Creating a Therapeutic Alliance:
Working with Conflict

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Introduction

Welcome to the Creating a Therapeutic Alliance: Working with Conflict module!

The success of Wisconsin’s long-term care programs depends on the success of the interdisciplinary team. Your job isn’t easy; it takes a lot of professional skills and judgment. It is not always easy to determine what a member hopes to achieve with your support; the member may not be able to express his or her own aspirations unless the right questions are asked. We know that the member’s aspirations (personal outcomes) can be identified only by getting to know the member, and by asking some difficult or seemingly obvious questions. We also know that a tension frequently exists between supporting a person in achieving his or her own aspirations and trying to help him or her stay as safe and healthy as possible.

There are often other barriers to identification of personal outcomes that are present at the time of the assessment. Many times the member is specifically seeking only “things” and “services.” This is understandable; it’s how the Medicaid fee-for-service program usually works—you get a paper prior authorization for a service or item that a doctor has written a prescription for. The member might also have been encouraged to ask for specific equipment or services by their friends, or even by resource center staff. New members are often confused about the purpose of long-term care and about how care-planning decisions will be made. People are often confused about what ‘choice’ means in long-term care programs; they might expect that they will be invited to order up whatever services they want, rather than be offered selection among several cost-effective alternatives.

Working with conflict is just one of the many skills case managers need in order to be a successful care planner in the world of outcome-based care. Often the term "conflict" has a negative connotation. However, we can change our perspective of conflict by viewing it as an opportunity for learning, growth, and positive change.

This training about conflict is not objective. In fact, it is extremely subjective and deliberately personal. It does not tell you what to do in any given situation. It does not suggest ways to change other people or offer hints about how to get them to do what you want. This is a personal approach to conflict. This module is a tool to help you notice how you react in situations of conflict, and offers ideas about how you might change yourself.
The questions throughout this material provide an opportunity to observe your own responses to conflict and to learn more about how you relate to conflict. Specifically, you will be invited to notice:

- The situations that are most challenging for you;
- How those situations affect you;
- How to consider those situations from different perspectives; and
- What you might do to neutralize the stress and work with the conflict.

**Getting Started**

When someone enrolls in an outcome-based long-term care program, a few people are designated to help that person achieve her or his desired outcomes. By design, they are supposed to operate as a team. They are supposed to collaborate. For many people, this teaming arrangement works well. Sometimes, there is conflict.

When the first rubs of conflict are met with haste, even the intention to collaborate can change. Some of the characteristics of good collaboration - humility, commitment, curiosity, and creativity - disappear. Instead, people operate as though there is only one correct choice or one correct decision. One person has to be right, to be in control, to win. Or, people make assumptions without fully understanding the situation that can lead to negative reactions. Emotions are involved that can cause a situation to escalate. **Even among well-intentioned people, the situation can quickly become a contest**
or, at worst a battle. Some people become aggressive, some passive aggressive, and others fold. None of these are characteristics of good collaboration.

How does it happen that people who agree to collaborate sometimes function as adversaries? When conflict is approached with the belief that someone has to win, by definition, the other people are positioned to lose - and they feel it. Once that kind of interaction has been experienced, it can be difficult to continue in good faith. It is difficult to have a positive ongoing relationship with someone you no longer trust. One side effect of this is the assumption that conflict is because of someone else.

Books and training workshops use titles that refer to people as difficult, noncompliant, challenging, and toxic. We are practically encouraged to use blaming and adversarial language to identify people with whom we experience conflict. Some people label themselves. Slogans, such as advocates or mothers from hell, have become popular. One side effect of this language is the assumption that conflict is because of someone else.

It is too convenient to suggest that conflict and the responsibility for resolving it are in the hands of another person. “He is difficult, noncompliant, challenging, toxic, from hell, etc. If he’d behave better (i.e., do it my way), we wouldn’t be in this mess.”
As soon as there is more than one person, there is the possibility for more than one perspective. **Tensions arise when one or more of the people involved believe that their perspective is the only valid perspective or do not take the time to consider the other's position.** What is probably a more accurate assessment (than assigning blame), is that when someone, in whatever role, does something or does not do something a certain way, “I feel challenged. I’m not sure how to carry on.”

It's my job to make sure you understand your responsibilities as a member, so read this (he'll never understand it!) and sign here. You won't get everything you want, but we will work on achieving your outcomes.

Wow, she is really bossy! We just met, and she wants me to remember all these rules. She'll never understand why I need a new van. What's an 'outcome', anyway?
Scenario

The following scenario is an example of how conflict between the interdisciplinary team and a member’s family can begin and lead to problems. Assess your reaction to the situation by reading the scenario and responding to the question that follows.

Sarah is a 28-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and severe mental retardation. She recently moved to the area with her family from another part of the state, and was enrolled into a long-term care program by her parents. Sarah’s parents both work part-time and have another adult child living at home, who is currently out of work. Sarah has never participated in any activities out of the home, other than attending school. The care manager is anxious to begin the planning process to determine how best to support Sarah and expose her to new experiences. Sarah’s mother refuses to participate in person-centered planning meetings, doesn’t want Sarah to do anything in the community and insists that the agency pay for repairs on the family’s only vehicle, an accessible van.

The care manager suggests that the mechanic who the agency has a contract with take a look at the van and give some suggestion as to what repairs are needed, and feels that the family should share in the cost of repairing the van since it is used by everyone. Sarah’s mother agrees to have the mechanic look at the van, but refuses to share the cost of repairs since the family “does so much for Sarah and gets nothing for it.”

After several weeks of aggravating phone calls with Sarah’s mother, the care manager begins to feel like he is making no progress and is concerned that the family does not always have Sarah’s best interest in mind. He is also concerned that his future relationship with the family will suffer if he holds his ground and denies their request. He decides to approve the van repairs, paid in full by the agency, to avoid further conflict.

A month later Sarah’s mother calls to complain that no one understands what she goes through every day and to report that, “Sarah doesn’t want to use the respite provider the care manager arranged for her, so the agency can just pay the family for that weekend each month and another thing…”

The care manager feels like he is now backed into a corner and is frustrated that Sarah’s mother suddenly wants more things.

How do you feel about the way the care manager handled the situation regarding the van?

Click on the reaction below that most closely describes your feelings about how the care manager handled the situation:
• He shouldn’t have given in to Sarah’s mother when she insisted on the CMO paying for the van repair. It set a precedent and now they will just want more and more things. (link to text)

• He did the right thing by giving in to the mother’s request for the CMO to pay for the van repairs. It would have taken too much time to negotiate with the mother. It was easier just to pay for it. (link to text)

Text:

Working with conflict should never be mistaken as passivity. On the contrary, to work effectively with conflict means:

 ✓ Learning more about what you and others value.
 ✓ Finding common ground.
 ✓ Respecting the relationships.

In the ‘van repair’ scenario, the care manager tried to gain the mother’s trust by eliminating the conflict. The care manager may have avoided the immediate conflict, but by not taking the time to work the conflict through, he missed the opportunity to see the situation from the mother’s point of view, learn about what she values and establish a working relationship for the future.

There are external consultants and a more formal complaint and grievance process that can be used when collaborators find themselves unable to resolve their differences. Then, they will still have to work together. It makes sense to build trust rather than resentment; and to treat one another with respect. Contentiousness is not the only way out of conflict. With a determination to better understand the seeds and elements of conflict in ourselves, there is an opportunity to work with it in order improve our collaborative relationships.
CHAPTER 1: Possible Sources of Conflict on Teams

Introduction

*By the end of this chapter you should be able to:*
- Identify a variety of “seeds” of conflict.
- Recognize communication and attitude patterns in yourself that are potentially sowing those seeds.
- Recognize situations that may be ripe for “seeds” of conflict to flourish.

There are many factors that influence our ability to collaborate successfully. Conflict often arises from a variety of sources, which interferes with a team’s ability to function successfully and can even misdirect the team’s focus away from the task at hand. **Improving your ability to identify possible sources of conflict and how to deal with them will improve your ability to work successfully on a team when conflict arises.**

Many people agree to collaborate, and work together as a team without fully appreciating what it will mean. Something sounded good about the job or the program. They were told how the process would work or they were given something to read about it. Maybe both. And so they agreed. Does that mean the agreement to collaborate was an informed decision?

We are conditioned to believe that ‘informing’ is a moment in time. A law officer informs a suspect that there is a right to remain silent, to have an attorney present, etc. We have heard this many times in movies and television shows as informing people of their rights. **Do people really understand everything they are told?** Will they recall and incorporate the information they received into the situations that unfold? Probably not. Will they be frustrated or angry when others assume that they should know or understand something? Probably. Will there be suspicion, embarrassment, cover-up, judgement, anger? Probably.

![Image of a character thinking about the return policy issue.](image-url)
For example: Some professionals can become frustrated or angry when participants in long-term care do not understand how the process is supposed to work, even after they have been informed.

Some members become frustrated when social workers and nurses start asking questions. If, as a member, it was my understanding that a social worker and a nurse were supposed to help me get what I think I need, that might seal the deal for me. When they start asking me why I want something or talking about how expensive it is, then, my experience might feel like they are trying to decide what I need or tell me what I need.

These are some pretty significant seeds of conflict.

Seeds of Conflict

They're trying to manipulate the system.
They shouldn't be able to get away with that!

Seeds of Conflict

There are many other possible sources of conflict. Consider some of them.

1. Institutional Thinking. In a process that honors individualization, statements such as, “That's the way we do it” or “We have to treat everyone the same” are bound to be sources of conflict. So is assuming that people in certain target groups require similar services to meet their needs.
One of the core values of an outcome-based approach is that each person and each person’s situation are to be considered independent of other people and their situations. What worked for one will not necessarily make sense for another. And, what was done in the past is not supposed to set the course for what might be done in the future.

2. **All or Nothing.** “Yes” or “No.” “You can or you can’t.” “Just this much.” These are adversarial positions. These approaches ignore the purpose of collaboration and negotiation. When team members operate within a limited field, conflict will arise. There are more than two polar choices.

   There is not only room for creative planning and problem solving in a collaborative model, there is an expectation that creativity and negotiation will be part of the process.

3. **Expectations.** Often people involved in a team may have different expectations about the goal or mission of the team, who is "in charge", and the process by which to make decisions. Some professional people might expect that because they have professional training, an academic degree, or relevant past experience, their opinions should have more weight. Some participants might expect that because the decisions are about them, their opinions should prevail, no matter what.

   When there are questions about the methods requested to achieve a particular outcome, the expectation is that the team will be creative and fully explore options, rather than to reject a request based on financial or other criteria. There are no guarantees about what will and what will not directly lead to a desired outcome. There is an expectation that efforts will be made to negotiate in order to move forward with a member’s request.

4. **Confusing Outcomes and Methods.** It is important that everyone on the team understands the difference between and outcome and the course of action taken to work toward achieving an outcome. An outcome doesn’t refer to a service or product itself, but refers to what we want to achieve. Methods refer to how we try to achieve those outcomes. (For example, improved communication is an outcome. Speech therapy is a method.) Knowing what we are trying to achieve before we start identifying the possible methods by which we can achieve it helps us to make the best choices. Many people are accustomed to choosing methods before they identify their outcomes, so this can be a touchy area. "I might not know exactly why I want something, only that it seems important."

5. **The ‘Why’ Factor.** Defensiveness is among the characteristics of communication that people frequently name as disturbing. When asked ‘why’ something is important or is needed, or why something has or has not happened, it is natural to explain or feel the need to defend one’s position. It is an innocent word that might be used with genuine curiosity. It has also derailed many discussions. The question that begins with the word ‘why’ often results in what others describe as defensive behavior. Care
managers should use caution when using the word ‘why’ and find other ways to explore why a member may want a particular service or product.

There are other ways to explore purpose and motivation than inviting a defensive stance. “What do you like about this?” “How would this be helpful?” “What seems right about this?”

6. **Statements and Assumptions.** Among the interactive styles that can be counterproductive among team members are the ongoing expression of statements, and operating based on assumptions. “I believe... I think... I know... You should... You need to....” When people just take turns making statements at each other, there is little room for exploration or creativity. In a process that relies on strengthening relationships, an interaction of statements can create collision after collision. People are left feeling unheard or misunderstood. Instead of making statements such as, “I know,” “you should,” etc., use active listening to focus on the member’s concerns and try to understand and appreciate their perspective.

Sometimes, we are not listening to better understand. We are waiting to tell others what we think or why they are wrong. During this kind of interaction, there is no room for consideration and better understanding. There is no opportunity for generative thinking, exploring with questions, or creativity. The phrase “active listening” is sometimes misunderstood to mean actively taking a turn as a speaker, actively filling in a silence, or actively assuming someone’s motivation. **Active listening is actively trying to understand and appreciate someone else’s perspective.** This may entail reiterating what someone said to make sure you understand, or ask questions to clarify or probe more to help you understand their position better.

7. **When a Smile and a Nod are Not What They Seem.** Just because you said what you did as well as you could, does not mean that I understood. Just because I said that I understood, does not mean that I do. Just because I said that I have no questions, does not mean that I am clear. All of this means that you tried to be clear, tried to check for understanding, and presented an opportunity for me to ask questions. There might be many reasons that I did not respond differently. Consider a few.

I did not understand what you said well enough to ask a question.
I did not want you to think that I’m dumb.
I was nervous.
I’m old, I’m tired, I don’t feel well - and you’re still talking.
You look kind, and I know you’ll help me.

For a variety of reasons, what we say to each other will sometimes not be enough. Talking and telling, asking and receiving answers, might not be a complete interaction. For many people, talking is not the most important way of learning or making decisions. Being able to see what someone is talking about,
or having a direct physical experience is an essential component of making decisions.

8. **Prior Experience.** Everyone has a past. For some people, there is the experience of participating in a service system rather than an outcome-based program. Whether you are asking for support or services, or trying to provide or arrange for them, there is the familiarity of how you did it before. Nurses, social workers, members, parents, providers (e.g. doctors, therapists, dieticians), advocates/lawyers all have past experiences that can influence current participation. It might serve you well or not.

   Everyone has to make an effort to not have an unquestioned reliance on prior experience. Stated another way, everyone has to make a deliberate effort to learn new practices when they are in new situations. It is important to consider what aspects of your past experience are relevant to new situations. And, be appreciative of a member’s past experiences and how it might shape their request for services.

9. **When Disagreement is Experienced as Disrespect.** Relationships that will be ongoing need to be protected. Whatever decisions are made, team members will be coming back to each other. Some people trust easily from the start and others learn to trust. Mistrust can also be a starting point or it can be learned. How we treat one another matters all along the way. Respect is measured or experienced in many ways. Our words and delivery, our expressed interest and curiosity, our willingness to learn about someone’s personal and cultural values, our attention to the effect we are having on others are but a few examples of what has to be considered to protect an ongoing relationship.

   There are honest disagreements and honest differences among people. There are reasonable questions about what is allowable or within the parameters of a particular program. We can be deliberate about how we express disagreements, differences, or limitations in order to be respectful. If after being as thoughtful and considerate as possible we learn that we have been experienced as offensive to someone, we can apologize.

10. **Personality Conflicts.** In some situations, personality conflicts may arise. Someone may have had a past experience with someone that was negative, or someone just does not like another’s style or approach to the team, or they may feel in competition with one another. Whatever the reason, it is important to find ways to understand the source of the conflict and find ways to work together in a respectful manner. It may be helpful for both parties to discuss the problem and work to resolve the issue or bring in a neutral party to help mediate. Or, you can just accept the situation for what it is, but make efforts to alleviate the source of conflict.
Conclusion

By becoming aware of these seeds of conflict, and weighing both the content and the presentation of what you are trying to communicate against these potential “seeds,” you will be able to avoid a great many of the communication pitfalls that happen between people. It takes vigilance and skill to watch what we are saying, and how we say it, and constant active listening to hear what the consumer is saying and not saying. Recognizing the seeds of conflict and where they are likely to be planted will help to smooth the path of care planning.

Optional Self-Test: To test your knowledge of the concepts raised in this chapter, return to the “Working with Conflict” main page and click on "Chapter 1 Self-Test."
Chapter 1: Self-Test

Apply your knowledge of possible sources of conflict by answering questions based on the following scenarios.

1. Linda is a 38-year old woman who is about to be discharged from a local nursing home to return home. Five months ago, Linda was in a car accident that left her paralyzed from the chest down and dependent on a ventilator. Linda is concerned about returning home for a variety of reasons, one being that her home isn't air-conditioned. Linda asks her care manager, Mary, if central air could be installed before returning home. Mary replies, “No, our agency has a policy against this. If we did it for you, we’d have to do it for our other members too.”

Based on this scenario, what are some possible sources of conflict that might enter into this decision?

- **Institutional Thinking**
  Correct... And, what else?

  One of the core values of an outcome-based approach is that each person and each person’s situation are to be considered independent of other people and their situations. What worked for one will not necessarily make sense for another. And, what was done in the past is not supposed to set the course for what might be done in the future.

- **All or Nothing**
  Correct... And, what else?

  “Yes, you can have central air,” or “No, you can not.” These are adversarial positions. These approaches ignore the purpose of collaboration and negotiation.

  What if the care manager explored with Linda the possibility of a window air conditioner in the main living area and/or bedroom instead of central air for the entire house? There is an expectation that creativity and negotiation be part of the process in considering member requests.

- **The ‘Why’ Factor**
  Try again! (Neither Mary nor Linda asked the sort of ‘why’ question that are likely to set off a defensive response in the other.)

2. Dan, a 36-year old man with cerebral palsy, has been experiencing chronic hip pain over the past few months. He asks Sue, his occupational therapist, for a lambswool seat cover for his wheelchair. Dan explains that he’s done a lot of
on-line research and believes that the special cover will help relieve some of his hip pain. Sue has been an OT for over 20 years and has never heard of a lambswool seat cover helping with hip pain. She tells Dan, “A new seat cover won’t help with your pain. I’ve been doing my job for a long time and what you need is an evaluation for pain management, not a new seat cover."

Based on this scenario, what are some possible sources of conflict?

- **The ‘why’ factor**
  Try again! (Neither Dan nor Sue asked the sort of ‘why’ questions that are likely to elicit a defensive response from the other.)

- **Expectations**
  Correct… And, what else?

  Some professional people might expect that because they have professional training, an academic degree, or relevant past experience, their opinions should have more weight.

  What if Sue asked Dan to share his on-line research with her? Perhaps there are new therapies or inexpensive pain management tools that Sue doesn’t know about.

- **Confusing Outcomes with Methods**
  Try again! (Neither Sue nor Dan have confused outcomes and methods. Both are aware of Dan’s desired outcome—relief of hip pain—and neither see the seat cover or the evaluation as an end in itself.)

- **When Disagreement is Experienced as Disrespect**
  Correct… And, what else?

  How we treat one another matters and we can still be respectful while expressing disagreements, differences, or limitations.

  Instead of telling Dan what he needs, Sue might want to say: “Wow, I think it’s really neat that you do your own research on the Internet. I’d be curious to read the information you discovered; could you share it with me? There may be other ways to help manage your hip pain as well. What would you think about an evaluation by a pain management specialist at the local clinic?”

- **When a Smile and a Nod are Not What They Seem**
  Try again! (Both Sue and Dan seem to have clearly stated their actual beliefs about the issue at hand.)
3. Jane calls her care manager, Richard, and asks for a computer. When Richard asks why she wants a computer, Jane replies, “Why are you always asking me ‘why’? All my friends have a computer and I want one too. You were trying to help me in meeting my outcomes.”

What are some possible seeds of conflict might be involved here?

- **Confusing Outcomes and Methods**
  Correct… And, what else?!

  It is very useful to make distinctions between outcomes and methods. Maybe Jane’s outcome is to have more contact with her friends and she believes using a computer for e-mail and chat will help her maintain her friendships. If Jane isn’t sure what she will do with a computer or how it will help her live the life she desires, Richard could help her explore the possible value of a computer by asking if she would like to take a computer class first or arrange for transportation to the local library once or twice a week to use a free computer.

- **Statements and Assumptions**
  Try again! (Neither Jane nor Richard made statements or assumptions such as, “I think,” “you should,” etc.)

- **The ‘why’ factor**
  Correct… And, what else?!

  A question that starts with the word ‘why’ tends to invite a defensive response. There are better ways to explore Jane’s purpose and motivation.

  Instead of asking, “Why?” Richard might want to ask Jane, “How will a computer help you?” or “What computer programs or web sites do you expect you will enjoy using?”

4. Nicole, the guardian of Jessica, a woman with Down Syndrome, is meeting with Jessica’s care manager to discuss her request for someone to come to Jessica’s apartment three days a week to clean and do laundry. Nicole begins her conversation with the care manager by saying, “I know we don’t agree on
what is best for Jessica, but I want her to have assistance with her housekeeping on a regular basis.” The care manager responds by saying, “You should consider that Jessica needs to be as independent as possible.” The conversation continues as both women assume they know what one another is thinking. No creative solutions arise out of the meeting, and Nicole’s request for housekeeping is denied.

Based on this scenario, what is a possible source of conflict that might enter into this decision?

- **Statements and Assumptions**
  Correct!

  Sometimes, we are not listening to better understand. We are waiting to tell others what we think or why they are wrong. Both Nicole and the care manager seemed interested only in making the other one understand her concerns, rather actively trying to understand and appreciate the other’s perspective.

- **Prior Experience**
  Try again! (Neither the care manager nor Nicole were assuming that old practices would work in a new situation, nor resisting trying new practices.)

- **Confusing Outcomes with Methods**
  Try again! (Neither the care manager nor Nicole got to the point of discussing Jessica’s outcomes due to the statements and assumptions being made.)

5. Chester, an elderly man with multiple health problems and a mild hearing impairment is meeting with his nurse, Amy. Amy is explaining to Chester that he needs to make a decision about whether or not he wants to go to the adult day care while his daughter is at work, or consider moving to a CBRF. There is little discussion of the issue, and Chester nods agreeably that he wants to try the adult day care. Amy makes the necessary arrangements and the following day, the day care van arrives to pick Chester up. Chester refuses to leave the house and calls Amy very upset that she is trying to ‘put him away.’ Amy is frustrated and confused, because Chester agreed to the new plan just yesterday.

Based on this scenario, what is a possible source of conflict that might enter into this decision?

- **Prior experience**
  Try again! (There is no indication that Amy or Chester are using prior experience as the unquestioned basis for their current decision.)
• **Statements and Assumptions**
  Try again! (Amy didn’t make statements or assumptions such as, “I think,” “I know,” etc.)

• **When a Smile and a Nod are Not What They Seem**
  Correct!

  For a variety of reasons, what we say to each other will sometimes not be enough. Talking and telling, asking and receiving answers, might not be a complete interaction.

  For many people, talking is not the most important way of learning or making decisions. Being able to see what someone is talking about, or having a direct physical experience is an essential component of making decisions.

  Amy needed to be more sensitive to the fact that going to the adult day care was a big decision for Chester, and that therefore he wasn’t likely to feel comfortable making a decision after only a little discussion and a nod. Amy could have asked a few creative questions to draw Chester out and explore his feelings about adult day care before believing his nod to be his informed and truly felt consent.

6. Lynelle has recently enrolled in a long-care program since moving to the area from another state with her husband. She is a woman in her thirties with a brain injury who, prior to moving to Wisconsin, received some services from the local service provider in her home community. Prior to their first meeting, Lynelle contacts her new care manager and tells him her home isn’t accessible enough for her and that he should send a contractor over to check it out. The care manager explains that there is a process that needs to be followed to determine whether or not the agency will arrange and pay for things such as home modification. Lynelle yells at the care manager, hangs up and immediately contacts his supervisor to complain and request a new care manager.

Based on this scenario, what is are some possible sources of conflict that might enter into this decision?

• **Expectations**
  Correct...And, what else?

  Lynelle’s expectation seems to be that her requests will always be granted without any discussion with her care management team about her outcomes and most cost-effective way of helping her achieve those outcomes.

• **All or nothing**
  Try again! (The care manager didn’t respond “yes” or “no” to Lynelle’s request.)
• **Prior Experience**
  Correct... And, what else?

It is important to consider what aspects of Lynelle’s past experience might shape her reaction to the care manager’s response to her request. Rather than say, “No, I can’t send over a contractor because we have a process...” The care manager should have said, “Yes, it’s possible that we can help you with that; but I’m not sure yet. I’m glad you called; that’s the sort of thing I need to talk with you about. Can I make an appointment to come over and take a look, and talk with you about our program and what we might be able to help you with?”

(end Chapter 1 self-test)
CHAPTER 2: Learning Patterns and Performance Characteristics

Introduction

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Recognize the different learning styles that people have.
- Learn what your own preferred learning style is.
- Recognize when a particular communication style may be in conflict with someone’s learning style.

Communication is a process of delivering and receiving information; learning and responding to what we have learned. In this chapter, you will discover how our various learning styles affect the process of communication and how they impact situations in which conflict arises.

Collaboration sets people up to learn from and teach one another. As a process, it takes time to collaborate, and time often seems to be in short supply. If you were talking with someone in English and found out that he or she only understood Spanish, it would be clear that you needed to find a common language or an interpreter. You might have tremendous desire to be helpful, but without that common language, there would be no exchange - no collaboration. No collaboration would be a conflict.

Even when we share a common language, we still might find it difficult to communicate with someone and not understand why. One possible reason is related to basic differences in how we learn. We do not all learn the same way. It can be like talking with someone in a language they do not understand. Popular talk about learning has described the process of learning too simply. We learn through our senses (e.g., seeing, hearing, touch), but not just one. In other words, we are not just visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners. We do not learn by looking, listening, or trying. We learn by looking, listening, and trying - in an order that makes the most sense to our brains. There is a pattern.

Learning includes several layers. First, there is perception, then discrimination, and then ‘getting it’ - tying it all together. Perception, as the word is used here, refers to what initially attracts our attention. We are attracted to a particular kind of sensory stimulation first. Some of us are attracted most easily by sound, others by visual images, and still others by direct physical sensation.
'Learning Patterns’ Exercise
Read the following scenarios and think about how YOU would react and what possible conflict could arise from them.

Imagine that you need to learn how to do something on a computer, and it is a new job requirement. When learning something new, how do you feel most at ease getting started? What would create a comfortable beginning? Would you want to start by having someone tell you what to do, show you what to do, or would you prefer to skip the explanations and demonstrations and try to do it on your own? You might be thinking, "But I want a little of this and a bit of that." You can have it all.

For now, think about what you would appreciate first. Which would seem the most natural and comfortable way for you to begin?

Click on the method of learning you would most prefer:

1. **To listen - an auditory approach (link to text)**

   Text:
   You would prefer to listen to an explanation of how the computer program works before you begin using it. Your supervisor informs you, “Sorry, we couldn’t afford to pay someone to teach you how to use the program, so you have to read the manual and figure it out on your own. You will be tested on your ability to use the new program in two weeks. By the way, your annual bonus is contingent on you being able to use the new program by our implementation deadline, since it’s a management goal to be fully automated by the end of the month.”

   **How does this make you feel?**
   - Give up, expect to lose your bonus. (link back to module)
   - Get angry, demand a meeting to complain to your supervisor. (link back to module)
   - Fake it, act like you know what you’re doing. (link back to module)
   - Feel dumb, consider leaving the job instead of looking bad. (link back to module)

2. **To look or watch - a visual approach (link to text)**

   Text:
   You would prefer to watch someone use the computer program before you begin using it. Your supervisor informs you, “Sorry, we couldn’t afford to hire a computer trainer, but the person who built the system will be providing our IT staff a verbal
explanation of how the program works at their staff meeting next week. All staff are
invited to sit in on the meeting. You will be tested on your ability to use the new
program in two weeks. By the way, your annual bonus is contingent on you being
able to use the new program by the implementation deadline, since it’s a
management goal to be fully automated by the end of the month.”

How does this make you feel?

- **Give up, expect to lose your bonus.** (link back to module)
- **Get angry, demand a meeting to complain to your supervisor.** (link back to module)
- **Fake it, act like you know what you’re doing.** (link back to module)
- **Feel dumb, consider leaving the job instead of looking bad.** (link back to module)

3. **To try - a kinesthetic or physical approach (link to text)**

Text:
You would prefer to try out the computer program before you begin using it. Your
supervisor informs you, “Sorry, we don’t have time to set up a tutorial program on all
the work stations. Instead, we have made one copy of the program manual for each
team to share, which you will be getting in a few days. The new system will be ‘live’
when it is installed on your workstation, so any data entered will be in the member’s
permanent record. You will be tested on your ability to use the new program in two
weeks. By the way, your annual bonus is contingent on you being able to use the
new program by the implementation deadline, since it’s a management goal to be
fully automated by the end of the month.”

How does this make you feel?

- **Give up, expect to lose your bonus.** (link back to module)
- **Get angry, demand a meeting to complain to your supervisor.** (link back to module)
- **Fake it, act like you know what you’re doing.** (link back to module)
- **Feel dumb, consider leaving the job instead of looking bad.** (link back to module)

**Based on the above exercise, consider the following:**

- Can you think of a situation when a member may have gotten angry or
given up because their preferred learning style wasn’t used?
- What would you do if someone regularly approached you in a way that
did not make sense to you?
- How would it effect your relationship with the person who was interacting
with you in a manner that was not helpful?
It is the nature of learning to get stuck. Essentially, we perceive more than is needed and have to discriminate what is most useful from everything else. When we hear the same information over and over, or look at the same things repeatedly, or do something again and again, but do not make progress, we are not hearing, seeing, or doing what is most relevant.

A huge amount of conflict grows out of people just not communicating with one another in a way that they can understand. We often do not think about basic differences in learning in the same way we would notice a more obvious language difference. The point is not to send everyone back to school or into therapy. The point is just to be aware of how you are communicating with a particular person. If all is going smoothly, great. If there seems to be confusion or misunderstanding, notice what you are doing. A grandmother’s wisdom says, “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’ll keep getting what you’ve been getting.” Try another way.

People often misunderstand and then mischaracterize each other’s actions. Someone might be described as difficult, noncompliant, inappropriate, resistant, not listening, not trying, not paying attention, a lousy care manager or advocate, etc. It is the professional members of the team who generally write the reports or make the more formal characterizations. The purpose of considering learning as a factor in communication has to do with the erroneous assumptions that are made and reported when we do not consider how a person’s learning patterns affect the way we communicate.

He has strong opinions and doesn’t like people telling him what to do! I hope I’m as feisty as he is when I’m his age!
We vary as learners. We also vary as a function of our life experiences, our cognitive abilities, our confidence, and our current circumstances among other things.

**Ways to Promote Better Understanding**

Consider these things about the other person:

- What is motivating to this person?
- What is valued?
- How much does he/she understand at one time?
- How much does he/she remember?
- How well does this person discriminate what is relevant?
- How well does this person anticipate what might happen in the future?
- How well does this person generalize what has been learned from one situation to another?
- How well does this person incorporate new information?

A big factor that affects the way we communicate and our overall performance is **temperament**. Some people tend to be more bold while others tend to be more timid. Some people are considered cautious while others are described as adventurous or even reckless. When people of assorted temperaments mix, it affects they way we collaborate and sometimes contributes to situations of conflict.

- If you would describe yourself as being more timid, how might it affect you when collaborating with someone who is bold? Or someone who is as timid as you?
- If you would describe yourself as being more bold, how might it affect you when collaborating with someone who is timid? Or someone who is as bold as you?

**‘Learning and Performance Characteristics’ self-assessment**

If we had information about each others’ specific and general learning and performance characteristics how would it effect our collaborations? Consider these familiar scenarios:

1. Many people have believed that having a particular piece of exercise equipment, let’s say a treadmill, would be life-changing. The people buying treadmills are convinced that they have found what they need and that it will
be used often, and that having the machine will help them achieve the outcome of a healthier life. Some (maybe even many) of those people are now owners of rarely or never used exercise machines!

Should someone have stopped those people from buying treadmills? If you were involved in the purchase decision, as a member of my team, what would you have done to ensure I was making an informed decision?

- You could have talked to me about exercise and equipment or provided information in writing. (go to text)
- You could have arranged to have me see different kinds of exercise equipment, or arranged to have me see people exercising in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. (go to text)
- You could have arranged for me to try out a variety of exercise options and machines. (go to text)

Text (same for all three buttons above):
If you know this is my preferred learning method, then you’re right! If you’re unsure of my preferred learning method, you could start by asking me if I have a preference. If I cannot tell you, try a method and notice the effect it has. Was it helpful or not helpful? This will help you offer me my preferred learning method the next time I need to make an informed decision. (click button to return to main body of chapter).

What makes any decision an informed decision? What experiences are really learning experiences? You must first know something about a person’s preferred learning style and then provide information in that way. Are there guarantees that the choices that any of us make will work the way we hope they will? With awareness that people learn in different ways, we can try to engage them in the ways that will help them to make the most informed decisions possible.

2. When the home care worker meets with their supervisor to talk about job performance issues, she doesn’t make eye contact and fidgets with something in her fingers while they are talking. What does her body-language mean?

- The worker’s body language means she is not listening and probably does not care about the issues they are discussing. (go to text)
- The worker’s body language means she has something to hide, knows she has done something wrong and is embarrassed. (go to text)

Text (same for both buttons above):
We have been taught that eye-to-eye contact means you are listening, and that it is respectful to look a person in the eye when they are talking to you. We have not been taught that for some people eye to eye gaze is so consuming that looking away makes it more possible to listen well. It is also true that for some cultures, eye-to-eye gaze is disrespectful. It is important to understand cultural differences in
communication and remember that if you listen better when looking someone in the eye, that is not true of everyone.

We have also been told that people who are fidgeting or moving about are restless or disengaged. We have not been taught that for some people, physical engagement improves their attention.

3. A social worker meets with a member and his wife to explain how to use the new emergency on-call system. When she is finished, she asks if they have any questions. They both smile and nod, saying they understand. Three days later the social worker gets a call from the home care worker to report that the member was without his medication all weekend and his wife called 911 when his blood sugar rose to 400. The social worker becomes frustrated that they didn’t use the on-call system to have more medications delivered, and prevented the need to the emergency room. What does this situation tell you about the member and his wife?

• The member and his wife don’t like the social worker, and told her they understood his instructions just to get him out of their house as fast as possible. (go to text)

Text: Not necessarily! The smile, the nod, the “yes, I understand” and “no, I don’t have any questions” is sometimes the socially or culturally conditioned behavior of someone who does not know what they are supposed to do. Some people have a hard time telling us they don’t understand, and need to be offered other methods for learning.

• The social worker didn’t do a good enough job explaining the new system and should have made sure they understood they system by showing them how to use it, write down the steps and having them practice using it while she was there. (go to text)

Text: The social worker probably did a great job of explaining the new system, but if the member and his wife don’t learn well by verbal explanation, this was not enough. The smile, the nod, the “yes, I understand” and “no, I don’t have any questions” is sometimes the socially conditioned behavior of someone who does not know what they are supposed to do. Some people have a hard time telling us they don’t understand, and need to be offered other methods for learning.
Conclusion

The point, once again, of considering learning as a factor in communication and collaboration is to notice what you are doing while you are doing it. Is what you are doing as a collaborator helpful? When you find yourself thinking, “we keep going over this and s/he still doesn’t get it,” try something different. If you have been talking and informing, and telling, is there a way to stop talking and demonstrate or to create a direct physical experience?

Some people want to hear about something before seeing or trying it. Others want to try it before they hear about it. Others might do best seeing and then talking before trying. We all have natural tendencies as learners; a pattern in which it is easiest to understand. Unfortunately, there is too much reliance on talking and telling with the expectation that everyone should understand.
CHAPTER 3: Communicator Characteristics

Introduction

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Recognize what your own communication “characteristics” are.
- Assess and adjust your communication characteristics to become a more effective communicator.

This chapter will provide an overview of various communication styles, and the tension that is often created by our differences and misunderstandings that frequently result.

People in high paying, high status jobs, as well as those in low paying, low status jobs consider the quality of their communication about the work they do to be very important. Among the top reasons people give for job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction is the quality of communication they have with supervisors, peers, and others. Collaboration depends on the willingness of a group of people to learn how to communicate effectively with one another. In other words, to be an effective team everyone has to take some responsibility to understand each others needs and preferences for communicating. What this means is that I do not get to decide that I am a helpful communicator. Those with whom I try to collaborate determine that, one person at a time. Although I might describe myself as clear and helpful, someone else might not. Each of us has a responsibility to adjust ourselves as needed.

We vary as communicators because we vary as learners. Communicating well is not about following a script. Communicating well is about noticing what you are doing and whether it is helpful or not helpful to your communication partner. Much of what rises to the level of conflict can be traced to the tension created by differences in communication style and misunderstanding.

Many people assume that good communication is a specific set of words and actions to be applied across people.

- If I smile, make eye contact, speak clearly, and maintain personal space, is that good communication?
- If I ask, “Do you understand?” and the answer is yes, is that good communication?
- If I ask, “Do you have any questions?” and the answer is no, is that good communication?

Consider the following informal list of communicator characteristics that only apply to language. Notice:

which characteristics describe you;
which characteristics seem to be a helpful match for you; and which characteristics you do not like.

Some people set their purpose for interacting from the start. They want your advice, an answer to a specific question, to vent, to have you ask them questions, etc. They tell you what they want from you. Other people just begin and do not make their purpose known.

Some people convey information in a random order. Others report sequentially.

Some people explain. They not only include facts and details, but reasons and rationalizations for what they are saying. Others assume that you must know and believe whatever they know and believe, because it’s “common sense,” “common knowledge,” or ‘obvious.”

There is subtle energy and big energy. Big energy refers to people who generally show their excitement and enthusiasm about a particular matter whether they are weighing in positively or negatively. You can hear, see, and feel it. Others might have the same commitment to what they are saying but their volume, tone, body language, etc. are all more contained. They are not obvious.

This characteristic refers to how people approach a situation. Some people notice and comment first about what they do not like, do not want, and do not believe will work.
Others notice first what appeals to them, i.e., what they like, what they want, and what they believe will work.

![Image of two people pulling against each other]

Some people ask questions. They might ask for facts, about process, or about emotions. They might ask with open curiosity or they might ask as a demand for information. Others make statements. I think... I believe... I feel... You should... You need to...

**None of these communicator characteristics is inherently good or bad.** On an individual basis, a particular approach is helpful or not helpful rather than good or bad. It is only when communication is approached as ‘one style fits all’ that it can backfire. **One style does not fit all people.** A rigid adherence to arbitrary rules of good and bad communication is not helpful. An attentive and active communicator notices what he/she is doing while he/she is doing it and tries to notice whether it is helping or not helping. If what he/she is doing is not helpful, a change is made.

**LISTENING PRACTICE:**

To learn more about your own natural tendency as a communicator, censor yourself for a few minutes while listening to someone talk. Set your intention to listen silently. When you feel an urge to speak, censor it.

The point of the graphic above is not to suggest that we only sit in silence while others talk. It is to suggest that we might learn more if we practiced listening better and allowed people to express themselves in their own way and in their own time. For many people, the natural tendency is to interrupt, fill in silences, direct topics, and talk about their own
experiences. We might be losing an opportunity to better understand what someone else thinks and values by not listening.
CHAPTER 4: Know Your “Triggers”

Introduction

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:
• Recognize what triggers a negative emotional response in you in communication with others.
• Recognize how the emotional response triggers “shut down” reactive responses from you.

This chapter will engage your awareness of those things that happen during stressful situations that make you feel ‘beside yourself’, that trigger a response in you that becomes a barrier to your ability to think clearly and creatively as you work through the conflict.

During moments of conflict, we often describe our experience by saying, “I was beside myself.” This actually means I was not fully present - my body was there, but my physical comfort, my good judgment, my creativity, and my openness were all some place else. During moments of tension or confusion, when we most need to think clearly and creatively, there is often a feeling of being swept away.

Sure! For example - we have a great marriage, but when he eats spaghetti he gets sauce all over his face and it really bothers me!

I love my husband, but sometimes it’s the littlest things…do you ever feel that way?
It is not only the major events that throw us off balance. Sometimes, even seemingly minor events can have a big effect or reaction. Be aware of the minor, as well as the major, events or behaviors that challenge you. In order to work well with others and make team decisions it can be helpful to notice what evokes a strong reaction and feelings of conflict.

Take a moment and finish this sentence, “I don’t like it when…”

There is reasonable certainty that the events you are wishing will not happen again, will. It is important to identify them, to learn how you can take better care of yourself when they happen, and to continue to be as effective a collaborator as possible.

If you work in a helping profession, it is reasonable to think that, when you started, your intention was to be helpful and effective. When we are swept up in emotion, or arrogance, or self-doubt in a matter of seconds, we are not available to carry out the role in the way we intended. We are not available to collaborate and negotiate. This has been described as an emotional hijacking!

Also, it is pertinent not only to be aware of the triggers in ourselves, but notice or become aware of the triggers for others. How do others respond to you? What signals or behaviors are they expressing that may indicate they are reacting negatively to your interactions?
We react habitually to certain events, such as:

- Someone rolls his eyes while you are talking.
- Someone says, “that’s not important.”

An event is what we see and hear, what we experience. Before there is thought or consideration, there might be a reaction to that event.

- You might feel tightness in your chest,
- An increase in your heart rate,
- A throbbing in the back of your head, or...
- Maybe you notice that you are questioning your own competence or someone else’s.
- Maybe you are judging or blaming.
- Or, maybe you feel an overwhelming desire to yell, “It is important and don’t you dare roll your eyes at me.”
- Perhaps your vision blurs or you feel compelled to look away.

It is easy to become conditioned, to be reactive. The effects are real. The question is, how do we break the habit of reacting to events or the anticipation of the possibility of events? The uninvited, unplanned, reaction (to an event) does not improve conditions for collaboration. Rather, reactivity increases the climate for conflict. Being reactive is not generally a constructive way to work with conflict.

One of the biggest barriers to changing our habits is not noticing or acknowledging that we are being reactive.

A response to an event is chosen. An event is noticed and our next action - what we say or do - is decided. We can set our intention to notice the events while they are happening. We can notice what happens to our thinking and whether it is helpful or not. We can notice the effects on our bodies and re-create a sense of physical well being. We can notice if we have a sudden shift in emotion. Learning how to work with conflict includes noticing familiar situations in which we are put off balance and learning how to
restore it. It is about learning how not to be ‘set off,’ by external events. It is also about learning how to make the most helpful responses we can conceive.

When I recognize that I am having judgmental thoughts, or blaming thoughts, or self-doubt - I can name it for myself rather than get swept away. That’s judgment. That’s blame. That’s doubt. Then, I can return to the real matters at hand. We can only regain balance when we notice that we have lost it. **Awareness and intention are powerful tools to change from reacting to responding.** We can continue to label or assign blame to others, or we can acknowledge how circumstances effect our ability to do our best work.

If I know that hearing someone say “but” has an unhelpful effect on me, I can prepare for it. The same is true if I know that seeing someone smirk and whisper to someone else has an unhelpful effect. If we are aware of the events that we find disturbing, we can at least prepare ourselves. We cannot control everything that happens around us, but we can certainly improve how we respond.

**Consider the story of Steve, RN and Mr. Crachet, Family Care member, as a good example of the benefits of changing our habitual reaction to ‘things we wish would not happen.’**

(note to Holli: can we do this in html pages, with the ppt slide coming up after each bullet is clicked?)
• *It’s Friday afternoon…*

“Steve, Mr. Crachet is on line 4 for you.”

Here we go again!!!
Habitual reaction...

Hello, Steve. Joe Crachet here. You said I should try the new medicine before we do anything else, but…

There’s that word, ‘but,’ again!

Mr. Crachet, I can’t help you if you won’t help yourself!
Hello, Steve. Joe Crachet here. You said I should try the new medicine before we do anything else, but…

There’s that word, ‘but,’ again! That’s my cue to take a deep breath and just keep listening…

But, I’m worried about how it’ll make me feel and I was calling to see if I could wait to try it when my daughter visits.

Oh, of course. That sounds reasonable!
Conclusion

Anyone who has traveled by plane has heard the flight attendant’s safety announcement to secure your own air mask before helping anyone else. If you can not breathe, you can not help anyone else. If you are not thinking clearly and feeling reasonably free from physical discomfort, it is harder to make good decisions or listen to anyone else.
CHAPTER 5: Facilitate, Collaborate, Mediate/Negotiate, and Advocate

Introduction

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:
• Identify key elements of teamwork with members.
• Understand the definitions of those key elements.
• Utilize strategies for teaming effectively with a variety of member styles.

Key elements of teamwork include facilitation, collaboration, mediation/negotiation, and advocacy. Planning teams generally include a member (i.e., a person in need of support), a social worker, and a nurse. There might also be involvement by family members, guardians, providers, and advocates. A variety of perspectives are included as a function of professional training, personal experiences, personal relationships, and values. Frustration comes when one or more of the participants expects that everyone involved will have the same understanding and values that he/she does.

‘Facilitate, Collaborate, Mediate/Negotiate, Advocate’ Self-assessment

How well do you understand the various elements that work together in successful teamwork? Test your knowledge by taking the following self-assessment:

1. To Facilitate:
   • To make a process easier, in order to accomplish a goal. (You do not have to be designated as a facilitator in order to function in this capacity.) (go to text)

   Text:
   Correct! A facilitator is anyone who makes it possible for people to do their best work. What is needed is the commitment to invite and respect viewpoints that are different than your own.

   • To work with others (in order to accomplish a goal). (go to text)

   Text:
   Try again!
• To reconcile differences, to reach an agreement, in order to accomplish a goal. (go to text)

Text:
Try again!

2. To Collaborate:
• To make a process easier, in order to accomplish a goal. (go to text)

Text:
Try again!

• To work with others (in order to accomplish a goal). (go to text)

Text:
Correct! This one seems easy, until you begin. We think, of course I can work with other people. What is needed to collaborate is the intention to actively consider those viewpoints that are different than your own. To actively consider means that you not only assume that you understand, but that you do what is necessary to make sure that you do.

• To recommend, sometimes on behalf of someone else. (go to text)

Text:
Try again!

3. To Mediate/Negotiate:
• To reconcile differences, to reach an agreement, in order to accomplish a goal. (go to text)

Text:
Correct! What is needed to mediate/negotiate is the willingness to accept a decision other than your own first choice. (These are dictionary definitions rather than legal ones.)

• To work with others (in order to accomplish a goal). (go to text)

Text:
Try again!

• To make a process easier (in order to accomplish a goal). You do not have to be designated in order to function in this capacity. (go to text)

Text:
Try again!
4. **To Advocate:**
   - To make a process easier (in order to accomplish a goal). You do not have to be designated in order to function in this capacity. (go to text)

   Text:
   Try again!

   - To work with others (in order to accomplish a goal). (go to text)

   Text:
   Try again!

   - To recommend and pursue an objective, (sometimes on behalf of someone else.) (go to text)

   Text:
   Correct! Humility is needed. It is common practice to justify a recommendation with the phrase, “in her/his best interest.” Whatever the issue being decided, a recommendation should not be based on what you would want, what you would value, or what you would decide in the same or similar situation for yourself. The recommendation should be based, as much as possible, on what is known about the person for whom you are advocating.

**Facilitation**

When working in teams, it is very helpful to have someone who plays the role of facilitator. Their role is to "observe" the team dynamics and process and are responsible for keeping the discussion on track. It is often a more "neutral" or objective about the content of the discussion. The facilitator assures everyone has an opportunity to share their points of view and assists with the decision-making process. This can be a formal or informal role depending on the situation. Team members can take turns being the facilitator or someone can volunteer to play this role. You may want to consider using this type of role to help guide team meetings, discussions, or decision-making when…

- There are people who tend to dominate and not let others express their ideas.
- There is a complex issue or situation that requires a more objective party to assure the team process is followed.
- There are very strong differences of opinion and a more collaborative decision needs to be made.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration refers to a group of people working together toward a common goal. To be effective, the team members need to understand the goal or outcome they are
trying to achieve together and share the same vision. In collaboration, everyone shares in responsibility for achieving the goal or outcome. This may require spending some time developing a vision and defining how they will work together. Some things to consider when collaborating with others:

- Identifying strengths and weaknesses—what is each party bringing to the team?
- Outlining responsibilities of each team member.
- Deciding what processes they will use for meetings, making assignments, communication, documentation, tracking progress, handling disagreement, etc.
- It may be helpful to spend some time getting to know one another and do some team-building exercises.

**Mediation and Negotiation**

Mediation refers to a neutral or objective party stepping into a polarized situation to assist in building consensus or helping to resolve a conflict. Typically, mediation is used as a last resort when team members cannot agree and are not willing to concede in their position. You may want to consider involving a mediator when the team needs the help of a more objective, neutral party to help work through an issue or resolve a dispute.

Negotiation on the other hand, is a helpful skill that allows team members to consider different possibilities and create more of a win-win solution. Some people believe negotiation is about winning the battle. But with an effective negotiation process, everyone feels comfortable with the decision, and everyone gains something from it. Negotiation skills can be used in all aspects of the team process, from simple discussions to making difficult decisions. Some ways to assure successful negotiations include:

- Taking a time out to acknowledge what the problem or issue is and define it.
- Understand what your own "bottom line" is and what is the best outcome you want to achieve.
- Then, take the time to learn about and understand what is the other team members "bottom line" and best outcome they want to achieve.
- Identify the common ground—what does everyone agree about? Hint: In our line of work, the ultimate focus should be on the participant's desired outcomes and what is in their best interest.
- Move the discussion away from everyone's "position" or agenda to what is in the best interest of the team's goal or mission? Reframe the issue or problem.
- Focusing on the interest above… what are some possible solutions that everyone can agree to. Consider, what are team members willing to try— even if they don't initially agree.
Advocate

To advocate means: To recommend. One who supports or defends a cause. One who pleads on behalf of another (Webster’s definition). Everyone on a participant's team will want to advocate for their position, for the policy of their agency, or for what will be best for the participant. Often, to advocate for something means you are taking a position on something and holding firm. In a team process we need to be aware of and understand what each member is advocating for. As discussed under negotiation, it will be helpful to move the team to a position where the ultimate interest is in supporting (and advocating for) the participant to achieve their desired outcomes and lead a quality life. This will help enable your team to maintain it's focus or shared vision.

Applying these skills will be easier or more difficult depending on how you and the others on your team behave. People generally identify difficulty with people who participate at the extremes. People who rarely speak, seeming passive, and those who rarely stop, or seem aggressive. The following table provides some suggested strategies for teaming with people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member Behavior...</th>
<th>Strategy...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiet, passive, silent</td>
<td>Ask about a direct experience. For example, “What has been your experience with...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks, but seems hesitant</td>
<td>Ask a question that explores what was already said, “Please say more about that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks, but is vague</td>
<td>Ask for clarification, “How does that work?”, “How did you decide that?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly talkative</td>
<td>Respectfully acknowledge and interrupt them. Assume some of the responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rambling</td>
<td>Invite a context and focus for what is being said, “I’m confused. Please help me understand how what you’re saying relates to ...” Ask this questions with trust that the team member DOES have a reason for bringing something up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating the discussion</td>
<td>Interrupt in order to summarize and again assume some of the responsibility, “Let me interrupt to make sure that I understand what you are saying.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very big energy</td>
<td>Reflect what you notice, “I can see/hear that you have a lot of energy about this.” Offer someone the opportunity to restore some balance without conveying disrespect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People receiving support or services are often overwhelmed by having to include others in their decision making process. The possibility of feeling as though their voice is not being adequately heard, that others are saying more than they are, can be a problem. If there is to be a more dominant presence on a team, a more dominant perspective, in most cases it should be that of the member.
Course Conclusion

A huge amount of conflict grows out of people just not communicating with one another in a way that they can understand. We often do not think about basic differences in learning in the same way we would notice a more obvious language difference. The point is not to send everyone back to school or into therapy. The point is just to be aware of how you are communicating with a particular person. If all is going smoothly, great. If there seems to be confusion or misunderstanding, notice what you are doing. A grandmother's wisdom says, “If you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting.” Try another way.

Download the Working with Conflict Toolkit to use as a guide when working with conflict in an actual situation you are currently involved in.
Toolkit

Use this toolkit as a guide to working with conflict in an actual situation you are currently involved in. This is not intended to be a ‘recipe for conflict resolution.’ Rather, it is intended to provide an opportunity for self-reflection and application of concepts learned in training course. This toolkit should be used only after completing the web-based course or one-day training, ‘Creating a Therapeutic Alliance: Working With Conflict.’

Suggestion for use: Consider meeting with your supervisor, co-worker or other trusted person to discuss your plan for approaching conflict that you will develop by using this toolkit. Sharing the process with another person will enhance your learning opportunity!

Section 1: Identify Possible Sources of Conflict

1. From your point of view, what has made collaboration difficult in this situation?

2. How would you describe yourself as a collaborator in this situation? What qualities do you bring to the situation that you feel have been helpful? What qualities do you bring to the situation that you feel have not been helpful?

3. Identify the possible sources of conflict from the list below:
   - Institutional Thinking
   - All or Nothing
   - Confusing Outcomes with Methods
   - The ‘why’ factor
   - Expectations
   - Statements and Assumptions
   - A Smile and a Nod are Not What They Seem
   - Disagreement is Experienced as Disrespect
4. Identify any skills you feel you don’t have that may be needed that would be helpful in this situation: 

5. Identify the person(s) who could be asked to teach you or bring the needed skills that would be helpful in this situation: 

Section 2: Learning Patterns & Performance Characteristics

1. Do you know the person you are in conflict with best understands/receives new information? 
   Y or N 
   (If you do not know how the person best understands/receives information, find out before continuing)

   What way does the person best understand/receive information?  
   _____ Listen to an explanation first  
   _____ Watch a demonstration first  
   _____ Try it out first  
   _____ Read about it first  

2. How have you been approaching the person, with regard to presenting information?  
   _____ Talking/providing a verbal explanation  
   _____ Providing a demonstration  
   _____ Assistance with a direct experience  
   _____ Given something to read  

   Is this approach consistent with their preferred learning style? Y or N

   If no, how has the person reacted to the way you have been presenting information? How do think it has made them feel? 

   How has the way you have been presenting information possibly affected your relationship with the person you are interacting with? 

3. What are some of the ‘performance characteristics’ of the person you are in conflict with (i.e. bold, timid, cautious, adventurous, reckless, etc.)? 

4. What are some of you’re ‘performance characteristics’?

5. How do you think each of your performance characteristics is affecting your ability to collaborate?

6. Identify what attracts the other person’s attention and what you notice they value.

   How can the situation be approached differently to accommodate their preferred learning style?

7. How can you approach this person differently, based on what you know about how they prefer to receive information, their ‘performance characteristics’ and what they value?

Section 3: Communicator Characteristics

1. Which of the following best describe the communicator characteristics of the person you are in conflict with?
   - set their purpose
   - do not make their purpose known
   - report in random order
   - report sequentially
   - explains with facts and details
   - assumes you already have facts and details
   - subtle energy
   - big energy
   - states what they do not like, do not want, and do not believe will work
   - states first what appeals to them, what will work, what they like
   - ask questions; with open curiosity or they might ask as a demand for information
   - makes statements

2. Which of the following best describes YOUR communicator characteristics?
   - set their purpose
   - do not make their purpose known
   - report in random order
3. How can you approach communication with this person differently, so that you are able to more effectively LISTEN and avoid the natural tendency to interrupt, fill in silences, direct topics, and talk about their own experiences, etc. ____________

Section 4: What You Wish Would Not Happen

1. Complete this sentence: “I don’t like it when (the person I’m in conflict with) says or does….“ ____________

2. When what you described above happens, how do you react? What physical symptoms do you notice? What happens to your thinking?

3. Identify a different way you could respond (rather than react) to the situation when it happens again. ____________

Section 5: Facilitate, Collaborate, Mediate/Negotiate and Advocate

1. Which of the following elements do you feel best describes your purpose in the team process?
   ______ Facilitation (To make a process easier, in order to accomplish a goal.)
   ______ Collaboration (The intention to actively consider those viewpoints that are different than your own.)
   ______ Mediation/Negotiation (To reconcile differences, to reach an agreement, in order to accomplish a goal)
   ______ Advocating (To recommend and pursue an objective)
   ______ Other (__________

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2. Which of the following elements best describes the purpose of the person you are in conflict in this situation?
   _____ Facilitation (To make a process easier, in order to accomplish a goal.)
   _____ Collaboration (The intention to actively consider those viewpoints that are different than your own.)
   _____ Mediation/Negotiation (To reconcile differences, to reach an agreement, in order to accomplish a goal)
   _____ Advocating (To recommend and pursue an objective)
   _____ Other (_____)

3. Refer to the table below to identify strategies for improving communication with the person you are in conflict with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member Behavior…</th>
<th>Strategy…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiet, passive, silent</td>
<td>Ask about a direct experience. For example, “What has been your experience with…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks, but seems hesitant</td>
<td>Ask a question that explores what was already said, “Please say more about that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks, but is vague</td>
<td>Ask for clarification, “How does that work?”, “How did you decide that?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly talkative</td>
<td>Respectfully acknowledge and interrupt them. Assume some of the responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rambling</td>
<td>Invite a context and focus for what is being said, “I’m confused. Please help me understand how what you’re saying relates to…” Ask this questions with trust that the team member DOES have a reason for bringing something up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating the discussion</td>
<td>Interrupt in order to summarize and again assume some of the responsibility, “Let me interrupt to make sure that I understand what you are saying.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very big energy</td>
<td>Reflect what you notice, “I can see/hear that you have a lot of energy about this.” Offer someone the opportunity to restore some balance without conveying disrespect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identify your strategies for better communication: ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Section 6: Your Plan for Improved Communication & Conflict Resolution

1. What assumptions or characterizations were you making about the person you are in conflict with? ________________________________________________________________

   How have your assumptions about the person you are in conflict with changed? _____
   _______________________________________________________________________

2. What questions or strategies might help you to better understand what this person values/the issues being raised by this person? __________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

3. What is the common ground in this situation? What do you and the person you are in conflict with agree on? ______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

4. What is your plan for implementing strategies identified in no. 2 above? ______
   _______________________________________________________________________

5. What resources/assistance might you need to implement the plan? __________
   _______________________________________________________________________

   Who can help you access these resources? _________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

Provide feedback on your experience with using this toolkit by sending comments by email to: (email address). Thank you!
Discussion Guide

O FREQUENTLY REPORTED EXAMPLES OF “NONCOMPLIANT BEHAVIOR”

> don’t take medication(s) as prescribed
> don’t check blood sugar on schedule
> don’t adhere to recommended diet
> don’t keep appointments
> don’t follow other professional treatment recommendations

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O FREQUENTLY REPORTED STAFF STRATEGIES (to achieve compliance)

> Educate, Re-educate, More Education
> Do It Myself
> Try to Catch Them
> Ask the Doctor to Scold or Reprimand

O STRATEGIES WITH A RELATIONSHIP FOCUS

> Normalize the situation.

   *I’ll be honest. I take medications and sometimes I forget.*

> Avoid making behavior the focus.

   *Step back. Actively try to learn more about the situation and the member’s perspective.*

> Avoid dismissing or blaming the person.

   *Make a clean slate. Take baby steps.*

> Reflect on the dynamics

   *...notice what we’ve been doing, and ask did it improve her/his quality of life (or not)*?
The evolution of MEMBER IDENTITIES

FROM: individuals with prior roles, histories, preferences, values, personal identities, a sense of control...

TO: ___ Good (compliant) Decision Makers, or ___ Bad (noncompliant) Decision Makers

RISK: From > Naming BEHAVIOR
To > Characterizing a PERSON

WHAT IS THE POWER AND EFFECT OF NAMING or CHARACTERIZING A PERSON?

cognitively disabled
elderly
mentally ill

manipulative
milking the system
good decision makers
bad decision makers

How does it influence your relationship?

FROM THE RESEARCH

> (non) compliance $\neq$ all or nothing

___ People might “comply” a little or a lot.
___ “Compliance” might vary over time.
___ There is a wide range of influencing factors.

> A Practitioner’s Goal and Measure of Success re: diabetes

0 goal = to get control over glucose level
0 success = good numbers

> A Patient’s Goal and Measure of Success re: diabetes

0 goal =
0 success =
X. A SELF EXAMINATION ON COMPLIANCE

___ food / weight ___ exercise / weight
___ stress ___ alcohol / drugs
___ smoking ___ sleep
___ sun screen ___ bike helmet
___ seat belt ___ speed limit

Who gets to decide when you are compliant enough?

O WHAT ARE THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE TENSION BETWEEN

> knowing that someone
  is not doing what was
  prescribed or recommended, and

> feelings of responsibility
  or liability for her/his well being?

O THE COMPLEXITY OF COMMUNICATION

Sender <----- Message <----- Receiver

> What other factors influence communication?

  o attention o interest
  o trust o history
  o content o context
  o language o vocabulary
  o time and timing o pace
  o location o values
  o emotion o style / attitude
  o other people and relationships
  o perceptions of roles / responsibility
  (i.e., who has it)
“Tendencies of clinicians to view their own management strategy as scientific truth and their focus on managing numbers rather than attempting to understand patients’ conception of disease and treatment goals lead to frustration and are serious obstacles to effective collaboration.”

(Freeman and Loewe, 2000)

…it is not realistic to expect all patients to comply with all health care recommendations. When patients do not follow recommendations, there is an opportunity for relationships to develop in which (support people) are more respectful of those who reject or adapt this advice.

(Russell, et al., 2003)

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**BALANCING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideals + Concepts</th>
<th>Practical Concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>autonomy</td>
<td>safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
<td>health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-determination</td>
<td>well-being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_The best way to ruin a good idea, is to misunderstand it, misapply it, and then say, “it doesn’t work.”_

T or F: CARING PEOPLE HAVE NO BIASES
WHAT INFLUENCES YOUR COMFORT?

Factors / Events

- Appearance
- Language - Vocabulary
- Attitude
- Actions / Decisions
- Environment
- Relationships
- Beliefs
- Style of Life

Some of us:

- have comfort with a variety of people - but have less comfort with some topics + situations
- have comfort with a variety of topics + situations - but less comfort with some people
- have less comfort when trying to balance responsibility (for health and safety) within a model stressing autonomy + self-direction
- have less (awareness and) comfort with issues of power and control, and how they creep into our everyday interactions

> I don’t like it when ...

> When that happens,

  0 I think...

  0 I feel...

  0 I see...

0 What happens to your best intentions?
HABITUAL REACTIONS to events
ANTICIPATORY REACTIONS to the possibility of events
GENERALIZED REACTIONS to non-events

> What's the difference between reacting and responding?

O WHAT ARE YOUR NATURAL TENDENCIES
WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T DO
WHAT YOU THINK S/HE SHOULD DO, OR
WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TOLD S/HE SHOULD DO?

A CHECK ON PERSPECTIVE

0 S/He’s ...(challenging, noncompliant,...)
   Where / Who is the problem?

0> I FEEL CHALLENGED.
   I’M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO.

0> S/HE MIGHT FEEL CHALLENGED
   ...by this situation
   ...by me
   ...by factors unknown to me

> Where / Who is the problem?

> How do you change from reacting to responding?
O WHY DO WE (PEOPLE) DO WHAT WE DO?

> 

**************************************************************************************
EXPECT NOTHING
----------WITH EQUANIMITY
* To ‘expect nothing’ /= disconnecting.
* Listen, observe, explore > be open. * Change the subject for awhile.
* Refine understanding of desired outcome.
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WORKING WITH CONFLICT
=/= WINNING
= trying to be influential,
= by allowing yourself to be influenced, and
= strengthening the relationship

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0 BEHAVIOR = what s/he did or didn’t do
     > a small frame

0 CONTEXT = what else was happening,
              what you might not know or understand yet
     > a bigger frame

0 STRESS = anything (+ or -) that throws us off balance

0 COPING = attempts to restore balance

0 SUPPORT = our attempts

     > to appreciate another person’s situation
     > to relieve stress - to increase comfort and trust
     > to minimize / eliminate need for ‘noncompliance’
     > to help members integrate medical and health matters so that they can
         participate in as many of their usual activities as possible

When you increase empathy and compassion,

negative feelings and judgements decrease.

To be a person who receives long term community support, sometimes
includes:

___ being asked what you want, about your desired ‘outcomes’

___ being told that you can choose

___ maybe not understanding the questions, or how to answer them

___ maybe not knowing what choices are available

___ maybe not trusting the person who asks

___ feeling excitement, fear, loss, confusion, relief, appreciation, disappointment, vulnerability, ...

_and always includes_

___ a personal history, values, and point of view -

_ the “full catastrophe” of life_

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Perspective matters.
In any given situation, the likely solution is

NOT about what you would do
what you would think
what you would want
what you would value
what you have learned
how you would decide
how long you would take
...

**********************************************************************

characteristics
  v
assumptions
  v
beliefs
  v
expectations
  v
opportunities
O> IS COMPLIANCE *REALLY* THE GOAL?

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LET WHAT DISTRACTS YOU,  
REMEMBER YOUR ORIGINAL INTENTION

COMFORT ZONES

> are honestly learned,  and
> can be intentionally adjusted

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TO BE INFLUENTIAL

PAUSE

TO BE INFLUENCED

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to COLLABORATE = to work with others

needed > the intention to consider more than your own perspective

to FACILITATE = to make a process easier

needed > the commitment to invite and respect different points of view

to MEDIATE = to reconcile differences

needed > the willingness to accept something other than your own 1st choice

to NEGOTIATE = to come to agreement

needed > all of the above

*ask yourself:* Which of these are hard or new for me?
O EXPLORING THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM?

> What’s happening in this person’s life?
> How does s/he feel about it - specifically?

O BEHAVIOR IN CONTEXT HAS MESSAGE VALUE

> What is s/he trying to achieve?

  e.g. she is not taking a diuretic because
  she wants to go play bridge (a desired outcome)

O WHAT ARE TWO MYTHS RELATED TO (NON)COMPLIANCE?

> _____________________________________________________________
> _____________________________________________________________

O What is it like to be __________,

  To value what s/he values,
  To have had her / his experiences,
  To be in this current situation, and
  To receive support as I provide it?

What else might help?

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O BEST PRACTICES - YOURS: WHAT CAN (WILL) YOU DO
TO IMPROVE YOUR OWN PRACTICE?

O WHAT ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO YOU?