



# Keeping the Peace

Tools for Conflict Resolution

Participant Guide



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## Lesson One: What is conflict?

Goals for the lesson: Participants will set group rules, learn the definition of conflict and learn how conflict can arise in their living environments.

### Introduction

It is not uncommon for people to have conflicts from time to time with people they live with. Roommate conflict can arise over trivial issues that can likely be resolved with a little bit of discussion. Conflicts in your living environment may also include issues with neighbors or even your landlord at times. This group will help you to learn and practice tools for effective conflict resolution. You will also learn some core communication skills that will help you to resolve conflict.

Before we get started on the lesson, it's important to set ground rules for the group. These are the rules that group participants want to follow to help the group run smoothly. Some examples include starting the group on time, not allowing participants in who are more than 5 minutes late, not using curse words, etc.

### **Activity: Setting Group Rules**

#### **Supplies Needed: Whiteboard and markers**

**Brainstorm a list of rules you would like for the group. Have a discussion with your fellow group members to come up with an agreement on rules. Common group rules include starting on time, not leaving the group early, not interrupting others when they are speaking, and giving everyone the opportunity to share in the group process.**

Now that we have set the rules for the group, let's start the lesson by learning a bit about conflict. What is conflict? According to the American Heritage dictionary, conflict is "a state of open, often prolonged fighting", "a state of disagreement or disharmony between persons or ideas", or "to be in or come into opposition". It is not uncommon to encounter various types of conflicts in our daily lives. This group will help you to identify and deal with conflict in your living situations so that you can live independently with the least amounts of supports possible.

It's important to look for solutions to problems or conflict. It's also important to begin to discuss underlying needs. Here's a story that helps us to explain why conflict resolution is important. There are two people in a kitchen. There is only one orange left and both of them want it. What would you expect as the solution? Compromise is one option. They might cut it in half and each gets half.

Let's assume that's what they do. One person now goes to the juicer and starts squeezing herself a rather too small orange juice. The other, with some difficulty, begins to grate the rind of the orange to flavor a cake. Had they discussed needs rather than heading straight to solutions, they could have both had the equivalent of a whole orange. Their needs were complementary. In fact, not conflicting. With the determination to use this "win/win" approach, two sets of needs can frequently dovetail together.

Addressing each person's underlying needs means that you build solutions that acknowledge and value those needs rather than denying them. Even where solutions cannot be as perfect as in the orange story, the person feels quite differently about the outcome.

You see, this story demonstrates the importance of communication when trying to resolve issues or conflict. This group will help you to learn new skills or to improve the skills you already have to help conflict resolution.

**Activity: What comes to mind when you hear the word conflict?**

**Rationale: It's important to understand what people identify as conflict in order to help them resolve conflict.**

**Supplies Needed: White board and markers**

**Brainstorm words and actions that come to mind when you hear the word "conflict". Share your ideas/thoughts with the group and discuss.**

Have you ever had a conflict and wished you could have handled it better?

Conflict comes about from differences-in needs, values and motivations. Sometimes through these differences we complement each other, but sometimes we will oppose each other. Conflict is not a problem in itself-it is what we do with it that counts.

It is important that we do something because whether we like it or not, conflicts demand our energy. In fact, an unresolved conflict can call on tremendous amounts of our attention. We all know how exhausting an unresolved conflict can be. It is not always easy to fix the problem but a great energy boost can come when we do. Resolving conflict requires skills.

What are conflict resolution skills?

They are the skills that enable us to bypass personal differences and to open up to possibilities. The skills of conflict resolution draw us closer to other people, as we jointly search for fair solutions and balanced needs. It involves a powerful shift from adversaries to co-operative partners. In this shift each person benefits. Participating in this group will help you to learn how to resolve conflict and be comfortable in your living situation.

**Discussion question:**

**What has been your experience with conflict? What has worked for you in the past when dealing with conflict? What has not? Who can you ask for help when you are trying to resolve conflict? Share your answers with the group.**

Homework: Keep track of conflict that arises in your life between now and the next group session. Make notes if you need to help you remember and share them with the group.

## Lesson Two: Listening Skills

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn essential listening skills and why they are important for conflict resolution.

Listening is an important aspect of conflict resolution. Knowing how to listen actively will help you to have the tools you need to resolve conflict. Before we go through the chart below that will help us to understand some active listening skills, let's do a quick exercise to get us thinking about listening.

### **Activity: Color Block**

**Supplies Needed: White board or flip chart and 5-6 different color markers**

**Purpose: Emphasize what happens when we are presented with too many contradictory messages at the same time.**

**Activity Description: Read the colors, not the words.**

**Debrief: Ask those who tried this exercise to share why it was so difficult. Explain that the reason why it is difficult is that there are too many messages being presented to our brains between the meaning of the words and the actual colors that the words are printed in. This is similar to what happens when we are faced with communication overloads in our busy lives. Make the point that simplifying messages often improves communication. Just think how much easier this exercise would have been if both the printed word and the color were the same.**

Let's now try to talk about some ways in which you can become an active listener. Becoming an active listener will help improve communication. It will help you be able to better resolve conflict once you've practiced these skills and the others that we will learn in this group.

Let's read through the chart below. It explores several skills that we can practice to help us be more active listeners.

Pay attention	Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Look at the speaker directly.</li><li>➤ Put aside distracting thoughts.</li><li>➤ Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!</li><li>➤ Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.</li><li>➤ "Listen" to the speaker's body language.</li></ul>
Show that you are listening	Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Nod occasionally.</li><li>➤ Smile and use other facial expressions.</li><li>➤ Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.</li><li>➤ Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh</li></ul>

<p>Provide feedback</p>	<p>Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.</li> <li>➤ Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say...?" "Is this what you mean?"</li> <li>➤ Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.</li> </ul> <p>If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"</p>
<p>Defer judgement</p>	<p>Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.</li> <li>➤ Don't interrupt with counter arguments.</li> </ul>
<p>Respond appropriately.</p>	<p>Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be candid, open, and honest in your response.</li> <li>➤ Assert your opinions respectfully.</li> <li>➤ Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.</li> </ul>

Learning a skill takes practice. Now that we have had a chance to read about active listening skills, let's try to practice them.

**Activity: Practice using active listening skills with a role play**

**Purpose: To practice active listening skills**

**Instructions: Break the group up into pairs. Ask each person to take turns being the active listener and the other the neighbor. Give the group about 10 minutes to practice (5 minutes for each role). Bring the group back together after 10 minutes are up to debrief. (Let the group know when 5 minutes are up so that each person has time to play each role).**

**Scenario: You've been friendly with your neighbor Joan for about a year. You always greet each other when you see each other. You've even helped Joan out by walking her dog sometimes when**

she is out of town. You feel like Joan has been avoiding you for the past couple of weeks. She doesn't say hello anymore and you are beginning to think that you may have done something to upset her, but you're not sure what you might have done. You decide to approach Joan and ask her what is going on. Turns out that she just broke up with her boyfriend and has been a little depressed. You didn't do anything to upset her at all!

Homework: Make an effort to practice using each of these active listening skills twice before our next session. Keep track of the skills you practice so that you can share your experience with the group.

### Lesson Three: Steps to Conflict Management: Identifying the Issue and Key Players

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn the first step to resolving interpersonal conflict, which is being able to identify the issue. Participants will learn and practice the step of “identifying the issue”.

Today’s lesson is all about being able to identify the issue. This is the first step to conflict resolution. It’s important to know what the conflict is in order to resolve it.

#### Identify the issue

Analyze the conflict to help clarify the key issue or issues. Some conflicts can seem very complicated and can be visualized as a web of different issues with lots of twists and turns. However, if you reflect carefully on the situation, you’ll likely find one or two central issues at the heart of the conflict that can help you focus on your position and better articulate your concerns.

Some useful questions you could reflect on are:

What event or moment triggered the conflict?

What are you not getting that you want?

What are you afraid of losing?

Is your frustration/anger accurate and appropriate to the situation or over-exaggerated?

Make a list of the issues as they make themselves known to you through your period of reflection and then make note of the ones that overlap and are connected. If you are unable to immediately spot the main theme, the overlap should help you identify it fairly quickly.

#### Identify key players

It’s also important to make sure you know who main individuals involved in the conflict are. Ask yourself who you are angry and/or frustrated with and whether you are directing your emotions at that person or elsewhere? Knowing who to address is as important, if not more so, than knowing what to address in order to effectively manage conflict.

For example, imagine you are angry because you weren’t able to get a good night’s sleep. Your neighbor was playing loud music until 3am. You’re frustrated, angry and tired. You have complained to the landlord several times and asked that he talk to your neighbor about playing loud music. You haven’t approached your neighbor directly because you don’t want him to know it is you that is complaining. Identify who the key players are. Your roommate? Your neighbor? Your landlord?



**Activity: Identifying the issue and who you are angry with**

**Purpose: To have group participants start to analyze situations in which they are angry or upset and identify what the issue is and who the key players are**

**Supplies Needed: Handout #1, pens**

**Directions: Review the handout with group members. Ask the group to complete the exercise and be ready to discuss their answers with the group.**

Homework: Practice the skills you learned today as conflicts arise during the time before our next session. Think about how you can identify the issue and key players. You can write this down to help you sort things out.

## Lesson Four: Steps to Conflict Management Cont'd: Articulate your concerns

Goals for the lesson: Participants will continue to learn skills for conflict management, namely being able to articulate their concerns.

We will continue to learn steps to conflict management today by learning about how to articulate your concerns. In other words, we will learn how to express our concerns so that the person or people involved in the conflict can understand where we are coming from.

When you are in conflict, you may have difficulty clearly articulating your situation without escalating the conflict. Using an "I" message (also known as an "assertiveness statement") can help you state your concerns, feelings, and needs in a manner that is easier for the listener to hear and understand. An "I" statement focuses on your own feelings and experiences. It does not focus on your perspective of what the other person has done or failed to do. It is the difference, for example, between saying, "I feel that I am not being taken seriously when I tell you that I find loud music with profanity to be disrespectful" and "You are constantly playing that loud rap music you love when I'm trying to sleep."

If you can express your experience in a way that does not attack, criticize, or blame others, you are less likely to provoke defensiveness and hostility which tends to escalate conflicts, or have the other person shut-down or tune you out which tends to stifle communication.

### Articulate your concerns

Let the other person know how you feel, what the specific problem is and what impact it is having on you. This will help keep the conversation on *your* needs and emotions, rather than an attack on the other person and his or her behavior.

Here are some tips to help you achieve this. Let's read through the table then we can practice them.

Use "I" statements.	Use words like "I feel..." or "I think..." when trying to describe the problem. For example, "I feel like we haven't been spending enough time together" is more effective than "you are always neglecting me."
Use neutral language.	Often when people engage in conflict with others, they use inflammatory language, including profanity, name calling and put-downs. Such language only escalates conflict and pushes the conversation away from the key issues. Try to use neutral or more objective language that states your position to help make the conversation less emotional.
Be specific.	Give two or three concrete scenarios that illustrate what you mean to help the person understand your perspective. For example, if you are feeling ignored by your roommate, give a specific instance of this such as "I was really hurt when you left to hang out with your friends on Tuesday night when we planned to have dinner together."

Now that we have read through how to get our feelings across to the people involved in the conflict, let's try practicing using "I" statements.

**Activity: Articulating your concerns worksheet**

**Purpose:** To practice using “I” statements, use neutral language and to be specific about how a person feels when trying to resolve conflict.

**Supplies Needed:** Handout #2, pens (you can also do this worksheet aloud with the group)

**Directions:** Review the handout with group members. Ask the group to complete the exercise and be ready to discuss their answers with the group.

Homework: Practice using the skills you learned today between now and the next session. You don't have to wait for conflict to arise to practice these skills. For example, think about how you can use “I” statements in general conversation when trying to express yourself.

## Lesson Five: More on active listening

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn more active listening skills that will help them to manage conflict.

Today's lesson is more about active listening. Active listening is one of the most powerful tools you can master. It is appropriate for everyday life, and it promotes positive, open and non-threatening communication with others. The only goal of active listening is to ensure your understanding. Becoming an active listener take a lot of time and practice. That's why we are spending time on another lesson on this topic. Here are some tips on how to be a good active listener.

- Focus on the other person. Put aside any mental distractions and set an intention to make what the other person is saying important to you. Through listening, you are gaining important information to help bring the conflict to resolution.
- Maintain steady (but non aggressive) eye contact. If you have trouble with eye contact, try focusing on the other person's nose instead of looking in their eyes.
- Avoid body language that suggests judgement or anger, such as eye-rolling, tightly crossed arms or legs or smirking. You are here to collect information, not to judge, and you want the other person to feel like he or she can trust you.
- Give the other person adequate space and time to speak. Try not to interrupt to state your case and instead save your comments or follow-up questions for after he or she has finished outlining their position.
- Encourage the person with simple affirming comments or gestures. For example, give a little head nod or say, "I can understand how that would be upsetting." A simple "mhm" can also let the person know you are in the moment with them. Such comments and gestures demonstrate understanding and encourage the continuation of dialogue.
- Demonstrate empathy. Show understanding for the other person's position; this also conveys attentiveness as well as a general understanding that you are both two human beings, not robots.
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Interpret people's physical cues, including how they sit, their tone of voice and their facial expressions. The things people do with their bodies can be as telling, if not more so, than words.
- Use the technique of reflection. Reflect back to the other person what he or she has said. This will help to make sure that you are understanding what the other person is saying and that you are being heard and understood.

Now let's take some time and start to practice active listening skills.

**Activity: "Describe the..."**

**Purpose: to practice active listening skills**

**Directions: Use handouts #3 and 4 to practice active listening skills.**

**Debrief: Ask group participants about the experience with this exercise. Were they able to practice any of the skills we just reviewed?**

Homework: Practice some of the active listening skills we learned today again before our next session. Try this out with a friend, another member of the group or your counselor.

## Lesson Six: Cooperation's role in conflict resolution

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn tools for reflection as part of the conflict resolution process.

Work together to resolve problems. Cooperation as a means of resolution requires that each person stop placing blame on the other and that both take ownership of the problem. Make a commitment to work together to effectively resolve the conflict at hand. There are a number of tactics that can help you and the person you are in conflict with reach an agreement or resolution.

- Move past positions. A "position" is the desired outcome of a conflict that is usually non-negotiable and often results in a dead end. A position might be "I want a new roommate" or "I refuse to work with this person anymore." To reasonably resolve the conflict, each party needs to move beyond their positions.
- Focus on the present and the future. Conflicts tend to focus on past wrongs and past behaviors. However, one of the most important ways for both parties to take ownership of the problem is to recognize that irrespective of what happened in the past, both of you need to focus on how you can alleviate and improve this problem in the present and future. For example, don't focus on the last time you had a leak and your landlord took 4 months to fix the whole in the ceiling. Continue to address problems with your landlord as they arise.
- Be creative. As a general rule, coming to a resolution that satisfies everyone equally is not easy and often requires some flexibility and clever thinking. Oftentimes, agreements reached too early or too quickly in the conflict management process do not last because they have not sufficiently considered all the ramifications of the agreement (e.g., if you and your roommate just decide to start buying all of your own groceries separately who will pay for shared items like toilet paper?). Generate a bunch of options and alternatives to think "outside the box."
- Be specific in the resolution of the conflict. When you are solving a conflict with another person, make sure to be precise and specific. For example, perhaps you are having a conflict with your roommate and the two of you have developed a written roommate agreement. Before signing off, make sure that both of you fully understand each stipulation (for example, if the agreement states that you have to clean the toilet biweekly, does that mean twice a week or twice a month?). Consider signing the agreement once you both clarify any questions or ambiguous points that could be interpreted differently.

Let's take a few minutes to take a look at what cooperation might look like in scenarios involving conflict.

**Activity: Cooperation in conflict**

**Purpose: To identify when cooperation is used in conflict resolution**

**Supplies needed: Copies of handout # 4 and pens**

**Directions: Review each scenario in the handout and identify which scenarios used cooperation to help resolve the conflict.**

Homework: Think about a make a list of each time you cooperated between now and the next lesson. Did you notice anything about cooperation and whether it simplifies and/or de-stresses your life?

## Lesson Seven: Agreeing to disagree and knowing when to concede

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn tools for reflection as part of the conflict resolution process.

Today's lesson is about agreeing to disagree and knowing when to concede in the process of conflict resolution. There may be times when you are involved in a conflict but come to the realization that sometimes it's best to "agree to disagree" in order to resolve the conflict. Let's read more about agreeing to disagree.

### Agree to Disagree

When dealing with conflict, sometimes you have to agree to disagree.

Each person has a unique point of view and rarely agrees on every detail. It's important not to try to figure out which one of you is "right." Being right doesn't matter and won't help resolve the conflict. Keep in mind that truth is relative. What one person considers to be true is not necessarily what another person considers the truth. For example, consider the differing testimony of various witnesses who all saw the same car accident but from different angles. Truth depends on a person's point of view.

It's important to resolve conflict by "agreeing to disagree" sometimes when you feel that both people involved in the conflict have strong opinions about the situation. Each person has their own "truth." That is, they have their own opinions and values and feel strongly about them. In order to agree to disagree, both parties need to be able to express their opinions and not use language that blames or puts down the other person.

Let's read through an example of conflict. We will examine two ways of dealing with the situation and discuss how the situation gets resolved by agreeing to disagree.

Kristin and Jenna are new roommates. Jenna likes to go out with her friends on the weekends and drink. Kristin is in recovery and does not like to be around alcohol. Kristin has noticed that Jenna has been drinking in the apartment and confronts her about it. She tells Jenna that she is "uncomfortable in the apartment when there is alcohol around" because "I don't drink and I don't want to be tempted to drink again". She goes on to say that "I'm nervous that I will want to drink if I'm around it." Jenna says that she doesn't understand what "the big deal is" and says that "she pays half the rent and will drink if she wants to". She goes on to say that "it's not my problem that you're an alcoholic." They go back and forth a few more times before Kristin realizes that Jenna is not going to budge on this topic. They each insist that their view is the "right" one.

In this example, the roommates were not able to agree to disagree. Kristin tried to approach Jenna and shared her viewpoint but Jenna put down her roommate and used language that was upsetting. She couldn't see her point of view. This was **not** a good example of agreeing to disagree because the problem was not resolved. Let's read through the scenario again. This time, the roommates won't blame each other for their strong beliefs.

Kristin approaches Jenna and asks her if she can talk. She proceeds to tell Jenna that her that she "understands that she has the right to drink if she wants to" but that it makes her "uncomfortable" because she "used to drink a lot and it caused problems in her life." She asks Jenna if she will not drink in the apartment but Jenna says that she is "sorry that she had trouble in the past" but that "it is my apartment too". Jenna goes on to say that she "should not have to be inconvenienced" where she lives. Jenna and Kristin try to resolve the issue. Kristin asks her to not bring alcohol into the apartment but Jenna is not budging on the issue. The only thing she will agree to do is to not leave alcohol in common areas of the apartment. The roommates agree to disagree in this scenario. Each of them feels strongly about having

alcohol in the apartment and neither is willing to budge. Thankfully, Jenna agrees to keep alcohol out of the common areas and Kristin will try to live with that.

The roommates agree to disagree in this scenario. Jenna is ok with the plan of not bringing alcohol in the common or shared spaces in the apartment. Kristin understands that it is also Jenna's apartment and that she is an adult who is able to make her own decisions. They agree to disagree since neither of them is willing to change their beliefs on this topic.

**Activity: Agree to Disagree Brainstorming Exercise**

**Purpose: Understanding what it means to agree to disagree.**

**Supplies needed: Whiteboard or flip chart and markers**

**Description: Brainstorm scenarios where you have agreed to disagree. Share your experiences with the group. Talk about how it felt to agree to disagree. Why is it important to agree to disagree sometimes?**

Knowing when to Concede

Knowing when to concede when involved in a conflict is also important. That is, when do you agree that you cannot come to a solution that everyone is in agreement with? Some issues cannot be solved to the complete satisfaction of both people involved, particularly if one person chooses to reject negotiating and hold strong to what they want. So, you have to ask yourself, how much the issue at the core of the conflict matters to you and whether you are willing to concede or keep talking about it until you reach a different solution.

Ask yourself, is the issue of real importance to you? It may be tough on your ego. If the other person refuses to budge and you realize that it is a more important issue to him/her than yourself, then it may be time to reach out and put the conflict to an end.

Concession doesn't have to be dramatic. A simple, "Bill, I heard what you were saying the other day when we discussed when we were going to clean the apartment. While I still feel it could be done on Saturday, I think you may feel more strongly about doing it on Sunday and I am willing to put the disagreement to rest. I'm willing to back you up and keep to the weekly schedule we agreed on when I moved in."

Here's another example of conceding in a roommate scenario. Kate and Pam agree that they need to put curtains up in the living room so they have some privacy from the neighbors in the building next door. They cannot agree on a color. Pam does not like the color blue and Kate's favorite color is blue. Kate is buying the curtains so Pam agrees to concede on the color of the curtains. After all, she is not paying for them and recognizes the need for curtains.

You can see from these examples that conceding can resolve conflict when one of the parties involved is willing to concede because the issue at hand is just not so important to you.

Homework: Brainstorm a list of times when you conceded in order to resolve a conflict. Do you notice any recurring themes? Are there people in particular that you concede to? Do you find that you often concede in order to avoid conflict even though your needs are not met?

## Lesson Eight-Knowing when to take some time

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn a crucial step in conflict resolution in this lesson, when to take some time out to reevaluate the conflict.

Taking some time and stepping away from a conflict can be an important aspect of conflict resolution. If you reach a point where you feel like the conflict cannot be resolved, consider asking the other person involved for time to think about it. Don't leave them hanging, though. Let them know you need some time to think about it. Even consider specifying a day and time when you can pick up the discussion again. You can also ask the other person to spend some time thinking over their position as well.

- During the break, put yourself in the other person's shoes and try his/her position and why it matters to them. If you were the other person, how would you negotiate with someone like you?
- Take another look at your own point of view. Are there areas of lesser importance to you where you could bend yet still maintain what matters most to you?
- Write down a summary of your last discussion. Try to be objective and nonthreatening with your words. This can help you look at the situation differently.

Knowing when to ask for help If you are still having difficulty resolving a conflict, you can ask a third party for help. If you feel that you're getting nowhere and are only making things worse, then consider asking for help in managing the conflict. Think of the people you may reach out to for help. Who are they? Consider asking a friend, family member or counselor for help. They can sometimes offer a different perspective on a situation because they are not emotionally invested in the situation.

### **Discussion questions:**

- 1. Why can taking time away to think about the situation help you to resolve conflict?**
- 2. How can you use the time when you "take a step back" when trying to resolve a conflict?**

**Activity: Who can you go to for help?**

**Purpose: To identify people that you can turn to when you need help**

**Supplies needed: Paper and pen**

**Description: Make a list of people that you can reach out to when you need help resolving conflict. Think of the people that you trust, that you feel will listen to you and offer you advice.**



## Lesson Nine: Alternative tools for conflict resolution

Goals for the lesson: This lesson will introduce another tool for conflict resolution, the LARA method of conflict resolution. Participants will learn the LARA method and practice this method with the group.

You have learned a lot of tools that you can use to help you diffuse conflict in this group. Today's lesson will focus on a specific method called LARA. Following these steps ensures that you communicate in a respectful way and help resolve conflict. The key to LARA is listening.

### LARA Process Steps

When engaging with others, often the best thing we can do is to listen, and to affirm what is being said. Too often when we are not speaking, we are also not listening with an intent to understand. We are simply waiting our turn to speak, then we jump to respond without affirming a single thing we heard.

#### Listen:

Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for underlying principles, cultural values, emotions and issues behind what is being said. Listen for commonalities. Observe body language and tone of voice which may provide additional meaning. Listen for inherent needs and interests, not just what is said.

#### Affirm:

Affirm the principles or issues in what was said, or simply the feelings or emotions that were expressed ("You feel very strongly about this."). Affirming is not agreeing, it's acknowledging or recognizing what is shared. This can be done by simply repeating or rephrasing what was said. You can demonstrate this by using an "I" statement.

#### Respond:

Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs behind them. Ask questions about what was said. By not dodging the question or issue, you show that you respect the other person, and you show that you are not afraid of their opinion.

#### Add:

Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood. This will help the other person see your point of view. Repeat this process for as long as you are willing and able to engage the person with an open mind.

#### **Activity: Practicing LARA**

**Purpose: To practice using listening, affirming, responding and adding.**

**Supplies needed: Handout #5**

**Description: Use the handout to practice these skills to help resolve conflict.**

Homework: Practice using each of the LARA skills in the time between now and the next lesson.

## Lesson Ten: Using problem solving skills to resolve conflict

Goals for the lesson: Participants will learn problem solving skills in 7 steps to help with conflict resolution. This will help to determine what action they should take to lead to conflict resolution.

Today is the last session in the Keeping the Peace Group. You have learned and practiced a lot of skills that will help you to resolve conflict and maintain a peaceful living environment. Today's lesson will focus on 7 steps you can take to help you decide on your best course of action when trying to resolve conflict. We can be overwhelmed by the choices we can make when resolving conflict. We may be unsure of which decision to make, how to respond, or what to do. This can be difficult because we are usually emotionally involved in the situation. Following these 7 steps will help you make a decision on the best course of action to take when you are unsure of what to do or how to respond to conflict. You will find that you can use the skills you have learned thus far when following these steps.

1. Identify and define the issue or question  
What is the issue or concern? Define the conflict. *Use the skills we already learned in the group and identify who the key players are.*
2. Analyze the situation and gather information  
You may find it helpful to accomplish this step by writing down the situation on a piece of paper. *You've already identified the key players. Who are they? What is the issue? What is the position of each of the key players?*
3. Generate/identify possible action steps (at least 3)  
Write down at least three action steps. Those are the steps that you can take to try to resolve the problem. *Consider using "I" statements if you are going to approach the other person involved so that they are aware of your feelings.*
4. Evaluate possible actions  
Look at each situation and evaluate what the outcome of each of the possible action steps you have developed. Think about how effective those action steps will be in resolving the conflict.
5. Select the best action(s)  
You may want to look at each of the action steps and rate how successful you think they will be at helping to resolve the conflict. Choose the action step that you think will be most effective at coming to a resolution.
6. Develop an action plan, identify next steps, and implement the action  
Now that you have selected an action step, develop a plan on how to go about implementing it. Will you involve someone else? Do you need to set up a meeting to discuss the issue with the parties or party involved? How will you keep calm and be able to address the other person/people involved and get your point across in a respectful manner? Put your plan into action!
7. Analyze and assess action effectiveness (and repeat the process if necessary)  
Once you have implemented your plan, evaluate how effective it was. Is the problem resolved? Or are there still other issues that need to be addressed? If there are, go back to the first step and start the process over again until you feel a resolution has been reached.

Let's put these steps into action by practicing them.

**Activity: Problem solving skills in action**

**Purpose: To practice conflict resolution skills using 7 steps.**

**Supplies needed: Handout #6**

**Description: Use the handout to practice these skills to help resolve conflict.**

Congratulations! You have completed the "Keeping the Peace" group. Be proud of the work you have done and don't forget to use the skills you have learned so that you can get or keep the home you want and deserve!

## Handout #1: Identifying the Issue and Key Players

Ever have a situation where you feel angry or upset about your living situation but aren't quite sure what to do about it? This exercise will help you to identify exactly what the issue is and who is involved in the conflict. After all, being able to identify these are key to resolving the conflict.

Read through the following situation and try to identify what the problem is and who is involved.

James and Robert have been roommates for about three weeks. They never met before living together in supported housing. They share a two bedroom, one bathroom apartment in a nice building that is close to shopping and things to do in the neighborhood. There are 15 other units in the building and their apartment is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of a 4 story building. Neighbors seem nice enough. They usually keep to themselves. There are various people who live in the building. There are some families with children, some older people, and some people that James and Robert know from their PROS program too. James and Robert seem to be getting along ok. They have had to have a few conversations with each other because Robert doesn't really like to clean up after he cooks right away and James is very neat. It sometimes bothers him that Robert leaves dishes in the sink overnight.

James and Robert noticed that their neighbor across the hall got a dog a few days ago. The dog barks all night long and they are both having trouble sleeping at night. James has been more on edge since then and has been a little short with Robert about doing the dishes. He has been snapping at him and even yelled at him and called him a pig this morning. Now they are upset with each other. Things weren't so bad before...

Discussion questions:

1. Can you identify the problem in this scenario? Consider what triggered the conflict.
2. Who are the key players in this scenario? What are their roles?

## Handout #2: Practicing articulating your concerns using "I" statements

Practice filling in the blanks to create "I" statements using these four parts:

1. "When you \_\_\_\_\_ (state observation)"
2. "I feel or think \_\_\_\_\_ (state feeling)"
3. "Because \_\_\_\_\_ (state need)"
4. "I would prefer that \_\_\_\_\_ (state preference)"

Here's an example: "When you leave your things all over the apartment I feel embarrassed to have friends over because I don't want them to think we are messy. I would prefer it if you kept your things in your own room or put them away."

Here's another pattern to the "I" message.

1. How you feel
2. What you have that feeling about
3. Why you feel this way
4. What you would like to see instead

For example: "I feel upset about the way you spoke to me because it embarrassed me in front of my friends. I would prefer that we discuss things in private."

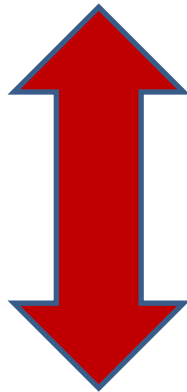
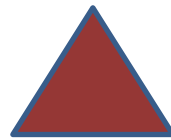
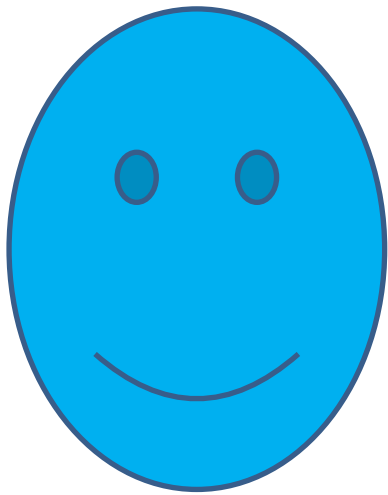
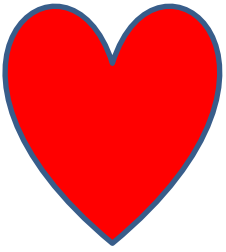
Practice changing these heated statements into "I" statements.

1. "You never listen to anyone and you are not listening to me now."
2. "How dare you! You never put the dishes away and you know that annoys me."
3. "You are so inconsiderate of my feelings."
4. "You are the most irresponsible person I know."
5. "You never let me talk or consider things from my point of view. You are just plain selfish!"

### Handout #3: Describe the...

Directions: Break up into pairs. Sit each person back to back. Give one person the handout with the pictures drawn on it. Give the second person in the pair a blank piece of paper. The person with the picture must dictate to his/her partner how to draw the picture. Make sure to emphasize no cheating or peeking! When finished, change the pictures around the groups and have the partners switch roles. When everyone has drawn once, compare the pictures. The goal is to have the teams draw similar pictures. This exercise demonstrates active listening!

Handout #4: Describe the...



Handout #4: Cooperation in conflict resolution

Directions: Read through each scenario and identify if cooperation was used to help resolve the situation. Circle yes or no.

<p>1. You live in a supported apartment through Making People Well Organization and your roommate just moved out. You've had the apartment to yourself for a few weeks when you find out that you are getting a new roommate. The housing staff introduce you to her when she comes to tour the apartment. She tells you that she smokes and asks you if you are a smoker. You think she is asking you because she will want to smoke in the apartment. You quit smoking four years ago and do not want her smoking in the apartment. As a matter of fact, your last roommate smoked and it always caused problems because she would smoke when you weren't home and you had to constantly address the issue with her. You decide to talk to this new roommate and tell her that you haven't smoked for four years and that you would prefer if she didn't smoke in the apartment. You also tell her that you had issues with a previous roommate who said she wouldn't smoke in the apartment but did. She says that she understands and agrees not to smoke in the apartment.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>2. Your neighbor is a musician and plays loud music at night when he practices the piano. The music is lovely but you find it too loud and can't fall asleep. You decide to confront your neighbor and explain that the music is nice but that you are not able to fall asleep at night because of it. After some negotiation, you both agree that he won't play the piano after 10pm.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>3. You notice that your roommate has been asking you to borrow money lately and you are concerned about him. You decide to ask him if he is ok and he tells you that he started gambling again. He is not going to be able to pay his portion of the rent because he gambled it away. He promises that he will pay you back next month.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>4. Your roommate has a boyfriend who visits often. He has started spending the night over about 3-4 times a week. He eats the food and leaves his belongings around the house. It's starting to bother you because you think he should contribute to the household if he is going to use your things too. You decide to talk to them about it and agree that he will chip in for groceries and clean up after himself (or limit leaving his belongings in your roommate's bedroom).</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>5. You have a leak in your ceiling from your neighbor upstairs' kitchen sink. You have asked the landlord to fix it about three times and he insists that he is working on it. You see him in the hall when you enter the building and tell him that you are going to call the police if he doesn't fix the ceiling by the end of the week!</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>



Answer Key:

1. Yes. This is an example of not allowing past experiences color your judgement. Focus on the present and future. This woman says that she will not smoke in the apartment and you are going to trust and take her word on it.
2. Yes. This is an example of how having honest communication can result in compromise. The neighbor gets to practice his piano and you get to fall asleep in a quiet environment.
3. No. This is not an example of cooperation. Your roommate gambled his rent money away and is asking you to cover the rent, even though he knows that you cannot afford it.
4. Yes. This is an example of how communicating can lead to cooperation and conflict resolution. By expressing your expectations and concerns, the roommates' boyfriend was agreeable to contributing to the food in the apartment.
5. No. This is not an example of cooperation. The tenant should not approach the landlord and give an ultimatum. This is not a way to open communication. In fact, giving an ultimatum often shuts down communication and can lead to more conflict.

Handout #5: Practicing the LARA method

Directions: Practice using each skill in the LARA method. After you practice using each of the skills, we will do a role play so that you can practice putting all of the pieces together to resolve a conflict.

Skill	Example
Listen	Listen for information and pay attention to body language and tone of voice.
Affirm	Consider using an "I" statement to show the other person that you are listening. ➤ "I hear that you are frustrated when I don't wash the dishes after I cook."
Respond	Repeat or rephrase what the other person is saying ➤ "It bothers you when I leave dirty dishes in the sink."
Add	Add information so that the other person sees your point of view ➤ "I want you to know that I usually don't have time to do the dishes right away on Thursdays because I have to get to work. I promise to do them as soon as I get home, no matter how late it is.'

Let's practice using each of these skills. Can someone volunteer from the group to have a conversation with me about the weather and your favorite time of year? Pay attention to how we demonstrate each of the skills while we talk.

Now let's practice using a role play scenario.

Jacob's new neighbor, Marlene, has been putting garbage bags outside her apartment door in the building's hallway. He notices that she leaves the bags there overnight sometimes and he's worried that the garbage will attract rodents. He also doesn't like the smell of the garbage in the hall so he approaches Marlene when he sees her.

Handout#6: 7 Steps to Conflict Resolution Worksheet

Directions: Use the scenario below to practice conflict resolution. Fill in the worksheet and answer questions to each step.

Joyce and Janice are roommates. They get along fine but Joyce doesn't have any friends and wants to do EVERYTHING with Janice. It's getting to Janice and she is starting to get annoyed with Joyce. She wants to confront her about it.

1. Identify the issue. What is the issue in this scenario? Who are the key players?

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2. Analyze the situation and gather information. What is the position of the key players?

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3. Identify possible (at least 3) action steps. What can you do to resolve the problem?

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4. Evaluate the possible actions. What do you think will be the outcome of each of the possible actions?

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5. Select the best action.

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6. Develop an action plan, identify the next steps and implement the action. What will you do to put the plan in place?

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7. Analyze and assess the effectiveness of your plan (and repeat if necessary). How did it go? Is the problem resolved? Do you need to try something else?

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