

4-H Nova Scotia

Conflict Resolution Tips and Procedures



Rationale

The 4-H Nova Scotia Conflict Resolution Tips and Procedure recognizes conflict as a normal part of all human interactions and reflects the responsibility of 4-H Nova Scotia to help 4-H members and volunteers solve problems.

Conflict is usually caused by a misunderstanding, personality clashes, and differences in values, goals or philosophical beliefs, unclear responsibilities, or lack of resources. Healthy conflict can lead to positive change in organizations, but negative conflict can be very destructive and can destroy an organization.

Introduction to Conflict

It is important to talk about what is bothering you whether at work or when volunteering. Don't take it home or stuff it away. Ignoring something doesn't make it go away. It makes it fester.

Talking about conflict has almost no chance of succeeding if it's carried out in public. Nobody likes to be embarrassed in front of peers or made an example of in public. Your goal is to eliminate the tension created by conflict. Privacy will help you. Remember: praise in public, correct privately.

Part A - Steps to Resolve an Issue, an Incident, or an Event

1. Be Prepared

Start preparing to resolve a conflict by checking your own behaviour. What are your hot buttons? Have they been pushed? How have you handled the situation so far? What is your own responsibility in the matter? Own up. Take responsibility for your part in the conflict. Do a little soul searching, a little self-examination, before talking it out with the other party.

2. Don't Wait

The sooner you resolve conflict, the easier it is to resolve. Don't wait. Don't let the matter boil into something bigger than it is.

If a specific behaviour has caused the conflict, promptness gives you an example to refer to and keeps you from building up hostility. It also gives the other person the best chance of understanding the specific behaviour you want to talk about.

3. Talk to the Other Person

Plan what you want to say. It helps to visualize a successful, peaceful conversation. Compose a script, rehearse it, make notes to guide you through. Talking to the other person involves practicing an opening statement and issue description ahead of time, and then finding the time and place to have an open, two-way discussion with the other person. It's critical to open the conversation with a statement that encourages collaboration (and not defensiveness). When describing the issue to the

other person, make sure you include exactly what happened, how it made you feel, and the negative impacts the situation has caused.

Neutral places are best. However, if you need to emphasize your role as general leader, county council president, or another position, a public place which has seating which is more private or confidential may be appropriate. Try to make the place as neutral as possible by sitting so that there is no table or other obstruction between you and the other person, if possible. This removes physical barriers to open communication.

4. Be Aware of Body Language

Body language is a type of nonverbal communication in which physical behaviours, as opposed to words, are used to express or convey information. Such behaviour includes facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch, and the use of space. Use positive body language so that you appear more positive, engaging, and approachable.

Some examples are:

- a. Have an open posture. Be relaxed, but don't slouch! Sit or stand upright and place your hands by your sides. Avoid standing with your hands on your hips, as this will make you appear larger, which can communicate aggression or a desire to dominate.
- b. Use a firm handshake. But don't get carried away! You don't want it to become awkward or, worse, painful for the other person. If it does, you'll likely come across as rude or aggressive.
- c. Maintain good eye contact. Try to hold the other person's gaze for a few seconds at a time. This will show them that you're sincere and engaged. But avoid turning it into a staring match!
- d. Avoid touching your face. Relax your body. Look interested.

5. Share Your Feelings

Nine times out of ten, the real conflict is about feelings, not facts. You can argue about facts all day, but everyone has a right to their own feelings. Owning your own feelings, and caring about others', is key to talking about conflict.

Remember that anger is a secondary emotion. It almost always arises from fear.

It's critical here to use "I" statements. Instead of saying, "You make me so angry," try something like, "I feel really frustrated when you..."

Remember to talk about behaviours, not personalities.

6. State Your Problem

Give specific details, including your own observations, valid documentation, if appropriate, and information from reliable witnesses, if appropriate.

You've shared your own feelings about the situation, described the problem, and expressed interest in resolving the matter. Now simply ask the other party how they are feeling about it. Don't assume. Ask.

Discuss what caused the situation. Does everyone have the information they need? Does everyone have the skills they need? Does everyone understand expectations? What are the obstacles? Does everyone agree on the desired outcome?

7. Listen Actively to The Other Side

Listen to the other side. Once you've stated your side of the problem, you have to listen to the other person air *their* views and concerns. It's the only way to understand their point of view. It will likely be uncomfortable, but it's important that you never interrupt, that you give them your full attention, use positive body language (no crossing your arms or frowning), and paraphrase what you've heard to make sure you understand their point of view.

Always remember that things are not always what they seem. Be ready to be open to the other person's explanation. Sometimes, getting all the information from the right person changes the entire situation. Be ready to respond with compassion. Be interested in how the other person sees the situation differently than you do.

8. Find A Solution Together

Ask the other party for their ideas for solving the problem. The person is responsible for their own behaviour and has the ability to change it. Resolving conflict is not about changing another person. Change is up to each individual.

Know how you want the situation to be different in the future. If you have ideas the other person doesn't mention, suggest them only after the person has shared all of their ideas.

Discuss each idea. What's involved? Does the person need your help? Does the idea involve other people who should be consulted? Using the other person's ideas first, especially with direct reports, will increase personal commitment on their part. If an idea can't be used for some reason, explain why.

9. Agree on a Plan of Action

Work towards a solution. This step involves gaining agreement about the nature of the conflict, as well as the steps to be taken by both parties to resolve it. You should start by gaining agreement from the other person that there is a problem, and then make sure that you've both aired your concerns. Then it's time to explore win-win solutions. Resolving conflict means finding a solution that does something for *both* participants, so be ready to communicate openly about the options. Lastly, plan a course of action based on the solution you've both agreed upon.

Say what you will do differently in the future and ask the other party to verbalize their commitment to change in the future.

10. Express Confidence

Thank the other party for being open with you and express confidence that your relationship will be better for having talked the problem out.

Part B – Conflict Escalation Process

If a sincere attempt has been made to resolve the issue with the other party and a resolution was not found, additional supports may assist with finding some common ground and a resolution. Both parties may agree on a third-party providing support, such as a General Club Leader, or it may be escalated to the provincial organization.

Escalate the problem, not the person. Don't make the disagreement personal. You are escalating because the issue is a matter that must be resolved. Always inform the persons involved prior to

initiating an escalation. You want all parties prepared, to ensure the escalation process is productive and focused on facts.

Confirm the following before escalating an issue:

The conflict is related to a personal issue or problem.

- Any concerns of misconduct or youth safety must be filed as an Incident Report and will be reviewed by the provincial organization.
 - Refer **Appendix A: When to Report Incidents for 4-H in Canada** and to the **Misconduct Reporting and Appeals Procedure** for next steps.
- Have you and the other parties repeatedly attempted to resolve the conflict (using the process in Part A) but have not reached a resolution.
- The person who has the issue/problem/conflict is responsible for escalating the matter. If you are the one who needs the other party to come around, you must initiate the escalation.
- Initiate the escalation within two (2) days of knowing the problem is unresolvable.

Provincial Escalation

Escalate the issue by sending it in writing or email to the provincial office. The Executive Director will notify the Provincial Board chair and the Conflict Management and Dispute Resolution Committee. The committee will connect with the involved parties.

Guidelines for Reviewing an Escalated Issue

The following steps will be taken by the committee to help foster a successful outcome:

1. Discuss the situation in a respectful manner with the individuals involved. Example: “I noticed you’ve been overly critical lately, which seems out of character for you—you’re always patient!” Don’t say, “You are being much too critical.” This just gets the person’s back up.
2. Be specific. If you say, “I noticed that on Tuesday the 15th, as well as Monday and Friday of last month you made several very negative statements,” the person realizes you are aware of the situation and that they have to address the issue. Their explanation is a perfect opportunity for you to listen and respond with empathy. Remember: you do not necessarily have to *agree* with someone to empathize with them. You are simply attempting to put yourself in that person’s shoes—if only for a moment—not condemning or condoning the behaviour.
3. Discuss how a conflict (or problem) impacts you, the club, or the project. “I am not sure you are aware of the full impact of the conflict between you and the others. The others are witnessing this, and it is making them uncomfortable... what do you feel is going on?” Remember, *you are asking not telling*.
4. Ask for the specific *cause* of the conflict. “From your perspective, what is happening here? You get along well with most everyone here so what is causing the conflict?” Remember to empathize again

after their response, rather than say, “Yes, but you’ve got to get along.” The word “but” negates everything positive you just said. If you have to fall on a conjunction, pick “and”. “Yes, I can imagine the challenge this presents—*and* we need to come up with a solution. What ideas might you have?”

5. Ask for the solution. For instance, “What do you think you need to do to help solve this situation? What is your next step?” This brings in accountability.
6. Agree on the action to be taken. This step is often missed and it’s the most important one. Think of it as a recap. “So, what I am hearing you say is that you are going to talk this through with your team members (discuss details). By when were you thinking of doing that?” The last step is to close on a positive note and ask them to get back to you on the outcome.

Resolution

After an issue is resolved, both parties should abide by the decision made. Only if significant new information becomes available that could reverse the decision will the escalation be revisited or appealed. Otherwise, consider the issue closed.

Appeals Process

If an individual determines that the matter has not been resolved to their satisfaction, they have thirty (30) days to make an appeal in writing to the provincial office.

The Executive Director will notify the Provincial Board chair and a review committee will be formed to consider and rule on the appeal. The Executive Director will report on the final outcome.

Sources:

1. Peterson, Deb. *A Step-By-Step Guide to Resolving Conflicts Peacefully*. ThoughtCo, Oct. 22, 2018, [thoughtco.com/steps-to-conflict-resolution-31710](https://www.thoughtco.com/steps-to-conflict-resolution-31710)
2. [crmlearning.com/blog/index.php/2016/11/4-essential-conflict-resolution-steps](https://www.crmlearning.com/blog/index.php/2016/11/4-essential-conflict-resolution-steps)

Appendix A: When to Report Incidents for 4-H in Canada

ISSUE	INCIDENT REPORT REQUIRED:	
Observe, know, or suspect child abuse or child is in harm's way.	<u>Always notify authorities first.</u> Then complete an incident report if 4-H leaders or youth are involved.	
Misconduct related to: -mishandling of finances, -breaking federal or provincial law, -using drugs or alcohol at a 4-H youth event.	Always. Refer to 4-H in Canada Youth Safety policy manual : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misconduct Policy	
Failure to uphold policy: -breach of confidential personal, health, or financial information -youth or adult is excluded from participating -failure to implement youth supervision practices (i.e. Rule of Two)	Always. Refer to 4-H in Canada Youth Safety policy manual : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety Assessment and Management Policy• Inclusion Policy• Supervision Policy	
Risk to 4-H reputation and image.	Always.	
ISSUE	ADDRESS LOCALLY:	INCIDENT REPORT REQUIRED:
Concerning actions, such as -disrespectful speech, action, or behaviour -unsportsmanlike conduct -not providing appropriate animal care	If able to address the issue at club or event with quick resolution or corrective coaching.	If this is a repeated issue or behaviour raises safety concerns.
Accident or illness involving any participants.	If very basic first aid treatment provided. A note on treatment is given to parents.	If there is an illness, injury, mental health concern, or if a vehicle is involved.
Property damage.	If it is easily repaired.	If it is unexpected, may involve insurance.
ISSUE	ALTERNATIVE RESOLUTION PROCESS	
Interpersonal conflict between youth or adults.	If conflict or grievance is related to misconduct, use the table above to determine if an incident report is required.	
Grievance about a 4-H project or program decision.	Otherwise try to resolve at club or event first. [list provincial conflict and grievance protocols] offer tips and next steps if further support is needed. If this does not resolve the conflict or grievance, reach out to the Provincial office for support.	