

Conflict Resolutions - Rules for Fair Fighting

Note: The person (“x”) who knows s/he has a problem has to take responsibility for bringing it up with another person (“y”).

The Preliminaries

Interaction #1:

X goes to Y—at a time when they can speak privately—and says, “Hello, Y. I ‘m having a problem that I need to speak with you about. Is this a good time for you to talk with me?”

Response:

Y either says, “Yes”—and the conversation begins; or Y doesn’t want to talk right now. If now is not a good time, Y can say so, but then must propose an alternative time for the discussion.

Defining the Problem

Interaction #2:

X needs to express his/her problem clearly and in terms that Y can understand. If x can talk about:

- a) what is happening, and
- b) how s/he is affected by it, then Y may be able to hear about it, and may even get interested in helping to solve the problem.

The Form: “When you do _____, I feel _____.”

Response:

Y’s response will tell you a lot about how skillfully the problem has been presented. What you want Y to do is to respond with understanding what X has said, and to be able to deal with those concerns without getting sidetracked, (for example, into defending his/her own behavior).

The Form: “So, what you are saying is _____?”

Interaction #3:

X can now acknowledge that s/he has been heard by Y. This rewards Y for listening (rather than trying to justify his/her own actions), and sets the stage for working together to solve the problem.

The Form: Yes, that’s the problem I’m having, (or, if you need to clarify Y’s understanding: “That’s pretty close, but it’s more like _____.”)

(If X clarifies or adds more information, then Y’s job is still just to listen, and then reflect back only what s/he thinks X is saying. This process goes on until X is certain that Y understands what s/he is bringing up for discussion.)

Negotiating

Interaction #4:

X needs to be able to say what it is that s/he wants in the way of change. Would it help for there to be a change in a procedure, or an expectation, or should Y be asked to modify his/her behavior in some way? The point is that Y can't be expected to "guess" at what would make things better for X. (In this system Y is asked to be a good listener, not a mind-reader!)

The Form: "I've been thinking, and I wonder if you would be able to make a change by doing _____ . If you did, it would make things better for me.
What do you think?"

Interaction #5:

Y can then respond to the suggestion with ideas of his/her own.

The Form: "You'd like us to make changes by doing _____. The only problem I can see with that is _____. Which might make things more difficult for me and cause a further problem. How about trying to solve things by doing _____"

Interactions #4 and #5 can be repeated any number of times, until a solution is found that is agreeable to both parties. Once an agreement is reached, think about how you can come together later on to review how it is working. Setting a time is good, because it reinforces the assumption that problems are something you can both talk about and fix—by working together.

J. Hancock
UNC Counseling Center
10/2003