MEDIATION SERVICES

HELP! I have a problem with my neighbour/family member.

Having a problem with the people we love, those we live with, those we live near or those we work with work can be challenging! Our elevated emotions can make it hard to talk about our concerns in a constructive way. At the same time, problems and disagreements are completely normal, and can have positive results when handled in a constructive way.

When we work out an issue together in a way that satisfies both people the relationship becomes stronger. We are also better able to handle the bumps that will inevitably come along in the future.

COMMON MISTAKES

*Let's start by looking at some **typical** responses to conflict that can lead us off track:*

- Avoiding or ignoring the problem and hoping it will go away—this is a good option for petty annoyances. But when we ignore persistent issues or others' concerns, the conflict will inevitably grow. This will dissolve the trust we need to work out the problem when it becomes unavoidable.
- Getting other people on your side (i.e.: spreading rumours/gossiping)—this makes the conflict bigger and more personally hurtful than the original issue. It causes division because it encourages people to take sides. This doesn't solve the original problem.
- Giving them a "taste of their own medicine" or getting back/getting even (i.e.: retaliation) —this usually causes the conflict to escalate and increases the possibility for violence.
- Calling Bylaw officers or the Police first—of course you need to call the proper authorities if you believe there is real danger. However, when authorities are called as a first approach for matters not related to personal safety it tends to increase hostility and becomes a barrier to communication between you and the other person(s).
- Becoming confrontational with the person about the issue—if we approach another person when we're upset the natural response is for them to feel defensive and to also become confrontational, *even if you have a valid point*. You're going in the right direction by talking to them directly, but the delivery of your message will have a big impact on the outcome of the conversation.

A MORE HELPFUL APPROACH

Start a respectful conversation directly with the other person and work it out together. Before you start the conversation try doing a self-check. Remember—the only thing under your control is yourself.

SELF-CHECK

It can be challenging to prepare yourself for a difficult conversation. The questions below can help you think through the situation on your own and sort out your perspective.

1. How long has the conflict gone on for you?

_____

2. Is the other person aware of your concerns or your differences? If so, how long do you believe they have been aware of what's bothering you?

_____

3. Have you tried to talk about it with them in the past? If so, what happened?

_____

_____

4. What are your interests: the wants, hopes, concerns, fears, desires, needs, and expectations that are at the root of the problem for you?

_____

_____

5. Be specific about your concerns and describe them in a way that is clear enough for the other person to understand, and doesn't involve judgemental language or assumptions.

_____

_____

6. What do you anticipate their perspective to be?

_____

_____

7. What constructive ideas do you have for how to address the problem?

_____

_____

8. Are you ready to hear a perspective that might be different than yours?

_____

9. What level of emotion do you feel when you think or talk about the issue/s?

_____

10. How do you feel about the other person aside from this situation? Can you identify their positive qualities?

_____

11. Have you worked out issues or problems with each other in the past?

_____

KEY TIPS

It takes extra focus to have a respectful conversation when an issue is bothering you. As emotions elevate we can forget the usual social graces that keep our relationships positive and so may the other person. Here are a few tips that will help you bring your best to the conversation, and help you set up a conversation in which the other person can be at their best too.

DO

Be prepared to speak and listen from the heart. Know how you plan to open the conversation, and become curious about their perspective on the situation.

Find a mutually convenient time and location for the discussion.

When approaching a person about a problem, **be polite and set a welcoming tone.**

Briefly and neutrally state the topic that you want to talk about. (eg: "I'd like to talk with you about the fence" will keep the conversation more open than "Your fence is on my property."

Share your intention for a positive resolution.

Speak calmly and clearly enough that the other person can take in the information.

Be respectful—use the person's name and give them enough airtime to share their thoughts. Model the respect you expect to be treated with in your conversation.

Ask questions to make sure you understood their perspective, and let them know that you understand where they're coming from, even if you see things differently.

Be open to different ways of looking at the situation. Expect that the other person has information to share that will help you understand their perspective, and could help lead to a solution.

Work together to identify the **main issues or problems**.

Brainstorm potential solutions.

Select the solution(s) that would meet both of your needs and, if appropriate, form some kind of agreement on what will happen in the future.

DON'T

Use sarcasm or judgemental language to get your message across.

Use words that will feel like **labels or name-calling**.

Speak to the other person's intentions. This triggers defensiveness.

Exaggerate frequency or intensity of the problem. When we do, the other person's focus gravitates towards the aspects of what you said that are not entirely true (exaggeration), and gives them an excuse to dismiss your concern. (i.e.: you *always* park in my spot VS you *often* park in my spot)

Talk about solutions until you both understand each other's point of view.

Interrupt the other person when they're sharing their perspective.

Approach the other person when either you or they are feeling really angry.

Approach the other person when either you or they are intoxicated.

Rebut or challenge the other person's feelings or perspective. You can add information about your intentions or how you would interpret a situation, but make sure you're still showing respect for the other person's prerogative to think and feel for themselves.

You may notice that there's more to say about *how* to have this conversation, than on *what* happens in the conversation. The flow of conversation is flexible when you have the ground work of respect and you've created openness to discuss the problem. Often the hardest part is making the conversation feel safe enough to work together, and to keep your positive intentions at the forefront when your goal(s) seem threatened. When you understand where the challenges lie, and you have a plan for how to manage them, you are much more likely to find a lasting resolution, and preserve or even strengthen the relationship.

Resources

If at first you don't succeed...

If the first time you tried to have a conversation with the other person didn't work out well don't give up! Your initial attempt has valuable information for you going forward. Take a look at what happened in your first interaction.

- What did you share, verbally?
- What message did you share in your approach, tone, and body language?
- What did the other person share verbally and non-verbally?
- Try to look beyond the expected defensiveness and imagine at least one reason that a rational human being might feel the way that they did/do?

Can you see any part of what didn't work in the interaction as stemming from your contribution? If so, it can be helpful to acknowledge that in your next conversation with the other person. Let them know that you are still committed to considering your options and working together to find a solution. If you decide to try to resolve it on your own, keep in mind what you learned from your first interaction.

If one or both of you are not ready to make another attempt at resolving the issue one-on-one, you could consider the use of a neutral third party. This could be a person you know and trust, like another neighbour, family member, a friend, or an Elder. If it is a person you know, make sure that they are neutral—meaning that they are not on your side or the other person's side. The third party could also be a person that you don't know personally such as a community resource worker or a mediator from Mediation Services.

Before you involve anyone else, let the other person know that it is important to you to work this out in a way that you both feel good about. You know that things haven't worked out well so far one-on-one, and ask them if they'd be willing to get some help in working things out. Ask them if they'd be open to getting the assistance of a third party, and make plans together about who you'd like to ask to help you reach a solution.

Mediation Services
A Community Resource for Conflict Resolution
302-1200 Portage Avenue Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 0T5 Phone: 925-3410

Mediation Services can provide coaching and third party intervention (mediation and conciliation) for neighbour, families and community groups in conflict.

There is a fee for mediation and conciliation, with subsidies available.

Mediation Services also offers a wide range of workshops and courses to increase individuals' comfort and confidence in dealing with conflicts.

Meeting room space is also available to rent for community use.

Winnipeg Committee For Safety

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