (maybe even give them this guide), ask them norms they want, ask them what they want from you, and/or ask them to share or think about their goals for the conversation.

Write letters or notes – Some people process or express themselves better in writing. You could suggest that everyone write letters to each other in advance. These could be sent to everyone or just to you. Or they could just write notes to remind themselves of things they want to say. It can be very helpful to write things down because it's easy to forget once things get emotional (this is especially helpful if anyone involved is conflict avoidant or more passive.) Ask those involved what they think would be best and use your judgment.

Starting the conversation

Just the presence of a supportive 3rd party can be a huge help and allow people to feel more open and safe. Helping to start the conversation off well is an important part of that.

Welcome – Thank and acknowledge them for being here to address this conflict. Let them know the steps you're going to take to open the space and how you'll support them throughout.

Grounding / Presence – Ask if there's anything anyone wants to do or say first to shed the outside stress of the day and be more present.

Set Norms – Start off reviewing the conflict resolution principles above and other group norms for communication. Ask if there are any norms they'd like to be present for this conversation.

Ask what they want out of the conversation – It's good to establish at the beginning what each person's expectations and goals are. Examples: Feeling heard, apologies, understanding the other person, developing better communication for the future, etc. Maybe write them down.

Ask if there's anything in particular they want from you as mediator – They could express how much or little they want you to intervene. Let them know they're in control of the process.

Setting norms and asking what they want out of the conversation and from you as a mediator can be done before the meeting, but it's good to reiterate as the beginning of the conversation either way.

When to intervene

Most of the time you'll just be listening. You only need to intervene if they're not making progress on their own, or if you see a potential way to be supportive.

Escalation – If things are getting heated without being productive and are continuing to escalate you need to step in. This is why you're there.

Potential misunderstanding – If you notice a potential misunderstanding it could be good to jump in and make sure they are both clear. Often people can be using the same word or phrase to mean very different things.

Talking in circles – If you notice them talking about the same things over again or jumping from topic to topic without any resolution they could be stuck and need some help.

Interruptions – If they are interrupting each other it could be good to remind them to listen. It's important they have space to get things out and to be heard.

Long silence – Some silence is good, but if there's a long silence you may need to step in to prompt dialogue.

Meaningful looks – If someone gives you a meaningful look it could be a subtle ask for assistance.

Potential interventions

There are a lot of ways you could intervene. Here are a few suggestions:

Take a breath – If things are getting really heated a breath or a short break can be good.

Restate what you're hearing – Summarize what you're hearing. This helps give some distance and space to reflect and clarify.

Ask them to say what they're hearing the other person say – This helps clear up potential misunderstandings.

Suggest a process – You can suggest a way forward. This is especially good if they're stuck or talking in circles. Maybe breaking down the conflict into different topics to be

addressed one at a time.

Ask if they're willing to resolve the conflict – If they're really getting nowhere ask if they're both willing or ready to resolve the conflict (doesn't mean that they have to do it immediately or know how to, just if they are willing to). It can be useful to take a step back and for all parties to reflect on where they're at. The truthful answer may be no, which is good to know and may mean you need to come back to this later.

Closing

As much as you can, make sure that everything is truly resolved. Talking through conflict is uncomfortable and people may want to just be done even if things aren't resolved.

Ask if everything is now resolved – Any nagging things you want to get out? Anything else you want to say?

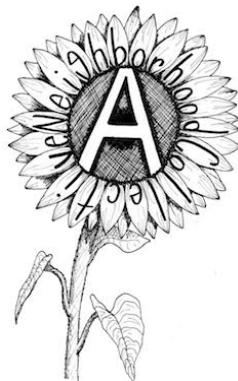
Ask if they have received what they wanted out of the conversation – Reflect back to the beginning. Did we accomplish what we set out to do?

Next steps – What else needs to be done? Future conversations? What can be put in place for the future? Better ways to communicate, support systems, new norms, etc.

Acknowledge them – It's not easy to proactively address conflict. Acknowledge them for what they brought to the conversation (vulnerability, courage, compassion, openness, etc.). Potentially ask them to acknowledge each other. After an emotional conversation it can be nice for everyone to remember why they like each other in the first place.

Follow up – Consider following up a week or month afterward to see how things are going.

Thank you for supporting others to resolve conflict! It is vitally important work.



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occupied Kalapuya Ilihi land in so-called Eugene, Oregon

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