

A CONVERSATION  ABOUT CONFLICT

## Facilitator's Guide

developed by



© Search for Common Ground, 2003

Duplication and transmission is authorized without special permission, as long as acknowledgement is given to Search for Common Ground and there is no commercial gain.

## **A Conversation About Conflict**

Search for Common Ground is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions. The Conversation About Conflict is an initiative of Search for Common Ground's Outreach Division.

A Conversation About Conflict is intended to create a new awareness about conflict in our lives. Through exploring our experiences of conflict in a small, informal group setting, we discover the causes of conflict, the costs of conflict and alternate approaches to respond positively to conflict.

This new awareness is achieved by:

- giving participants an opportunity to reflect on conflict in their own life, their current practice at home, at work and other settings
- discussing the cost of avoided and badly managed conflicts for us personally and as a society
- exploring various effective approaches participants have used or experienced when dealing with different conflicts
- offering some 'food for thought' by presenting to the group the basic principles of conflict resolution as ideas to consider
- motivating people to take action, from changing their own behaviors and sharing their insights with others to receiving training or initiating conflict resolution programs in their workplace or community

The format of the Conversation About Conflict is a facilitated discussion over an hour and a half to two hours. It can be hosted in workplaces, schools, campuses, civic association gatherings, community based organization venues, churches, libraries or individual homes. The size and nature of the groups can vary greatly.

The Conversation is led by a facilitator who engages the audience with a set of challenging questions and presents a few ideas to consider. The resulting dialogue is shaped by the insights and experiences of the participants.

## Instructions for Facilitators

The Conversation is divided into four sections:

- *The Introduction Unit*, requiring approximately ten minutes, provides a brief overview of the Conversation history, format and purpose.
- *The Conflict Questionnaire Unit*, requiring approximately twenty to thirty minutes, helps participants relate to the issue by examining how they deal with conflict in their daily lives.
- *The Exploring Conflict Unit*, requiring approximately forty to sixty minutes, broadens the discussion by providing five leading questions on the nature of conflict and different ways to deal with it.
- *The Conclusion Unit*, requiring approximately fifteen minutes, brings the conversation to a close, encourages the completion of the feedback form and invites interested participants to become involved.

### What you need

To run A Conversation About Conflict, make sure you have:

- your Facilitator's Guide
- Participant sign-up sheet\*
- sufficient number of Questionnaire Response Forms\*
- sufficient number of Participant Feedback Forms\*
- sufficient number of pens
- sufficient number of the 'Things You Can Do' Hand Out\*
- if you are using Power Point make sure you have all the equipment you need and test it in advance
- if you are using a flipchart, write the questionnaire questions on five separate sheets and the 'ideas to consider' also on five separate sheets neatly in advance
- if you are using a Display Board , make sure you have:
  - o the Conversation About Conflict logo card
  - o the five question cards in the right order
  - o the two questionnaire rating cards
  - o the five 'ideas to consider' cards in the right order

you can order a Display Board by emailing us: [kzehr@sfcg.org](mailto:kzehr@sfcg.org),

\* this document can be found at the back of this Guide

## **Setting up the room**

The best set up is a circle of chairs, without any desks or tables. Keep a chair for yourself and sit in it for most of the Conversation to be perceived as part of the group rather than as the ‘teacher’. If you are using the Power Point presentation, try to have the projector behind you so that it doesn’t stand between you and the participants. If you are using a Display Board, you can have it on a chair or a table next to you or, better, on a flipchart stand. If you are using a flipchart, just have it next to your chair.

You may have documents and brochures about your own organization. Please keep them on a separate table so as not to confuse participants. You can refer to them at the beginning and take questions once the Conversation About Conflict has clearly ended. In the materials at the back of this guide you will see a handout for participants to get at the end called, “Things You Can Do”. Please feel free to put together a list of local resources, trainings and suggestions of further steps people can take to distribute with this handout.

You may want to have refreshments available or a jug of water and some glasses.

## **Facilitating the Conversation About Conflict**

Facilitating means literally ‘making it easier’. Your role is therefore to make it easy for participants to engage in this conversation and gain value from it. It is very important to set the scene at the beginning by establishing clearly the purpose of the Conversation and creating a safe space for participants. After that, you will be mainly asking questions to the group, gently guiding the Conversation when necessary, keeping it on track and occasionally linking or building on the different points participants make.

You will need to listen very attentively and use paraphrasing – that is, restating what someone has said in other words - to extract the most important insights. Use sentences such as ‘so what you are saying is...’ or ‘if I hear you correctly, you think that...’ and ask the group to respond. If you are doing all the talking, then you are on the wrong track! Be careful not to be set up as ‘the expert’ and start giving a lecture on conflict resolution or answer all the questions yourself.

In the third section, each set of questions ends with what we have called ‘an idea to consider’. These ideas should come as a natural conclusion of the discussion. You should always present the ideas as ‘food for thought’, something for people to think about, rather than as ‘the Truth’. Don’t spend too much time on the ideas or become defensive, participants must feel safe to disagree with them.

If the Conversation runs out of steam, get participants to work on the next question in pairs or small groups of four to get them engaged again, instead of trying to fill the void yourself. We have made recommendations in the Guide when to use pair sharing, but it is up to you how much and when to use it.

The questions we ask can be quite personal and people often feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with one person rather than the whole group – especially when the group is over 15 people. When you use pair shares, it is useful to let participants know:

- 1) the time they have for that discussion
- 2) who will go first – you can select something fun to decide who goes first (e.g., the person with the longest hair, the brightest top, closest to the wall, the tallest, etc.), and
- 3) that you will ask them to switch half way through the time and have the other person share

Make sure that you time the exercise and tell them to switch half way through. You should also let them know about 15 seconds before the end of the period that they need to wrap-up.

Another challenge is to not let a few individuals dominate the whole Conversation. Invite the participation of those who haven’t spoken yet, being careful not to put anyone on the spot. If the Conversation becomes too heated, ask people to raise their hands and have them speak in order. You can also ask the group to support you in making sure that everyone is heard and respected if people start interrupting one another.

Finally, keep an eye on your watch. You want to leave enough time in the end (a minimum of 15 minutes) to properly wrap up the Conversation, get feedback and discuss possible follow-up.

As you grow more confident, you’ll find your own words and develop your own style in facilitating the Conversation about Conflict. Using the Facilitator’s Debrief Form\*, please share with us your experiences and innovations as we are constantly updating this Guide to incorporate facilitators’ suggestions.

### **Six points to remember when facilitating this Conversation:**

- Resist temptation to teach – facilitate
- Resist temptation to answer all the questions – reflect back
- Resist temptation to convince – use questions
- Make the Conversation flow
- Help participants see the bigger picture/vision
- Find your own words and examples

**Above all, remember that your only objective is *to have a conversation*. You are not trying to preach the benefits of conflict resolution but rather to have them think about the issues and leave with a few insights – their own!**

### **Using this Manual**

Each unit is separated, clarifying each time the purpose of that particular unit and the preparation required. When you are facilitating the Conversation, segue from one to the next without interruption. The instructions are displayed into two columns: on the *right*, we've listed all what you need to say to the participants, on the *left*, the Facilitator's notes, we give you some extra information and suggestions that should help you facilitate.

The information to be written up on the flipchart (or displayed with Power Point or Display Board) follows immediately your instructions, with the word Flipchart at the top.

We hope this format is user-friendly. Thank you for your feedback:

Search for Common Ground  
Outreach Division – The Conversations About Conflict

[cframpton@sfcg.org](mailto:cframpton@sfcg.org)

tel: 202 572 62 89

fax: 202 232 67 18

## **Facilitator's Checklist**

### **What participants need to know in advance:**

- the Conversation is free and open to all
- the Conversation is an opportunity to explore the way we deal with conflict, as individuals, as a community and as a society – it won't focus on one issue in particular
- the Conversation is not affiliated with any religious or political agenda
- the Conversation is not a training workshop
- the date, venue, times and sponsoring organization or individual facilitator

### **What participants need to know at the beginning of the Conversation:**

- who the facilitator is and how s/he's come to do this work
- the objective of this Conversation is to raise awareness on the issue of conflict and how we deal with it
- the Conversation is a free flow of ideas, a dialogue but we will also present the basic principles of conflict resolution as 'food for thought'
- the Conversation has been developed through a program at Search for Common Ground - a non-profit organization dedicated to non-adversarial approaches to conflict

### **What participants need to know at the end of the Conversation:**

- the ways to continue this Conversation as listed on the 'Things You Can Do' Hand Out
- the resources that exist at the local level (community mediation centers, independent mediators, training courses, etc.) as developed into a Hand Out by you, the facilitator if you'd like to
- if applicable, the services the sponsoring organization or facilitator offers

## THE INTRODUCTION UNIT

### **Purpose:**

The objective of the introduction is to orientate the audience by giving them some background information about the Conversations and its purpose. It prepares the ground for the Conversation and must create a safe and comfortable space for participation.

### **Objective/ Expected Outcomes:**

By the end of this unit, participants will understand who the facilitators and sponsor organization(s) are. They will know what the purpose of the Conversation is and what format it will take.

**Time:** 5 - 10 minutes, depending upon audience

### **Activities:**

- Welcome and introductions
- Presentation of purpose and format of the Conversation, setting expectations

### **Preparation required:**

- Have a Participant Sign-Up Sheet ready to circulate among the participants.
- If you'd like to, you can have labels ready for participants to write their first name.
- Read the Background Information and have it handy to answer any question.
- You may have documents and brochures about your own organization. Please keep them on a separate table so as not to confuse participants.
- You may want to have refreshments available or a jug of water and some glasses.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activity</b></p>
<p><b>Time:</b> 10 min.</p> <p>You can have information about your own organization available and say that you'll be happy to answer any question about your work at the end.</p> <p>It is helpful for the group to understand a bit of the context of the Conversation. In the field of conflict resolution, people normally go to skills training without first exploring their deep beliefs about conflict. This Conversation is not a training but an opportunity to explore conflict. Those interested in being trained in the specific skills of conflict resolution will be well prepared to do so by this Conversation.</p> <p>You may add here that given world events today, it seems appropriate to look at conflict in our own backyard –our homes, workplaces and communities.</p> <p>You can choose to say a lot about Search for Common Ground or very little, depending on whether you believe it is relevant and interesting to that particular audience.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Welcome Participants.</p> <p>Circulate the Sign-Up sheet among participants.</p> <p>Introduce yourself as the facilitator and the organization you represent, if applicable, adding a few words about what motivated you to become a facilitator.</p> <p><b>Why a Conversation About Conflict?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We all deal and often struggle with conflicts (give some examples).</li> <li>- We encounter many different kinds of conflict every day without necessarily connecting them and seeing some of the patterns and lessons to be learned.</li> <li>- This is an opportunity to step back and explore conflict in our life, our beliefs about it, how it looks, how it impacts us, how we deal with it and what our options are.</li> <li>- Give a little bit of background information about Search for Common Ground and the Conversations as appropriate. (see Background Information). The organization is not affiliated with any religious or political agenda.</li> </ul>

If you feel that ground rules are necessary, ask for the group to establish them. It'll be easier and quicker to just ask that cell phones ringers be turned off. If you think some may be concerned with confidentiality, address it with the group.

If the audience isn't too large, ask participants to introduce themselves briefly and say what motivated them to join this Conversation.

Explain how the next 1 ½ - 2 hours will look:

- simply a conversation, a free exchange of thoughts and experiences, no right or wrong
- share as little or as much as feels comfortable
- the Conversation is structured as a graduated exploration of conflict, starting with a questionnaire and then taking the discussion further, sometimes with a partner, other times as a group
- at points throughout the Conversation we'll also be offering ideas to consider or "food for thought"

Deal with any ground rules and logistics issues, such as location of restrooms, etc.

Thank all the people who need to be thanked.

Ask participants if they have any questions.

## **Background Information for the Introduction Unit**

### **Search for Common Ground Background**

Search for Common Ground is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. Our “toolbox” includes mediation/ facilitation training, community organizing, and the use of radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music to bring conflicting parties together.

Founded in 1982, the organization now operates in fourteen countries around the world, including the United States, working with partners on the ground to strengthen local capacity to deal with conflict.

You can find out more about Search for Common Ground at [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org).

## **Background Information for the Introduction Unit**

### **A Conversation About Conflict Background**

A Conversation About Conflict is an initiative of Search for Common Ground's Outreach Division. Partnering with like-minded individuals and organizations, it seeks to raise the public's awareness of how we deal with conflict and differences and help them explore cooperative approaches as developed by the broad field of conflict resolution. The Conversations are currently hosted in different cities in the United States for diverse audiences with no previous exposure to conflict resolution.

A Conversation About Conflict encourages participants to develop a new awareness of conflicts in our lives – how we currently respond to them, what they cost us, and alternative approaches which can be used.

This new awareness is achieved by:

- giving participants an opportunity to reflect on conflicts in their own life, their current practices at home, at work and other settings;
- discussing the cost of avoided and badly managed conflicts for us personally and as a society;
- exploring various effective approaches participants have used or experienced when dealing with different conflicts; and
- motivating people to take action, from changing their behaviors and sharing their insights with others to receiving training or initiating conflict resolution programs in their workplace or community.

The format is a one and a half to two-hour facilitated discussion. The size and nature of the group can vary greatly. A Conversation About Conflict can be hosted in schools, campuses, workplace brown bags, civic and other associations. It is not a training course, simply a conversation. The facilitator engages the audience with a set of challenging questions and a few propositions. The resulting dialogue is shaped by the insights and experiences of the participants.

Those who express an interest in taking the conversation further are referred to local organizations and programs (e.g. business facilitators, community mediation centers). They can also become facilitators themselves, taking A Conversation About Conflict to their respective communities.

## THE CONFLICT QUESTIONNAIRE UNIT

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this section is to ‘get the conversation going’ by providing participants with an opportunity to reflect on their own conflicts and to connect with the group. By sharing personal experiences, participants get to deal with the heart of the matter immediately and see the relevance of the Conversation.

### **Objective/ Expected Outcomes:**

By the end of this unit, participants will have reflected on how they personally respond to conflict and how conflict is dealt with in their two primary environments: family and work (or friends if more appropriate, particularly with students or in work settings where discussion directly about work is not appropriate).

**Time:** 20 - 25 minutes

### **Activities:**

- Explain the questionnaire
- Distribute the response forms
- Ask the questions
- Set up paired sharing
- Discuss and debrief with the whole group

### **Preparation Required:**

- If using a Flipchart, write each question of the Questionnaire on a separate page of the flipchart.
- If using Power Point, present each question on a separate slide.
- If using the Display Board, have each question in order ready to put up individually.
- Have sufficient numbers of the Questionnaire Response Forms available to distribute – you’ll find it at the back of the Manual.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p><b>Time:</b> 20 - 25 minutes</p> <p>Say that you'll be asking five questions and that they should answer them as it applies in each setting. Reinforce no right or wrong, ask to answer honestly</p> <p>Write each question on a <b>separate</b> flipchart sheet, if you show them all at once, participants will go over the questions too quickly, without thinking or reflecting.</p> <p>If you are asked what you mean by 'conflict' say that conflict means many different things for different people and that you'll be exploring the term during this Conversation. It's whatever 'conflict' means to them. If they want to, for this exercise, they can define conflict as 'a disagreement about something that you care about'.</p> <p>If some participants work with family members, you can suggest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they make a distinction between work conflicts and conflicts at home with family</li> <li>- they use other family members who they don't work with for the family setting</li> <li>- they use friends in one of the settings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Questionnaire</b></p> <p>Introduce the questionnaire as a way of 'getting into the topic' and 'assessing how we currently deal with conflict' in different settings.</p> <p>Distribute the Response Forms and review how they will be using them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Answer each question in terms of your family environment in the first column and your work environment in the second column</li> <li>- 0 means 'almost always NO' and 5 means 'almost always YES'</li> </ul> <p>Show the first Question (see Questionnaire on the next page), read it out loud and let participants answer it before moving on to the next one. Reiterate the instructions for each question.</p> <p>Questions 3: give an example (e.g. superficial issue: washing up, real issue: respect within relationship + sometimes the only resolution you need is being heard)</p> <p>Question 5: say that you assume that they didn't answer 5 to all four previous questions.</p>

## Flipchart

### Questionnaire

*Write each question on a different sheet!*

Question 1:

**Is it easy for you to raise an issue or disagree ...**

---

Question 2:

**When in conflict, can you share your feelings, especially anger...**

---

Question 3:

**Do you deal with the “real” issue and find resolution...**

---

Question 4:

**Is everyone’s voice heard and respected...**

---

Question 5:

**What would it take to create a safe or comfortable space for conflicts and differences...**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p>If someone is sitting next to someone they know very well, ask if they would be willing to switch seats with someone else. We've found that it works better for participants if they partner with someone they don't know as well.</p> <p>If appropriate, reassure participants they don't need to share anything they are not comfortable talking about. It is very important that participants feel safe in the group and not coerced into personal disclosure!</p> <p>You can add that they shouldn't share specifics about what their partner has said without their permission.</p> <p>If someone says they did answer 5 to all, then ask them to answer what is present or why do they think they were able to answer 5 to all.</p> <p><b>Take off cards if you are using the Display Board.</b></p>	<p><b>Questionnaire (continued)</b></p> <p>Ask participants to turn to their neighbor and share what they saw when answering the questions. Also ask them to elaborate their answer to question 5.</p> <p>Tell them that they will have 10 min. to share, and at the 5 minute point let them know that they are half way through.</p> <p>Debrief with the whole group by asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What came up in your discussion?</li> <li>- What insights or patterns did you see?</li> <li>- What similarities or differences did you see between the two settings?</li> <li>- What did you answer for Question 5?</li> </ul> <p>Close and segue to next section: we are going to talk more about what conflict is for us, what some of our deep beliefs are and how they affect our ability to deal with conflicts effectively.</p>



## **THE EXPLORING CONFLICT UNIT**

### **Purpose:**

This unit's objective is to explore conflict further by looking at what conflict means and the role it plays in participants' lives. Five discussion topics, building on each other, will be used to approach the different aspects of conflict and effective resolution techniques.

### **Objectives/ Expected Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this unit, participants should be able to better understand their beliefs and responses to conflict, understand that they have a choice in how to respond to conflict and explore different ways to respond to conflict.

**Time:** 40 – 50 minutes

### **Activities:**

Presentation and discussion of five questions

Presentation and discussion of five 'ideas to consider'

### **Preparation Required:**

Each 'Idea to consider' should be written on a separate sheet of the flipchart or a separate slide of the Power Point. If you are using a Display Board, have your five cards ready in your hand in the correct order.

### **Six points to remember when facilitating this section:**

- Resist temptation to teach – facilitate
- Resist temptation to answer all the questions – reflect back
- Resist temptation to convince – use questions
- Make the Conversation flow
- Help participants see the bigger picture/vision
- Find your own words and examples

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p><b>Time:</b> 40 minutes in total</p> <p>You don't have to ask all the questions, always go with what participants give you.</p> <p><i>Possible example:</i> Men and women used to have rigid roles within marriage; nowadays responsibilities have to be constantly negotiated. The workplace has also become less hierarchical, less rules means more opportunities for misunderstanding and conflicts.</p> <p>The idea should emerge naturally from the discussions. If you are a Conflict Resolution practitioner, you can say: 'this is where we come from in our work'. Offer it as 'food for thought' and move on to the section. You should not be perceived as trying to convince the group, you're just presenting it as an idea to think about.</p>	<p><b>Exploring Conflict 1 :</b> <b>What does conflict mean to you?</b></p> <p>Tell participants you are now going to move to discuss the concept of conflict and the role it plays in our lives.</p> <p>Ask the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does the word conflict mean to you?</li> <li>- What role does conflict play in your life? How often do you experience conflict?</li> </ul> <p>Facilitate the discussion. If appropriate, you can ask any of the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why do we have conflicts?</li> <li>- Is it possible not to have conflict?</li> <li>- Do you consider conflict to be normal?</li> <li>- Do you believe we have more or less conflict than 5 years ago?</li> </ul> <p>When the group discussion allows it, introduce the 'Idea to consider': <i>Conflict is a natural part of life. Conflict is everywhere; it seems to be a normal part of life and every relationship.</i></p> <p>Let the group react to it briefly and then move on to the next section.</p>

**Flipchart**

**Idea to Consider:**

*Conflict is a natural part of life*

Conflict is everywhere; it is a normal part of life and every relationship.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p>You may suggest they think back of the first conflict they remember with their siblings or schoolmates.</p> <p>Don't forget to warn them when they have to switch.</p> <p>Typically we only remember conflicts that ended badly and generated a lot of suffering. As a result, we associate all conflicts with these bad experiences.</p> <p>Again, this idea should emerge from the group's discussion and the idea to consider be a way of summing things up. If people don't agree, let the group respond or just acknowledge their point as valid and move on.</p>	<p><b>Exploring Conflict 2:</b> <b>Are conflicts good or bad?</b></p> <p>Ask participants to shut their eyes and try to think of one of their first experiences of conflict. When they have had a chance to think of something, ask them to turn to their neighbor and ask them to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What happened in this conflict?</li> <li>- What lessons did you learn from this experience?</li> <li>- What beliefs about conflict did you develop?</li> </ul> <p>Give them 5 minutes and then debrief the whole group. You can ask any of the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did these experiences influence the way you perceive or react to conflict today?</li> <li>- Are there conflicts that can be easily resolved?</li> <li>- Did any of the early conflicts have a positive outcome? What makes a conflict have positive or negative consequences?</li> </ul> <p>When the group discussion allows it, introduce the 'Idea to consider': <i>Conflict is neither positive nor negative. It is the way we deal with the situation that will turn it into something destructive or an opportunity for growth.</i></p> <p>Let the group react to it briefly and then move on.</p>

**Flipchart**

**An idea to consider:**

*Conflict is neither positive nor negative*

A conflict is a situation, neither positive nor negative in itself. It is the way we deal with that situation that will make it either something destructive or an opportunity for growth.

<b>Notes to Facilitator</b>	<b>Learning Activities</b>
<p>Show the diagram on the flipchart (see page 24). Deal with any questions about the two approaches.</p> <p><i>Possible example:</i> You can think: ‘If only my husband/wife was more understanding/less selfish, etc.’ or you can focus on ‘how can we have a relationship that works for the both of us?’ The question frames the situation completely differently.</p>	<p><b>Exploring Conflict 3: How do we handle conflict?</b></p> <p>Ask the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What is your usual response to conflict?</li><li>- What are your immediate or automatic emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors?</li></ul> <p>There are basically two different ways to deal with a conflict, you can either focus on winning, convincing, overcoming the person you’re in conflict with OR you can engage that person as a partner and work together on the problem you have.</p> <p>Let the group respond to the diagram.</p> <p>Then, ask participants to think of a conflict they are involved in or affected by, now or recently. Ask them to turn to their partner and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- How did each of you deal with the problem and each other?</li><li>- Which model/approach were you the closest to?</li><li>- How did the conflict affect your relationship?</li><li>- Did you get to the real issue and resolve it?</li></ul> <p>After 5 minutes, debrief with the whole group.</p>

The group may react quite strongly. Conflict situations are not that simple, what do you do when someone is aggressing you, etc. Don't go on the defensive or try to answer every question, rather reflect them back to the group. The idea is to challenge the participants, to make them think of their own deep beliefs and attitudes. Try to not remain stuck there for too long.

When the group discussion allows it, introduce as an 'Idea to consider': *Conflict is a choice, although this is not the easy answer to all problems, there is always a choice.*

Let the group react to it briefly and then move on to the next section.

## Flipchart

## Diagram

### ADVERSARIAL APPROACH

Seeing each other as the problem,  
the source of the conflict  
& focusing on our differences

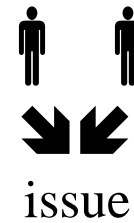


or

### COOPERATIVE APPROACH

Understanding our differences  
& working together to find  
common ground

or





## **Flipchart**

Idea to Consider:

*Conflict offers a choice*

Although it is not the easy answer to all problems,  
there is always a choice.

<b>Notes to Facilitator</b>	<b>Learning Activities</b>
<p>The problem with the diagram and the idea of choice is that it requires us to be conscious and think about our options to some extent (at least before it becomes our natural way of dealing with any conflict). When most of the time we respond to conflict in a very emotional way, the automatic pilot takes over.</p> <p>If it takes too much time to put people in and out of pairs, just run the whole section with the large group.</p> <p>If you are a Conflict Resolution trainer or practitioner, you can share a little bit about your own journey and experiences about learning those skills.</p>	<p><b>Exploring Conflict 4: How do we make conflicts work for us?</b></p> <p>Ask the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- When we're in conflict do we really think about the options we have in the way we react?</li><li>- How confident are you in your ability to deal with conflict?</li></ul> <p>Ask participants to turn to their neighbor and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Think back to the conflict you recalled earlier, what tools and skills did you use to deal with this conflict?</li><li>- What have you found useful in dealing with conflicts at home, at work, or with strangers?</li></ul> <p>Debrief with the whole group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What skills, processes and qualities do we need to deal with conflict and all the emotions that go with it?</li></ul>

The idea here is to challenge the idea that some people are good at dealing with conflict when others aren't. Personality can play a role but mostly, it's a question of attitude and skills development over many years.

When the group discussion allows it, introduce the 'Idea to consider': *Dealing with conflict can be learned and practiced. Choosing to deal with conflict through a cooperative approach requires a commitment to rise above automatic responses and the courage to step into the unknown. It is a muscle we can build, a question of attitude, experience and learning from each other.*

Let the group react to it briefly and then move on.

**Flipchart**

**An idea to consider:**

*Dealing with conflict can be learned and practiced*

Choosing to deal with conflict through a cooperative approach requires a commitment to rise above automatic responses and the courage to step into the unknown. It is a muscle we can build, a question of attitude, experience and learning from each other.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p>To make this a kind of very quick meditation can be very powerful but not necessarily appropriate for all groups. If you don't feel comfortable, just ask people to think back of the questionnaire, reading it with them.</p> <p>We may think that conflicts will always be dealt with badly and lead easily to violence, that nothing can be changed. We forget that each culture deals with conflict in different ways, and some are much better equipped to deal with it in a more cooperative, less destructive ways. Our culture may learn from past mistakes and change over time (ex. effect of con res training in schools on the next generation).</p>	<p><b>Exploring Conflict 5:</b> <b>What are we willing to do?</b></p> <p>Close your eyes and think back to the original questionnaire questions.</p> <p>Repeat the questions :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it easy for you to raise an issue or disagree?</li> <li>- When in conflict can you share your feelings, especially anger?</li> <li>- Do you deal with the 'real' issue and find resolution?</li> <li>- Is everyone's voice heard and respected?</li> <li>- What would it take to create a safe and comfortable space for conflicts and differences?</li> </ul> <p>Imagine what it would be like if you could answer 'almost always YES' to all the questions? I want you to write down 3 words that would describe it.</p> <p>Ask the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What would it take for that to happen?</li> <li>- What would become possible, in our families, communities, country, the world?</li> <li>- Do you see a connection between the way we deal with our personal conflicts and other, larger, conflicts?</li> </ul>

Be careful not to be drawn into a political debate.  
Always bring the participants back to their own role and responsibility.

When the group discussion allows it, introduce the 'Idea to consider': *We each make a difference. We are all interdependent and I'll only be safe when others are safe too. There is also a connection between the way we deal with our everyday conflicts and the larger ones. When we are more aware of the way we deal with our conflicts, we can choose and commit to dealing with them in a way that brings growth and mutual understanding. Change takes place one person at a time until and it becomes the norm.*

Let the group react to it briefly and then move on to the next section.

## **Flipchart**

### **An idea to consider:**

*We each make a difference*

We are all interdependent and I'll only be safe when others are safe too. There is also a connection between the way we deal with our everyday conflicts and the larger ones.

When we are more aware of the way we deal with our conflicts, we can choose and commit to dealing with them in a way that brings growth and mutual understanding.

Change takes place one person at a time until it becomes the norm.

## **THE CONCLUSION UNIT**

### **Purpose:**

This unit's objective is to close the conversation and direct participants on how to access additional information. Participants are also invited to become further involved.

### **Objective/ Expected Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this unit, participants will have completed their experience of the Conversation. They will have filled their feedback form and received information about how to find conflict resolution services and information in their community.

**Time:** 15 minutes

### **Activities:**

- Closing of Conversation
- Completion of the Participant Feedback form
- Distribution of the 'Things You Can Do' Hand Out

### **Preparation Required:**

Ensure that you have sufficient copies of the Hand Out 'Things You Can Do' and Participants Feedback Form - you'll find them at the back.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Notes to Facilitator</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning Activities</b></p>
<p><b>Time:</b> 15 minutes</p> <p>Some facilitators prepare a Hand Out listing all the resources that exist in the community (local mediation center, training courses, volunteer opportunities, etc.)</p> <p>You can choose to end on this quote:  <i>In human societies there will always be differences of views and interests. But the reality today is that we are all interdependent and have to coexist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interests, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue.</i>  The Dalai Lama</p>	<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>Conclude the Conversation by asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How useful have you found this Conversation?</li> <li>- What do you leave with?</li> </ul> <p>Explain that there are many ways you can engage in continuing to explore the way we deal with conflict.</p> <p>Distribute any information about your own work and what is available in the community.</p> <p>Distribute the ‘Things You Can Do’ Hand Out</p> <p>Ask participants to fill in a Participant Feedback form</p> <p>Thank participants for engaging in the conversation.</p> <p>Stay behind to answer any questions.</p> <p>Once all participants have left, fill in your Facilitator’s Debrief form and send it to us.</p>

***A Conversation About Conflict Signup Sheet***

Date: (M/D/Y)\_\_\_\_\_ Location:\_\_\_\_\_

Please print clearly!

<b>Name</b>	<b>Postal Address</b>	<b>Email Address</b>	<b>Please contact me</b>

A CONVERSATION  ABOUT CONFLICT

**Questionnaire Response Form**

**Rating system:**

0 being 'almost always NO'

-

5 being 'almost always YES'

**Family**

**Work**

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 1 2 3 4 5

Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 1 2 3 4 5

Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 1 2 3 4 5

Question 4: \_\_\_\_\_

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 1 2 3 4 5

Question 5: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONFLICT

## Things You Can Do...

- Discuss this Conversation About Conflict with your friends and family, sharing with them any insights you had and points that were raised that you thought were important.
- Look at ways you can deal with conflicts differently and remember this Conversation next time you are in conflict!
- Think about how your family/friends/workplace deals with conflict and if there are possible initiatives that could help raise awareness on their current practice and possibly shift to more cooperative approaches. We will be glad to support you or refer you to the appropriate people so send us an email describing what your ideas are.
- See if this group is interested in continuing the Conversation About Conflict and discuss together ways to do this.
- Suggest to your facilitator or email us the names and contact details of other groups that you think might be interested in participating in A Conversation About Conflict.
- Ask your facilitator or email us about becoming a Conversation About Conflict facilitator.
- Visit the Search for Common Ground website for information on A Conversation About Conflict and other resources on conflict transformation: [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org).
- Develop your skills in handling conflict by enrolling in training or workshops at your local dispute resolution / mediation center or other professional groups in your area.
- The possibilities are endless...Please share your ideas with us at:

**Search for Common Ground**  
**Outreach Division**  
**1601 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 200**  
**Washington DC 20009**  
**Tel: 202 – 572 6289**  
**Fax: 202 – 232 6718**  
**Email: [cframpton@sfcg.org](mailto:cframpton@sfcg.org)**

A CONVERSATION  ABOUT CONFLICT

## Participant Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in this Conversation. We greatly appreciate your feedback.

**Name of Facilitator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date (M/D/Y)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of discussion**  
**(City/town):** \_\_\_\_\_

1) What would you improve about the Conversation in terms of format and content?

2) What did you gain/learn from this Conversation?

3) Please list two actions that you are going to take as a result of participating in this Conversation, or two things that you are going to do differently.

4) Can you recommend any groups that we could approach to hold a Conversation about Conflict? Can you give us a contact name and number?

5). To monitor this program we would be grateful if you could provide us with the following information. *(Note this information will not be used for any other purpose)*

**Profession:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:**       Male       Female

**Age Group:**     16-21     22-30     31-40     41-50     51-60     61-70     71+

A CONVERSATION  ABOUT CONFLICT

## Facilitator Debrief Form

**Facilitator's**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many times have you facilitated a Conversation ?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date (M/D/Y), time and venue of Conversation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**General description of audience:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Number of people present:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall: How did you feel the format worked for your group?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Specifically: What worked best? During what part(s) were the participants most engaged and interested? Any thoughts as to why?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Specifically: What worked least well? Where were the participants lost or disinterested? Why?**

---

---

---

**Do you think that this Conversation achieved our goal to “create a new awareness about conflict in our lives – how we respond to them, what they cost us – and explore alternative approaches which can be used”?**

---

---

---

**What part(s) did you feel least comfortable facilitating? Why?**

---

---

---

**Do you have any insights or lessons learned to share? Any recommendations for improvements? Any other comments?**

---

---

---

---

Please attach any completed Participant Feedback Forms and send to:

**Search for Common Ground**  
**Outreach Division**  
1601 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 200  
Washington DC 20009  
Email: cframptonr@sfcg.org  
Fax: (202) 232-6718

# A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONFLICT

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why a Conversation?**

Search for Common Ground and its partners have a vision of promoting cooperative approaches to conflict, yet we don't want to preach or impose it. The Conversations are designed to allow people to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviors and come to their own conclusions.

### **What is the spirit of A Conversation About Conflict?**

It is literally a conversation: an informal exchange of ideas by spoken words. People must feel safe and enjoy the conversation as something fun and different. The facilitator's role is to guide the discussions and challenge the audience with questions and suggestions. No specific agenda is brought to the Conversation About Conflict other than to have participants become more aware of how conflict impacts their lives and explore options in how to deal with conflict.

### **What results do you get from holding A Conversation About Conflict?**

Participants feel challenged by the Conversation. They re-examine some of their beliefs and may have a slightly different mindset as a result. They can go back to their family, workplace and friends and discuss their new insights. The next time they face a conflict, they have a better understanding of their options. After taking part in a Conversation participants might choose to take conflict resolution training, initiate an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program in their company or become involved in the local mediation center. We support these initiatives and refer them to the appropriate partners.

Finally, some participants may come forward to become Conversation About Conflict facilitators, expanding the project's reach and encouraging new initiatives themselves.



### **Where are the Conversations About Conflict held?**

They can be held in a wide variety of settings, from schools, university campus and workplaces, to churches, community mediation centers, civic associations, other membership groups and even in private homes.

### **What is the ideal number of participants?**

Twelve to twenty people is an ideal number of participants but Conversations can be held for smaller or larger audiences - the format is adjusted accordingly.

### **Who should facilitate these Conversations?**

Anyone can facilitate, as we all have experiences of conflict. There is no need to be an expert and no teaching is done. All that is needed is the commitment to the vision and the process of the Conversation About Conflict.

### **How to hold A Conversation About Conflict?**

The Conversation About Conflict follows a basic format outlined in the Facilitators Guide. It can be adapted to the specific needs of the audience. The feedback received from participants and facilitators constantly informs this Guide which is regularly revised. Yet, each Conversation is unique, created by the interaction of the group, their concerns, stories and insights.

### **What is required from the facilitators?**

A Memorandum of Understanding is signed by each new facilitator to ensure the integrity of the Conversation About Conflict. Facilitators are asked to respect the spirit of the Conversation and follow the general guidelines provided. They are also asked to report back on each Conversation About Conflict they hold.

### **How do I become a facilitator?**

Interested facilitators please contact:

#### **Search for Common Ground**

#### **Outreach Division - The Conversations About Conflict**

1601 Connecticut Ave NW – Suite 200

Washington DC 20009

Tel: (202) 572-6289      Fax: (202) 232-6718

Email; [cframpton@sfcg.org](mailto:cframpton@sfcg.org)

website: [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

*How much conflict do you have  
in your life?*

*How do you deal with it?*

JOIN US FOR

A CONVERSATION  ABOUT CONFLICT

A 1-2 hour open dialogue on how we deal with conflict -  
in our everyday lives  
in our communities and society as a whole -  
what it costs us, and the different ways  
we can deal with it.



Date:

Time:

Location:

Organized by:

For more info & reservations, call:

Event is free of charge

# A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONFLICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
For More Information, Contact:  
(Your Name and Phone Number)

Date

## (Name) gathers to talk about conflict in everyday life

With all the focus on conflicts throughout the world, it is an opportune time to look at conflict in the lives of individuals in the United States – in its communities, its workplaces, and its families. To that end, *(your organization)* is hosting a series of “Conversations About Conflict” on *(dates)*, at *(time)*, in *(location)*. The Conversations are open to the public and free of charge.

For one evening *(adapt if necessary)* participants engage in an open dialogue where they talk about conflicts in their lives, how they respond to them and how they are affected by them - the small everyday conflicts as well as the larger ones that affect their community and society. The purpose of the “Conversations About Conflict” is to raise awareness about conflict and the different ways we deal with it. The hope is that as more of these conversations take place, people will come to appreciate that conflict need not lead to violence or confrontation but can be an opportunity for growth and mutual understanding. There is no other agenda, nor political or religious affiliation.

These facilitated Conversations have been designed by Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organization dedicated to non-adversarial approaches to conflict. Similar “Conversations About Conflict” are being hosted by partner organizations throughout the country with an initial focus in New York, particularly New York City and the mid-Hudson Valley, North Carolina and Washington, D.C.

*(More on your own organization)*

Contact *(your organization name and phone number)* for more information or:

Search for Common Ground  
Outreach Division - The Conversations About Conflict  
Tel: 202 – 572 6289  
[cframpton@sfcg.org](mailto:cframpton@sfcg.org)  
[www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

– END –

