**CRG BASIC MEDIATION TRAINING/APPROACHES TO CONFLICT:**

**Class 2 Materials**

**CONFLICT AND CULTURE**

Whether a conflict exists at all is a cultural question. In an interview conducted in Canada, an elderly Chinese man indicated he had experienced no conflict at all for the previous 40 years.[2] Among the possible reasons for his denial was a cultural preference to see the world through lenses of harmony rather than conflict, as encouraged by his Confucian upbringing. Labeling some of our interactions as conflicts and analyzing them into smaller component parts is a distinctly Western approach that may obscure other aspects of relationships …

Ways of naming, framing, and taming conflict vary across cultural boundaries. As the example of the elderly Chinese interviewee illustrates, not everyone agrees on what constitutes a conflict. For those accustomed to subdued, calm discussion, an emotional exchange among family members may seem a threatening conflict. The family members themselves may look at their exchange as a normal and desirable airing of differing views. Intractable conflicts are also subject to different interpretations. Is an event a skirmish, a provocation, an escalation, or a mere trifle, hardly worth noticing? The answer depends on perspective, context, and how identity relates to the situation.

Just as there is no consensus across cultures or situations on what constitutes a conflict or how events in the interaction should be framed, so there are many different ways of thinking about how to tame it. Should those involved meet face to face, sharing their perspectives and stories with or without the help of an outside mediator? Or should a trusted friend talk with each of those involved and try to help smooth the waters? Should a third party be known to the parties or a stranger to those involved?

<https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/culture_conflict>

**DE-ESCALATION**

**Things that tend to ESCALATE tension or WORSEN conflict:**

* “Wing it”
* Speak at people, try to provoke reactions, try to prove your point
* “You” statements (blaming, saying what you think their intent was)
* Rejecting body language
* Generalize (always, never, etc.)
* Be wordy, repeat same points
* Interrupt, ignore other person
* Ask accusatory questions to control or provoke
* Dehumanize yourself or others, see them solely as what you disagree with
* Focus on personality, finding fault, contradicting all possibilities
* Dig into your own position or belief (“it’s all you want or nothing,” “only willing to talk about x”, etc.)
* Focus on past
* Focus on differences (excluding or denying common ground or shared experiences)

**Things that tend to DE-ESCALATE tension or RESOLVE conflict:**

* Be prepared
* Speak with people, invite them to join a discussion
* “I” statements (speaking about your own experience or reactions)
* Receptive body language
* Be specific
* Be concise
* Listen and demonstrate listening
* Ask open-ended questions to understand
* Show, connect with your own real feelings of respect or positive regard
* Focus on the issue, finding positive responses
* Open up to other possibilities – accept partial solutions, other frames
* Focus on present, future
* Focus on common ground (while naming and acknowledging differences)

***Bottom line tips for challenging conversations: 1) decide to de-escalate and engage, 2) listen first and deeply, 3) don’t move to problem-solving or action too quickly, and 4) take care of yourself and be accountable for your own behavior***

**KEEPING CALM, HELPING OTHERS TO BE CALM**

**What we can do for ourselves:**

* Take a break
* Take a few calm breaths (including out-breaths longer than in-breaths)
* Count to 10
* Picture a calming image or color
* Go outside, take a walk
* Move around in a different way
* Vent with someone else who’s safe
* Drink some water
* Over the longer term, lean and practice techniques that help us stay calm (meditation, reflective writing, yoga, etc.)
* Other ideas:

**What we can do with others:**

* Keep calm ourselves
* Ask the other person if they need to take a break or need something in order to take care of themselves (and listen and support them to do that)
* Create as much safety as possible, set up a good environment for talking
* Offer a glass of water or something else that might make them comfortable
* Give the other person time to ask questions or talk first, listen carefully before rushing into what you want to say or your agenda
* Set up clear expectations for your time together (goals or expected results, what will or won’t be talked about, how long you have to talk, who else is involved in what ways, etc.)
* Other ideas:

***CHILL STEPS:***

***WORKING TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING***

1. ***Recognize you’re in a conflict, “chill”/de-escalate, choose to work it out or understand***
2. ***Listen, express yourself (what are deeper needs?)***
3. ***Problem-solve, list multiple possible options***
4. ***Choose something that works for both people***