Managing Conflict: Escalating And De-Escalating

OBJECTIVES:

1. Define conflict in co-parenting relationships.

2. Identify one's role in patterns of conflict.

3. Raise awareness of unhealthy patterns of communication during conflict.

HANDOUTS:

1. *Conflict and Communication Styles*
2. *Logic in Conflict*
3. *Resolving Conflict Through Assertive Communication*
4. *Take Home Message for This Session*

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks

- Scrapbooking materials

- Pencils and pens

- Flipcharts and markers

GETTING STARTED

Please re-introduce yourself and give one strategy you've used to calm yourself down when you are under stress or angry.

ACTIVITY:
Mini-Lecture on Conflict

Prepare flipcharts or a PowerPoint that contains the information below.

In our classes about relating to others, we've learned about the importance of listening and the use of positive strokes. Today we will look at how you can use some of these communication skills to manage conflict.

Before we discuss techniques for dealing with conflict, we need to learn more about the topic of conflict. It is important to recognize that conflict is normal. Conflict does not predict divorce or break-up. Rather, certain behaviors that people use when disagreeing with their partner predict separation and divorce. Research on couples who ended up divorcing gives us insights into identifying dangerous patterns of thinking and behaviors.

This pattern of behaviors was observed among couples that ended up divorcing:

- *A complaint is made ("You left your towel on the floor this morning.")*

- *If complaints are not acknowledged or dealt with in a satisfactory manner, they become criticism ("You always leave your towels on the floor…you are a SLOB!")*

- *Complaints/criticism are met with defensiveness.*

- *Interaction begins to involve contempt—eye-rolling, sarcasm, and belittling.*

- *Partners finally stonewall, meaning they dismiss each other, disengage from one another, and ignore each other completely.*

We also know of some other problems in communication:

- *"You" statements (or accusation) vs. "I" statements (or feelings)*

- *Mind-reading*

- *Sarcasm*

- *Gunny-sacking (keeping things in and then dumping them all at once)*

- *Sharp tone of voice*

Now that you understand more about what destructive behaviors in conflict situations look like, let's turn to some rules for escalating and de-escalating conflict.

The conflict will escalate or increase if:

- *There is an increase in emotions like anger, frustration, etc.*

- *One feels that they are being threatened.*

- *People get involved, choosing sides.*

- *The individuals were not friendly prior to the conflict.*

- *The individuals have few peace-making skills.*

- *They want to engage in conflict.*

The conflict will de-escalate if:

- *Attention is focused on the problem, not the participants.*

- *There is a decrease in emotion and perceived threat.*

- *The individuals were friendly prior to the conflict.*

- *They know how to make peace, or have someone help them do so.*

- *There is a desire to reduce conflict.*

ACTIVITY:
What Is Your
Conflict Communication Style?

Complete the questionnaire, **Conflict and Communication Styles.** The answers you give will help you understand how you tend to deal with conflict with others.

Discuss the following and summarize the responses on a flipchart:

• What did you learn about yourself?

• Is there anything you would like to change?

• What were the communication barriers?

• What are the toughest and easiest situations to face?

ACTIVITY:
W.I.N. Scripts

Prepare a flip chart that outlines the WIN technique.

Think of a conflict you have had with your child's co-parent. In the past, what have been the barriers you have experienced in talking about these issues? What changes could you make in how you address them?

[Write the examples of conflict on a flip chart if participants feel comfortable sharing them.]

One communication strategy to help reduce conflict is to use the "W.I.N. Strategy." WIN stands for: "When you…, I feel…, I need…"

Think about the conflicts we listed. Sometimes people in anger, begin a conversation or an argument with phrases like, "You always," or "You never," that make the receiver of the message very defensive. The WIN strategy changes the emphasis from an attack on the other person, to how the other person's actions make the speaker feel.

Let's look at the examples on the handout, "Logic in Conflict." How could we apply the WIN approach to reduce conflict and tension? Get into small groups of two or three people and, using the conflicts we listed, practice using this technique. As a group discuss these questions on what you can do when there is conflict based on the W.I.N. strategy.

Discuss these questions with the larger group:

• How can you get what you need by using a WIN Strategy?

• What are some things you should avoid saying?

• How do you feel when you hear the WIN message?

ACTIVITY:
Resolving Conflict
Through Assertive Communication

Think about a conflict that you are now facing. What do want to happen in order for the conflict to be resolved? Complete a copy of the **Resolving Conflict Through Assertive Communication** handout. We'll begin our next session talking about this handout.

ACTIVITY:
Scrapbook Page

Have participants prepare a scrapbook page that shows the participant's commitment to resolve conflict in a way that promotes positive co-parenting.

HOMEWORK:

Also, have the participants take a minute to complete the **Take-Home Message** for their magnet. The action step should focus on using the new stress management strategies they learned.

CLOSING:

In this lesson we defined conflict in co-parenting relationships, identified our own roles in patterns of conflict, and raised awareness of unhealthy patterns of communication during conflict. Conflict management requires skills you will likely develop over time and across relationships, so keep working!

Together We Can: Creating a Healthy Future for our Family

Conflict And Communication Styles

When I am having a problem, disagreement or am in conflict with someone, I usually ... (check all that apply).

❏ Put off dealing with the situation

❏ Get mad, get loud so I get my way

❏ Try to meet the other person half way

❏ Criticize or attack the other person

❏ Give a lot of reasons to show I'm right

❏ Just give in but find another way to punish the person

❏ Treat the other person as if s/he is a child who needs a parent to explain how the conflict will be resolved

❏ Try to help the other person get what s/he wants

❏ Complain or sulk until I get my way

❏ Explain my point of view, ask the other person to do the same, and listen to his/her response

❏ Keep my ideas to myself

❏ Change the subject

❏ Find humor in the situation and try not to take yourself too seriously

❏ Try to understand the other person's point of view

❏ Get another person to decide who's right

❏ Try to work out a compromise that we both can agree to

The type of person I find it easiest to discuss a problem/conflict with is ...

....

Because ....

The type of person I find it hardest to discuss a problem/conflict with is ...

....

Because ....

Ideally, I would like to communicate my needs during a conflict in these ways:

....

....

Logic in Conflict

Conflict often occurs over differences of opinion, facts, perceptions or values. While no one approach or method of resolving conflicts covers every situation, developing skills of assertive communication can be useful in a great variety of conflict situations.

W.I.N. Formula

By using a technique called the W.I.N. METHOD, you can focus more easily on the real issue, express how it is affecting you, and describe what you would like from the situation.

W	stands for **WHEN** …	When you …	State the specific behavior you don't like.
I	stands for **I** …	I feel …	Express your feeling or thought.
N	stands for **NEED** …	I need/want …	Specify what it is that you want to change.

Example 1:

When you **don't call and are late for dinner,** I am **annoyed.** I have spent a lot of time preparing the meal and have been waiting for you to come home. **I need you to call** home when you are going to be late.

Example 2:

When you **make jokes** about people of my gender, I feel **very upset** and uncomfortable. I would **appreciate it if you didn't tell jokes like that in the future.**

Together We Can: Creating a Healthy Future for our Family

Resolving Conflict Through Assertive Communication

1. **Describe the conflict:**

   ....

   ....

2. **What I would like to see happen:**

   ....

   ....

3. **What I will say:**

   A) When you ....

   ....

   B) I feel ... or I think ....

   ....

   C) I need/want/would like/would prefer ....

   ....

4. **Putting it all together:**

   ....

   ....

   ....

Take Home Message for This Session

Directions: Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

Conflict is normal. Resolving it in a positive way helps to promote a healthy relationship.

My Action Steps:

....

....

The Next Session:

....
DATE

....
TIME

....
LOCATION