

# **CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDANCE**

# **ALL NATIONS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE**

To cultivate biblically rooted, hope-filled and culturally relevant engagement with God's mission, by training and equipping disciples of Jesus Christ in partnership with the global church.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDANCE**

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### **2 INTRODUCTION**

Being a Christian Community does not mean that we will always live in harmony with one another. Sometimes, interactions with others do not go as well as hoped and we can be tempted to respond unhelpfully when feelings run high. This guidance seeks to provide a framework for the resolution of conflicts between students, between staff and between students and staff. This is not a College policy but a guidance document.

### **3 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT**

There are many, many verses in the Bible that encourage us to deal with issues quickly, by talking with the person concerned.

- "In your anger do not sin." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil' Ephesians 4:26-27
- If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you' Matthew 18:15
- 'Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.' Colossians 3:13
- 'My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.' James 1:19-20
- 'Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.' Colossians 4:6.
- 'Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.' Proverbs 10:12

### **4 SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT**

In the Appendix, we have included a document from the internet which sets out very practical and useful skills and strategies for resolving conflict, which is definitely worth reading before you tackle speaking with the person with whom you have had a disagreement or who has offended you in some way.

### **5 RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE**

- i. Ask yourself why you are upset. Is this triggering something in you that has nothing to do with what has happened? Do you need to pray about your attitude? Pray about the issue, ask for forgiveness for any lack of love on your part or unhelpfulness in your responses to the other person. Ask God to intervene by showing you and the other

person what you both need to understand. Commit your meeting with them to God asking Him that they will meet with you, for God to help you both to listen to each other with an open mind and for Him to be in your responses.

- ii. Ask the other person to meet with you to discuss the issue. Choose a neutral safe space where you will not be interrupted and can maintain confidentiality.
- iii. Keep your discussion confidential unless you both agree to tell anyone else.
- iv. It is a good idea to try to resolve the issue between yourselves initially. It is usually better to try to resolve this informally together and save the option of mediation if you are unable to resolve your differences (see section 7).
- v. You may wish to ask each other at the outset of your meeting what you both hope to achieve by discussing the conflict (e.g. to understand each other's point of view; to find a way forward; or to restore your relationship)
- vi. Pray together.
- vii. During your meeting, try to apply the skills and strategies suggested in the Appendix, including stopping and praying together if your conversation gets 'stuck' at any moment. Maintain eye contact, do not interrupt one another but listen carefully with an open mind. Separate the issue from the person.
- viii. Conclude with a specific agreement which satisfies you both.
- ix. If you do not reach agreement, do not be afraid to try again another time but take some space and have further thoughts before trying again. It can be helpful to resolve a conflict bit by bit giving you time to think and consider before taking the next step,
- x. If resolved, take time to reflect on what you have learned from the experience and how you might do things differently in future.
- xi. Always end your conversation with prayer.

## **6 WHAT TO DO IF THE SITUATION REMAINS UNRESOLVED**

- i. After your meeting and after further reflection, if you feel matters are still unresolved consider mediation. This could be either to bring closure or to find a way forward that is satisfactory to all parties.
- ii. Ask the other person if they are willing to seek mediation, and consider whether you will both abide by the conclusions of the mediator and whom you might approach to lead that mediation.
- iii. The mediator should be impartial and independent of the circumstances that caused the conflict.

## **7 MEDIATION**

- i. Mediation is a way of resolving conflict. It can help to mend relationships by finding solutions that everyone can agree to, improving communication and allowing everyone involved to have control of what's finally agreed. It is the mediator's task to apply communication skills, objectivity and creativity to help both parties reach their own voluntary solution to the conflict.
- ii. Mediation involves sharing, listening and checking: Both parties sharing what they believe has happened; helping both parties to listen to the other's viewpoint; checking what actually happened in order to clear up any misunderstandings. It also involves getting both parties to take responsibility for their part in the conflict and helping them find a solution. Finally, they should help the parties to affirm, forgive and/or thank the other where appropriate.

- iii. Mediation is voluntary and should be confidential. The mediator will agree with everyone involved what, if any information should be shared with whom, when and how.
- iv. At the outset both parties will agree to be open minded and to abide by the conclusion reached through mediation.
- v. Outcomes can be an acknowledgement of each party's views; a commitment to change behaviour, a commitment to regularly review what has been agreed.
- vi. Mediation may well take more than one session and should be underscored by prayer.

## **8 COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCES AND DISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATIONS**

- i. If either party feels the other is guilty of breaking the College Code of Conduct, they are free to ask the College to conduct an investigation (either informal or formal). Student disciplinary issues are investigated using the Student Disciplinary Policy and staff disciplinary issues are investigated using the Staff Disciplinary Policy.
- ii. If either party feels they wish to make a complaint against the College, they may do so using the Complaints Policy.
- iii. If a member of staff feels they have an employee grievance against the College, they should follow the Staff Grievance Policy.
- iv. If either party or the mediator feels someone has been guilty of a potentially criminal act, then the College authorities should be informed so that it can be determined whether external authorities need to be informed.
- v. If any safeguarding issues are raised, the Safeguarding Lead should be informed so that the appropriate action can be taken.

See next page for **Skills and Strategies for Resolving Conflict**

## **APPENDIX 1: SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT**

The following secular article comes from this website: <https://www.casita.com/blog/conflict-resolutions-skills-students-need-to-know>

Conflict is inevitable in everyday life because people will never be on the same page on everything. Therefore, we need to develop a certain set of skills to be able to handle conflict correctly and efficiently.

At university, you are bound to be in settings where conflict arises during group work or lectures, and you must learn how to manage it.

### **I. WHY SHOULD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS HAVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS?**

You might think that this is an unnecessary skill for someone who is still just a student. However, it's one of the most important ones you'll need. University life is full of social interactions, whether in an academic context or not. Things like group projects and presentations, study groups, and social gatherings are all settings where conflict is prone to arise at any time.

Having the necessary skills to alleviate such conflict between peers is extremely beneficial in strengthening relationships. It will also reduce disruption to the activity at hand, helping you be more productive as a group. Tension in any group setting stops things from getting done and ruins the enjoyment of any activity. Moreover, these skills also come in handy in every student's personal life while dealing with conflict with family and friends in a healthy manner.

### **II. SKILLS NEEDED TO MANAGE CONFLICT**

#### **1. Active Listening**

This is an important life skill in general, but it is specifically relevant to conflict resolution to fully know the situation from both parties. You need to be attentive to what is being said in conflict situations without cutting off or interfering in the conversation. Keeping open ears is the only way to keep an open mind and fully take in what is being said and understand it.

#### **2. Communication**

Active listening is one thing, and during a conflict is something entirely different. While listening technically falls under communication skills, it would be pointless to communicate your response to what you've heard without having the necessary skills. Each person has a way of communicating that depends on their background and experience. That's why it's important to ask for clarification when you don't understand something and clarify yourself when needed. Check which classes have communication skills lectures or workshops that you can attend to enhance this skill.

#### **3. Emotional Intelligence**

In cases of conflict, emotion always plays a part and can cause further struggle to resolve things. This is where the skill of emotional intelligence comes into play, to understand your own feelings and others and take them into consideration. Emotional intelligence helps you navigate your way through a conflict without having it unnecessarily escalate. Understanding your own emotions is also important to be able to communicate them effectively.

#### **4. Impartiality**

One of the most important skills when managing a conflict between two parties is impartiality. This is because conflicts can easily develop and become personal. People involved in the conflict can use it to bring up past held grudges, and things get messier. When managing a conflict like this, you mustn't take sides or express anything that may indicate that you agree or lean towards what

one person is saying. Try to instead re-navigate the discussion to the problem at hand and suggest possible solutions.

## **5. Patience**

Managing disputes is no easy thing, so you should be prepared for the possibility of the situation not being resolved right away. This might be a nuisance in a group project or any other academic need since it would waste time. However, you need to be patient with these things and not rush them because they might worsen. Rushing a solution to a conflict will only make the parties involved feel excluded in making their own decision and feelings known and heard.

# **III. STRATEGIES TO RESOLVE CONFLICT**

## **1. Immediate Stress Relief**

As soon as a conflict arises, the best way to start handling it is with quick stress relief to prevent the situation from escalating. Stress relief mainly refers to staying centred and calm in order not to get overwhelmed and respond in an unhealthy way. So find something that soothes you and practice it in situations of conflict where you need to calm yourself instantly.

## **2. Acknowledge Emotions**

Once you've calmed down, you need to take a minute to recognise your emotions to control them. Don't try to ignore strong feelings like anger, sadness or fear because it will only limit your ability to respond to the situation at hand. It's important you also take a minute to acknowledge the other party's emotions and what is troubling them to make it easier to reach common ground.

## **3. Don't Get Defensive**

In conflict, many people's first instinct is to become defensive and attack the other person, whether passively or directly. However, this only makes the situation worse and escalates it, so try not to take anything said against a point you made personally. Instead of answering objections with defensive 'yes' and 'no' statements, try the strategy of "yes, and...". Start your statement with things like "Yes, I understand, and I believe..." or "I hear you, and what I'm saying is...". It might seem simple, but it can go a long way to smoothing over the situation.

## **4. Try 'I' Statements**

In a conflict, it's easy to start pointing fingers and blaming each other, which is a one-way ticket to a full-blown argument. To avoid this, make sure you start your sentences with 'I' statements such as "I feel, I believe, etc.". It's much better to say, "I feel like I didn't have a chance to explain," than saying, "you're not listening to me".

## **5. Use Humour**

Using humour during a conflict can work like magic in ending the whole thing, if done right. However, it might not be the appropriate strategy to use and can make things tense. If a conflict is personal, humour would be the wrong move since there would be a chance of offending the other party. It's perfect, however, if the conflict is superficial to alleviate tension and help parties involved loosen up and discuss the issue more light-heartedly.

Handling conflict is a skill in itself that gets sharpened the more you have interactions and experiences. You get to know yourself and your reactions and better control them and how to handle other people in a way that does not make things worse. The main things to remember during a conflict, whether you are part of it or not, are listening well before speaking, picking your battles, and being willing to forgive and forget to spend your time at college in peace.