

27. CONFLICT RESOLUTION EXERCISE

TIME - 1 hour

GROUP SIZE – Unlimited pairs

WHY?

Conflict is everywhere: in our families, at work, with our friends, with strangers. It is natural and inevitable, so long as difference and diversity exists. How we deal with conflict, however, can make a world of difference in these relationships. It can be the difference between breakdowns or break-throughs, where people reach new levels of learning and understanding. This exercise provides participants with an opportunity to practice different ways of dealing with conflict and to reflect on how each of them feels to both parties in the conflict. Transforming the ways we deal with conflict with others can be powerful, productive, and healthy.

HOW?

There are four broad categories for what we do in this exercise:

- a) **BLAME**: Share in a blaming way.
- b) **REFLECT**: Think about how it felt to be “blamed”.
- c) **MIRRORING**: Paraphrasing the words and reflecting the feelings.
- d) **SHARE WITH COMPASSION**: Taking responsibility.

The following steps are a “script” of what the facilitator says during the exercise. Notes to the facilitator are in italics.

BLAME: Share in a blaming way.

1. Everyone pick a partner. Sit directly facing each other.
2. Pick an “A” and a “B.” All A’s raise your hand. All B’s raise your hand. What a group!
3. Now everyone take a moment to think of someone with whom you have been in some sort of a conflict in the last year. It could be the president of a highly destructive company, or it could also be a parent, a teacher, a friend, or anyone else with whom you’ve had a conflict. The more significant this person in your life, the more meaningful this process may turn out to be.
4. Take a moment to think about this person, then raise your hand when you’ve thought of someone.
5. In this exercise, you will all have a chance to speak to the person you are thinking of. First, A will speak to B, as if this is the person with whom you have a conflict. B, your job is to listen silently, without responding. You cannot talk during A’s turn. A, your job is to speak with as much judgment and blame as possible. Consider it your job to tell the person you’re in conflict with exactly what’s wrong with them. Start as many sentences

as possible with the word “you.” For example: “You are totally judgmental and have no tolerance for other people’s opinions. You’re closed-minded, heartless, selfish, mean, and stupid.” Does everyone get the idea? Any questions?

6. When everyone understands what to do, signal A to start speaking. They have three minutes to speak. Make sure everyone is ready to move on before continuing.

REFLECT: Think about how it felt to be blamed.

7. B, take a moment to think about how it felt to listen to A. How would you feel if you really were the person in a conflict with A? Share this with your partner.

BLAME: Share in a blaming way.

8. Now reverse roles. B will have a chance to speak to A as though they are the person you are in a conflict with. A, your job is to listen silently without responding. B, you’re going to speak with as much judgment and blame as possible. Consider it your job to tell the person you’re in conflict with exactly what’s wrong with them. Start as many sentences as possible with the word “you.” Begin.

9. B now has three minutes to speak. Make sure everyone is ready to move on before continuing.

REFLECT: Think about how it felt to be blamed.

10. A, take a moment to think about how it felt to listen to B. How did their communication make you feel? Let them know what you felt.

MIRRORING: Paraphrasing words and reflecting feelings.

11. Okay! Now I want to introduce a concept we call ‘mirroring’. So A, I want you to say a word, and whatever it is, I want B to ‘mirror’ that word, by saying it right back to A. Try it a few times with a few different words. Make sure everyone understands what to do; then give the signal for A to start.

12. Now B, try saying a few different words that A will mirror back to you. Take another minute to do this.

13. Now A, try saying a whole sentence. It could be anything. And B, you’re going to mirror that. For example, if A says: “I like green tomatoes,” then B would say, “You like green tomatoes.” If A says: “You’re my friend,” then B would say, “I’m your friend.” Try this with a few different sentences, to get the feel for it. Begin!

14. Did that work okay? Any questions?

15. Okay, now switch. B will say a few sentences, and A will mirror each of them.

SHARE WITH COMPASSION: Taking responsibility.

16. Now remember that conflict we were just exploring? It's time for A to have another chance to speak to B. This time, talk from your own experience. Express yourself honestly and yet compassionately. Treat B the way you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes. Start as many sentences as possible with the word "I." For example: "I feel hurt sometimes, when I feel de-valued. I work very hard, and sometimes I feel like nothing I do is good enough." B, listen carefully, because, in a little while, you're going to mirror your partner.

17. When everyone understands what to do, signal A to start speaking. A will have approximately three minutes to speak and share.

18. B, think about how it felt to listen to A. Would you react differently from how you would have reacted the first time? Now B, you're going to mirror back what you heard A say. For example: "I hear that you feel hurt sometimes, when you feel de-valued. You work very hard, and sometimes it seems like nothing you do is good enough." A, listen carefully to see if you've been heard. Notice if B misses anything important to you. B, the idea is not to use the same exact words, but to express all the same points you heard, possibly in less words. Any questions? Begin.

19. When everyone is complete, ask: "A, do you feel heard? Tell B if they missed anything, and then B, mirror back what you missed the first time."

20. Wait a few minutes for the pairs to complete.

SHARE WITH COMPASSION: Taking responsibility.

21. Now B will have another chance to speak to A. Talk from your own experience. Express yourself honestly and yet compassionately. Treat A the way you would want to be treated if you were in their shoes. Start as many sentences as possible with the word "I." A, listen carefully, because you know what's coming up next. B will have approximately three minutes to speak.

22. A, take a moment to think about how it felt to listen to B. Are you reacting differently from how you reacted the first time? Now A, you're going to mirror back what you heard person B say. B, listen carefully to see if you've been heard. Begin.

23. When everyone is complete, ask: "B, do you feel heard? Tell A if they missed anything, and then A, mirror back what you missed the first time."

24. Wait a few minutes for the pairs to wrap up.

25. Find a non-verbal way of thanking your partner.

26. Now let's form a circle and have some time for discussion and reflection. Create at least 20 minutes for discussion. Suggested questions include:

- Which style did you find easier to listen to? Why?
- What did you notice about yourself as you were blaming? What about when you

- were mirroring?
- What normally happens to you in conflict situations? Do you gain more understanding of the person and become better friends, or do problems grow?
 - Even if the first way of communicating might not be very effective for resolving conflicts, how did you feel about it? Did any of you enjoying getting things off your chest?
 - How might you deal with that kind of energy?
 - Were any of you surprised by anything that happened in that exercise? How many of you feel like you learned something from that? What did you learn?
 - What did you think of the mirroring process? Was it hard or easy? Why? Do you think it could help some people understand each other better? How did it feel to be mirrored? Did you really feel heard?
 - How can we best support each other in remaining respectful and open-minded, and communicating clearly, during conflict?
 - What do you define as a healthy balance between considering the other person's feelings and standing up for your self?