



Conflict Resolution

Lecturer Details

Session Aims and Objectives

- This session aims to look at some of the factors which commonly lead to conflict in the medical workplace. It goes on to consider barriers to communication that may affect how well conflict is resolved, followed by communication skills which are most effective in resolving conflict.
- It also provides guidance on where to go for support, protection or redress for those trainees who find themselves involved in a conflict situation.

Learning Outcomes

Recognise the common causes of conflict and identify the different stages of conflict.

Understand the two forms of communication and develop strategies to reduce the opportunity for conflict in the future.

Be aware of the level of emphasis that can be placed on verbal and non-verbal communication during a conflict situation.

Understand the impact that cultural differences may have in relation to communication.

Identify the causes of communication break down and the importance to create conditions for communication to succeed.

Recognise the warning and danger signals displayed by individuals during a conflict situation including the signs that may indicate the possibility of physical attack.

Identify the procedural and environmental factors affecting conflict situations and recognise their importance in decision making.

Understand the importance of keeping a safe distance in conflict situations.

Summarise the methods and actions appropriate for particular conflict situations bearing in mind that no two situations are same.

Explain the use of 'reasonable force' as described in law and its limitations and requirements.

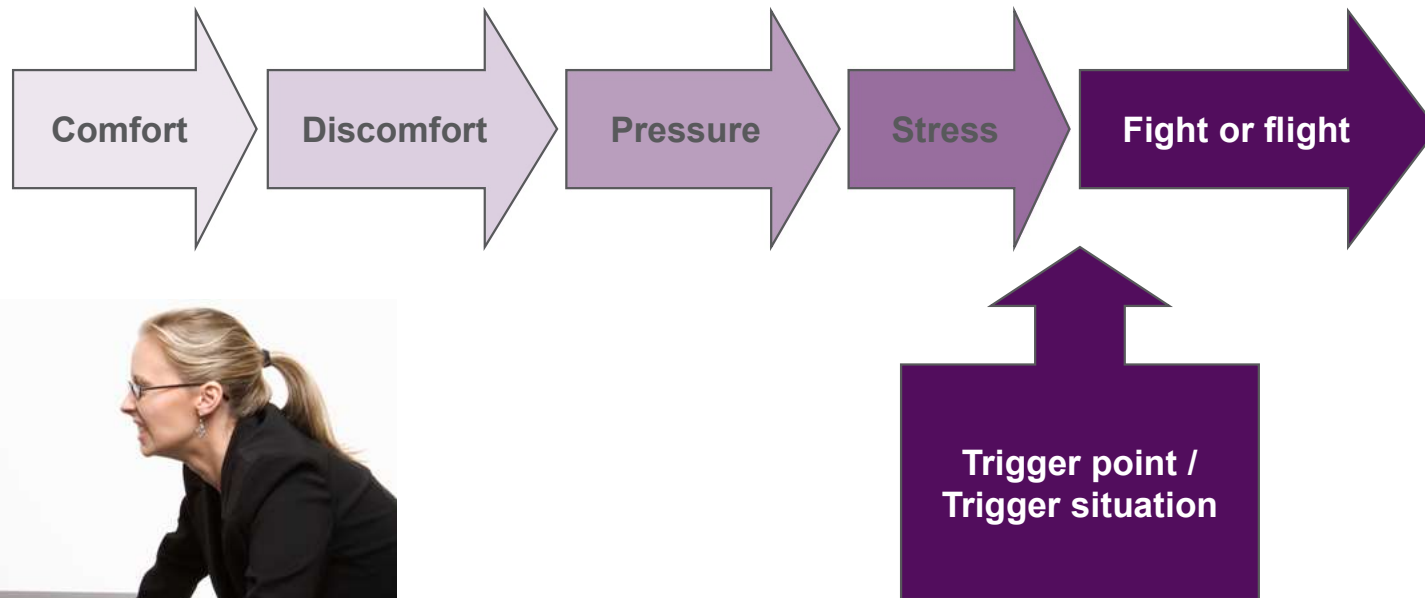
Identify the range of support, both short and long-term, available to those affected by a violent incident

Understand the need to provide support to those directly affected by a violent incident and the wider organisational benefits of this

What is conflict?

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines conflict as:
- **‘A serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one.’**
- The healthcare workplace is a fertile breeding ground for conflicts because of the stress, the dynamics and interdependency of the various relationships that exist between and among care providers, patients and families.
- Conflict occurs in all workplaces and the healthcare sector is no exception. Some might say that conflict is even a normal and natural part of the workplace, and that it can help to effect constructive change.

Initiating Conflict

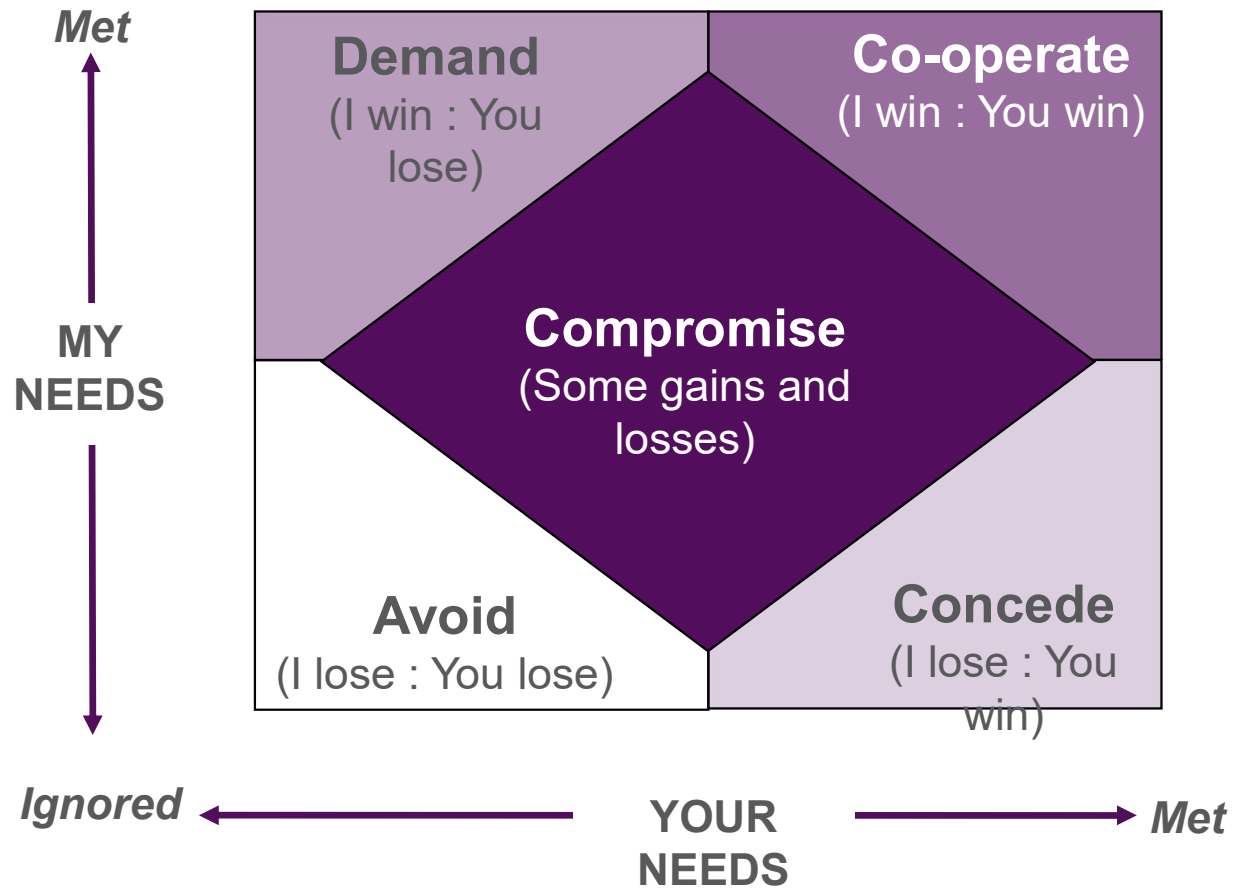


How do humans respond to conflict?

- Fight - React in a challenging way.
- Flight – Turning away from the conflict and what's going on.
- Freeze - Not sure how to react and become very passive.
- What's happening to your body?



Conflict modes



What would you say was the main cause of the conflict? Select one or more options from the list.

Poor
communication

Personality
clash

Power
differentials

Organisational
problems

Incompatible
work styles

Heavy
workloads

Stress and
fatigue

Unwillingness
to assist

Causes of conflict

- **Poor communication** is often at the heart of conflict situations – it is often not what people say, but the way they say it that most influences how people react.
- Conflict can also arise **when personalities clash**, or when people bring their personal problems to work with them.
- Sources of conflict relating to **hierarchy** and the inability to resolve conflicting interests are quite common - tensions are heightened by **power differences**. An **unwillingness to assist** can also be a symptom of power plays
- There are also likely to be a number of organisational sources of conflict, for example: an ineffective, out of date NHS system or a process that frustrates and irritates. This might include difficulties with resource allocation, the distribution of duties, workload and benefits, different levels of tolerance for risk taking, and varying views on accountability.

Causes of Conflict

- People have **different ways of working**, have different approaches to specific tasks, and this is a common source of disagreement
- **Heavy workloads, stress and fatigue** are all major contributors to conflict situations, and the reason why people do not always help each other, even if they want to.
- **Unresolved conflict can have a very negative effect on the individuals involved.** Resulting in a variety of emotions, including dissatisfaction, unhappiness, hopelessness, and depression.
- It can affect people's sleep, their relationships and their performance in the workplace, occasionally leading to resignation.
- **Body language** often contributes to conflict situations more than we realise. Here are some negative examples that you might see in the workplace.

Language and Cultural difference

- Other barriers include **lack of attention to, or interest in the other person**, differences in perception and viewpoint.
- **Language and cultural differences** and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents can also present a barrier. The norms of social interaction also vary greatly in different cultures, and the way in which emotions are expressed. An example of this might be when one person is used to exchanging pleasantries with colleagues, when the other is not, or
- **Expectations and prejudices** can lead to false assumptions or stereotyping, for example, when someone expects their request to take priority, or when one individual feels that they or what they are doing is more important. Medical professionals also some may have a tendency to adopt a 'what can you do for me' attitude, rather than 'what can I do for you'.

Resolving Conflict

- One simple, but effective technique when faced with potential conflict is 'the deep breath'....'power of the pause'.
- The Thomas Killman Instrument (TKI), is a well-known and accepted descriptor of the various ways in which people deal with conflict.
- It identifies five approaches to conflict:
- **Competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance and accommodation.**
- Collaboration is identified as the preferred method for resolving conflict, as it encourages people to work toward a resolution that allows everyone to get what they need, rather than trying to win or to defeat another person.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

- Each of these styles is described and discussed, and tips are provided on when to use each style. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of each approach are outlined.
- Watch this video
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFlydyH2H8Y>
- <https://go.govloop.com/rs/231-DWB-776/images/Conflict-Mgmt-Cheatsheet.pdf>

Communication

- The majority of difficulties in this area can be dealt with by using **common sense**, **maintaining a sense of perspective and balance**, and staying in touch with the fact that we are all fallible human beings, and that, after all, work is just one part of life.
- **Humour**, **sensitivity**, the capacity to view things from a colleague's perspective (**empathy**) and **timing** are all important and helpful attributes.
- Informal conversations can really help manage those relationships, and to deal with day-to-day frictions and irritations, so it's important to ensure that there is sufficient unstructured time for this to take place.
- Establishing relationships with the team from the beginning of a shift, exchanging pleasantries and getting to know them goes a long way in avoiding conflict situations, as does being reliable, and making time to discuss their concerns. This investment should ensure that, when under pressure, interactions between professionals won't erupt into conflict because the relationship is an established one

Resolving conflict

- Most healthcare trust policies advise that people involved in conflict situations should discuss, report or seek advice from their supervisor, and that HR can be approached for assistance too.


Steps in conflict Resolution

- Seek advice from a friend, senior colleague, training rep, medical education manager or supervisor for advice and support as soon as possible.
- Approach the person you are in conflict with face to face or by email and ask them what can be done to resolve the conflict.
- Stick to the facts, include actual examples of the concerning behaviour and how it makes you feel.
- Don't copy anyone into the e-mail at this stage.


3. State exactly what you would like the other person to do instead

- It's important to state exactly what you want the other person's behaviour to be instead
- Don't use "we" e.g., "I think we should sit down and talk about it". Specifically describe only what you want them to do
- This request should always come at the end after you've described the behaviour that's causing the problem and why it's a problem for you
- Only then will the other person be open to hearing your request. Don't put the request at the beginning. It always belongs at the end

Seek help and advice from your clinical or educational supervisor as early as possible. Meetings and conversations with your supervisor will generally be confidential and their advice and support will be invaluable. The key message is seek support from your supervisor as soon as possible or a senior member of the team in your speciality.



Always keep a record of incidents and interactions where you are in conflict with another person or team.



If you witness a colleague or member of staff struggling with ongoing conflict the same principles apply.

Warning and Danger Situations

- **On rare occasions conflict may quickly escalate and personal, racist or other verbally aggressive & threatening language may be directed at you.**
- If your personal safety or well-being is threatened in such a way - move away from the patient area but ensure at least one member of staff stays with you.
- Ask a member of staff to call the senior manager for the area or HR manager stat who will advise you and manage the situation.

Managing individual patient conflict

- What to have in place – Policies / Patients charter.
- Have clear codes of conduct for staff that are advertised to patients.
- Do you have a behaviours and policy? Define acceptable behaviour.
- Advertise policy and consequences
- Toe the line / consistency is key
- When enough is enough – the Bernard Manning case!

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