

Lesson #1

The Nature of Conflict

Objective:

Participants will

- Consider conflict as neither bad nor good, but as neutral.
- Acknowledge that the way people deal with conflict makes it constructive or destructive.

Materials:

Overhead transparency of Handout “Chinese Symbol” (following pages).

Procedure:

1. Ask the group how they believe most people think about conflict or how most people respond to it. Take note of the number of positive and negative words used to describe conflict.

Note that conflict management training attempts to change the way people think about conflict situations, to teach that conflict is a natural part of life. Instead of avoiding or fearing conflict, conflict management training tries to teach individuals to view conflict as a natural event in our life. Conflict in itself is not good or bad, it's how we deal with it that makes it constructive or destructive. Conflict can be viewed as an opportunity to learn, to make a correction, reach a solution, or, perhaps, to apologize.

Ask participants to give examples.

Show the Chinese symbol. Explain that the Chinese language uses two symbols to express the word “crisis” or “conflict.” One symbol stands for danger; the other, for opportunity. Those who dread or avoid conflict seem to see only the potential for danger in a challenging situation. Another way to look at conflict is to see the possibilities, the opportunities, the potential in each conflict situation.

2. Choose one or more of the following activities.

Activity 1¹ Positive conflict memory

Objective: Participants will focus on positive aspects of conflict.

Materials: paper and pens/pencils or chart paper, markers and tape

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to form groups of four and share a positive memory of a conflict which was resolved. Ask them to record the reasons that the experience was a good one.
2. Invite the small groups to report to the whole group on the reasons they remembered these conflicts as positive experiences. If the groups used chart paper and markers, post their work.

Activity 2 How We Learn to Manage Conflict

Objective:

Participants will understand the power of early childhood memories, experiences and messages about conflict.

Materials: None needed, except for Option of “Memory” handout (in following pages).

Procedure:

1. Direct participants to think back as far as they can to their earliest memory. Ask them, then, to recall their earliest conflict memory. Ask these questions:
 - What conflict did you witness or experience?
 - Who were the parties engaged in the conflict?
 - What were your feelings as a witness or party?
 - What kind of behaviors were modeled for you?
 - What was the outcome of the conflict: positive or negative?
 - What did you learn from this experience?
2. Give participants a few minutes to think about their early memory. Elicit responses from volunteers or allow participants to talk in pairs. **Procedure Option:** Use the “Memory” handout (in following pages) to allow participants to write responses instead of talking.

¹ Activities developed by Jo Dee Davis, Madeleine G. Trichel, Anita Whitely, Terry Wheeler

3. Ask what memories students are making now. Ask what students are learning from their experiences.

4. Close the Session. Ask participants to consider

- How can we use this information in our classrooms?
- How can we use this information in our school?
- How does this information apply to our School Conflict Management Action Plan?

Trainer Tips

- Think about your participants before you select this activity. It may be very powerful, even painful, for some participants.
- Be ready to allow sufficient time for talking, if participants do want to share. Be sensitive to those who may not want to share information about early memories or experiences. Be ready to move on, if participants are unwilling to discuss their early memory.

Do not use this activity if you think it may be painful for participants.

HANDOUT: Chinese Symbol

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Thinking Back on Early Memories

