

Crisis > Change > Choice: **Effective Conversations in Crisis Situations**



When a community has been affected by a crisis, it is necessary to come together in order for the community to survive and move ahead. This requires particular attention to encouraging and practicing effective conversations among community members and with others. Here, we offer several intervention techniques for facilitating helpful conversations and avoiding conflict in discussions.

The Purpose of Conversation

Conversation is the spoken exchange of ideas, observations, opinions, or feelings between people.

Primary Functions of a conversation:

1. Share information
2. Establish/maintain social relationships
3. Establish common meaning
4. Coordinate actions

Source: Richard Norquist, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-conversation-analysis-ca-p2-1689924>

An Effective Conversation...

Produces positive results, like:

- Creating agreements
- Clarifying doubts
- Solving problems
- Finding new options
- Learning

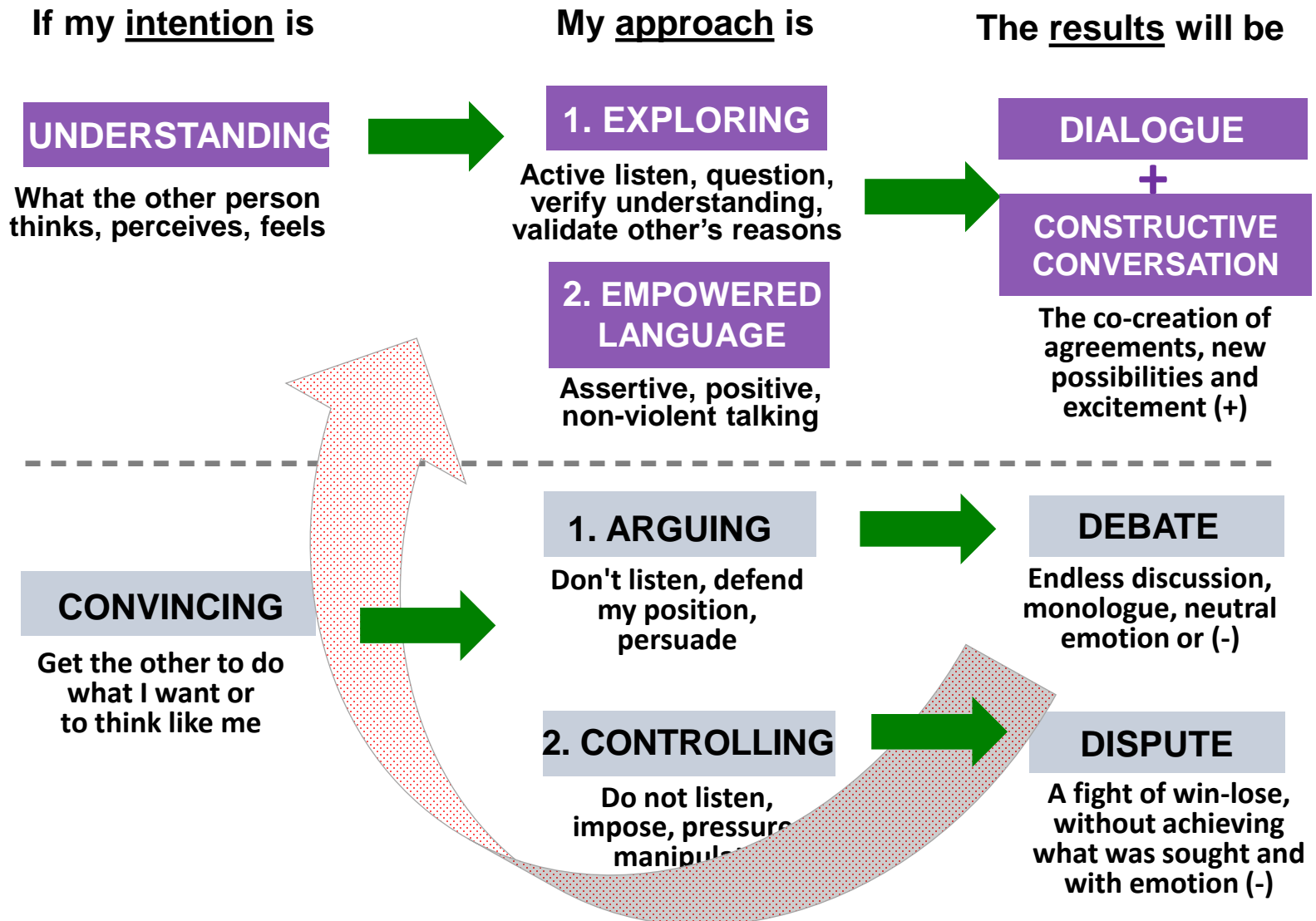


And more:

- Strengthening relationships
- Avoiding conflict
- Creating positive emotions and/or avoiding negative ones
- Generating interest in more conversations



Model for Effective Conversations



Active Listening



karenamaranto.blogspot.com

Active listening will move the conversation forward.

Consists of:

- Listen to understand... not to answer
- Listen beyond words or feelings, listening to the tone of voice
- Pay attention to the words to understand what is logical and right for that person
- Paraphrase what you hear to verify that you understand what was said correctly.

What Active Listening Communicates

- I understand your feelings.
- I'm taking you seriously.
- I am interested and concerned.
- I do not want to change you.
- I respect you and your ability to solve your problems.



Foto: Ximena Combariza E.

Advantages of Active Listening

- Prevent or minimize misunderstandings.
- Help in solving problems that meet the needs of the population.
- Show empathy and acceptance.



Use Positive, Empowering Language

“Words build reality!”

- Speak in a way that makes people feel more capable of acting and manage to agree on meanings with others.
- This is a critical factor for recovery and for the development of personal, group and community potential.

Empowering Language

- Using linguistic structures that help people recall, clarify and share memories and their importance which increases behavioral options.



- Critical for the development of personal, group and community potential.

The 4 C's of Empowered Language



- **Correspondence**
 - Identify or assume responsibilities
- **Capacity**
 - Recognize options for action
- **Clarity**
 - Be clear in describing what you want to say
- **Coherence**
 - Be consistent in related messages

*These apply to conversations with myself
as well as conversations with others!*

Examples of Positive, Empowering Language

1. Correspondence/Responsibility

"I feel very sad and anxious when I see all the houses that the cyclone destroyed."

VS

"One feels bad in these situations."

2. Capacity

"I'm going to finish the report for the boss this afternoon."

VS

"I have to deliver that paper to the boss."

3. Clarity

"Can you pass me the alarm clock that is in the left drawer, please?"

VS

"Give me that thing."

4. Coherence

"I want to be more active, even though the company is closed."

VS

"I should do something..."

Empowered

VS

Unempowered

Empowerment in Dialogue - Techniques

- **Tracking**
 - Asking for more clarity or more information
- **Paraphrasing**
 - Repeating what you heard and understand, to verify
- **Framing**
 - Identifying and pointing out the positive



(AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

These techniques help verify understanding and move the conversation forward.

Tracking

"Ask the person to clarify or expand on the idea through specific questions (what/how/when/where) to reach agreement on the meaning and on all real options for action about the topic".

Dr. Gilbert Brenson

Example:

How would you respond to this statement:

"We cannot do anything when everything at home is upside down!"

We can increase understanding and explore options by responding:

- *"What do you mean, everything is upside down in the house?"*
- *"What you want to do now?"*
- *"How could you do it now?"*

Paraphrasing

Restate in your own words, and in an empowered form, what you understood.

Do you mean that you felt good because she listened to you? Is that right?

I think she heard what I said. Maybe she's taking me seriously.



Reframing

"Using this technique, we seek to enhance individual and group self-esteem by identifying and highlighting the positive aspects and value of the person and what they are doing."

Dr. Gilbert Brenson

Types of reframing:

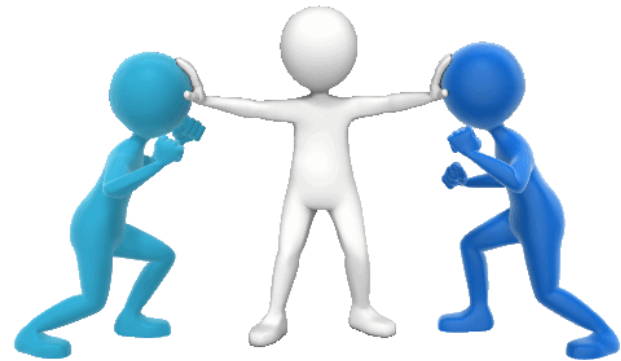
Examples:

1. Recognize personal qualities → ***"You are a very kind person."***
2. Strengthen personal initiative → ***"That's a wonderful idea! Do it!"***
3. Highlight good intentions → ***"I know you want to help..."***
4. Reframe obstacles as opportunities → ***"What did you learn from it?"***

Avoiding Conflict Escalation

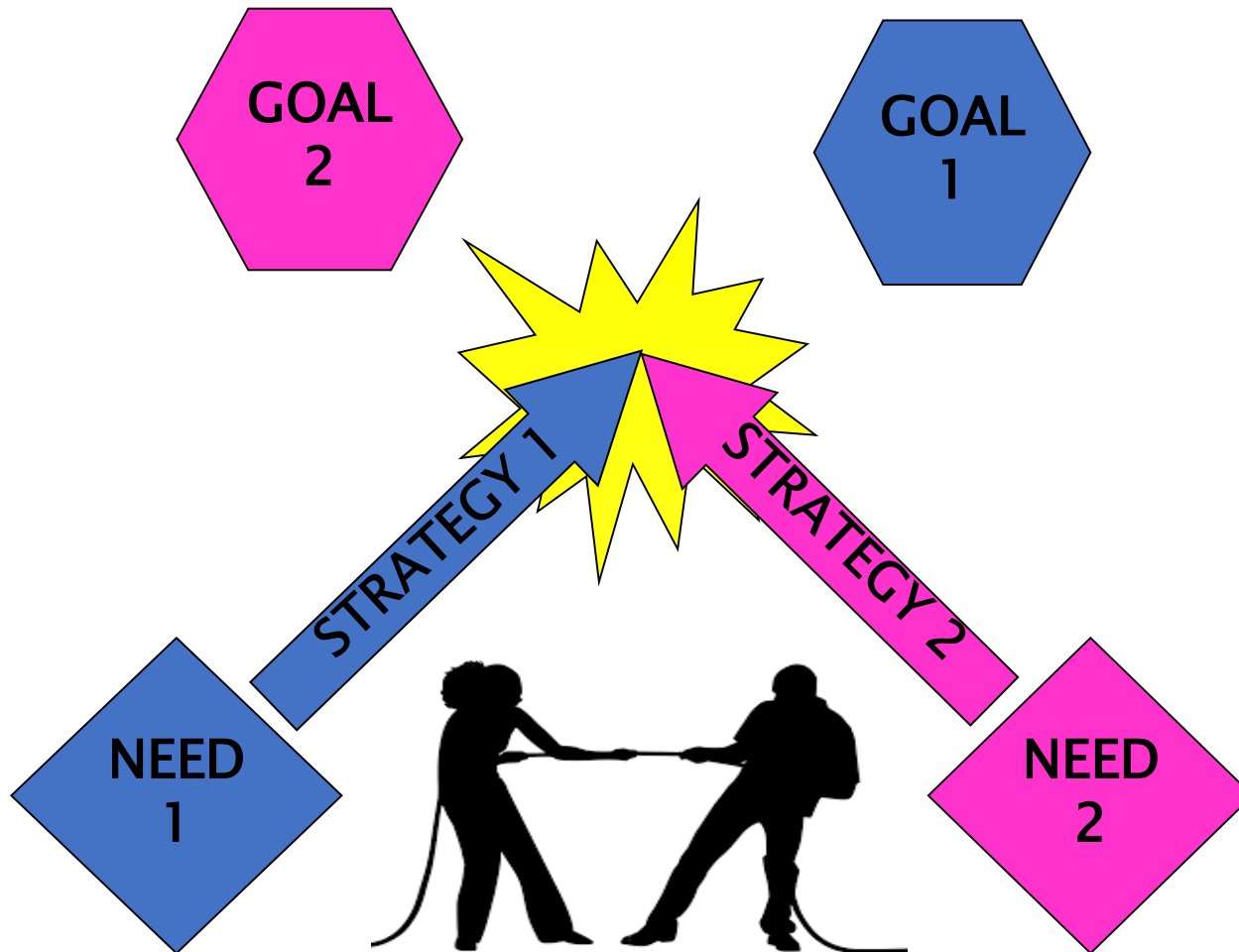
"Conflict occurs when one person tries to satisfy a need or desire which interferes with or prevents another person from satisfying their own needs or desires."

Here we present several strategies and techniques to recognize when and how conflict begins and how, as a facilitator, to reduce escalation while still addressing the positions and needs of those involved.



[Based on presentation by Gilbert Brenson-Lazan, 7 Nov 2007, with permission.]

The Process of Conflict



Conflict Escalation



INFLEXIBILITY

Unyielding adherence to one's own fixed principles or purposes.

- Hardening
- Persuasion
- Manipulation

DISCOUNTING

Denying or diminishing the value of others or their principles or purposes.

- Polarization (us vs. them)
- Loss of respect
- Indirect threats

AGGRESSION

Imposing with violence one's own fixed principles or purposes upon others.

- Verbal Aggression
- Physical Aggression
- Destructive Behaviors

Verbal Expressions of Conflict

Examples:

- **Hardening**
"I know I'm right."
- **Persuasion**
"I have to convince them that I am right."
- **Manipulation**
"I'll do whatever is necessary to show that they are wrong."
- **Polarization**
"Those of us that know I am right are now all together."
- **Loss of Respect**
"It isn't even worth talking to them."
- **Indirect Threats**
"We have to dominate those that are not with us."
- **Verbal Aggression**
"That person is a #%\$&!"*
- **Physical Aggression**
"Take this!"
- **Destructive Behaviors**
"I may lose but I'll take some of them with me."

How do you react when you hear one of these?

Non-violent Communication (NVC)

Requirements

SELF-EMPATHY: Compassionately connecting with ourselves, noticing our feelings, thoughts, and judgments, and acknowledging what is affecting us.



EMPATHIC LISTENING: the connection with what happens in other people and what would make their lives better. It implies "emptying the mind and listening with all our being".



HONEST AND ASSERTIVE EXPRESSION: of how I see a situation (my observation), of my feeling, need and request.



Elements of Non-violent Communication

1. Observations: What we see, hear or touch, and also what is different from our evaluations of meaning and importance.

2. Feelings: Our emotions or sensations, free from thought and history

3. Needs: Universal human needs which are separate from the strategies used to satisfy them.

4. Requests: Request for a specific action, without being a requirement.

Practice

- ***When I...*** (Observations)
- ***I feel...*** (Feelings/Emotions)
- ***Because I need...*** (Needs)
- ***Could you...*** (Requests)

Non-violent Communication

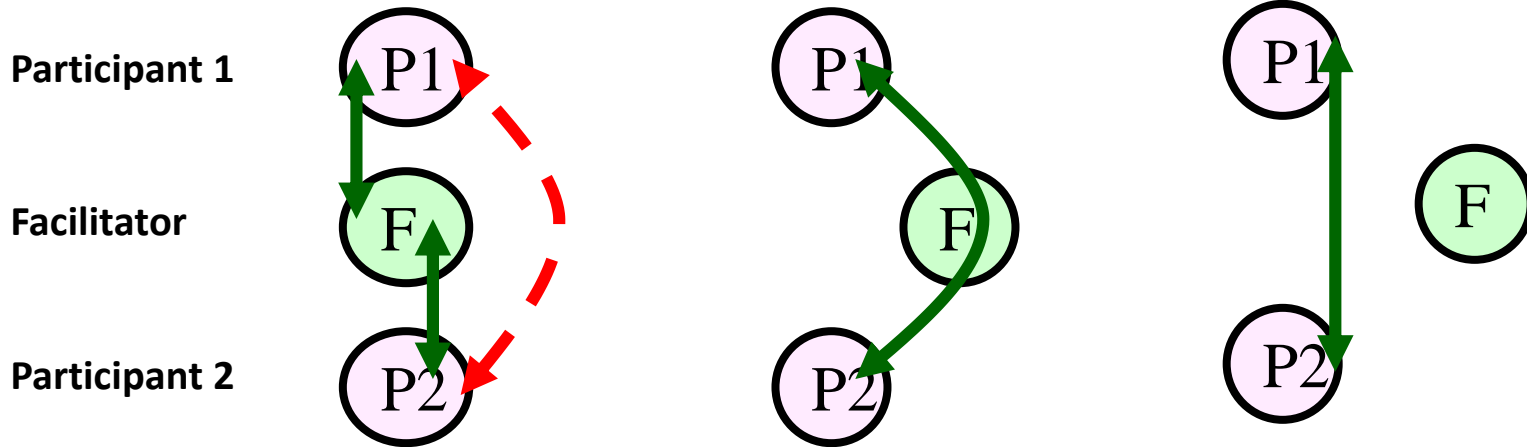
The Synergies Produced

I clearly express my feelings and thoughts without blaming or criticizing you

I listen with empathy to your feelings and thoughts without blaming or criticizing myself

Observations	What I observe, remember or imagine, free of my judgments, that contributes or does not contribute to my well-being	What you observe, remember or imagine, free of your judgments, that contributes or does not contribute to your well-being
Feelings	What I feel about what I observe	What you feel about what you observe
Needs	What I need or value and what is associated with my feelings or emotions	What you need or value and what is associated with your feelings or emotions
Requests	The concrete actions that I ask of you and that would enrich my life, without being a requirement	The concrete actions that you ask of me and that would enrich your life, without being a requirement

Dynamics of Intervention



Stages

1

Facilitator interrupts any dysfunctional communication between participants and communicates directly with each person.

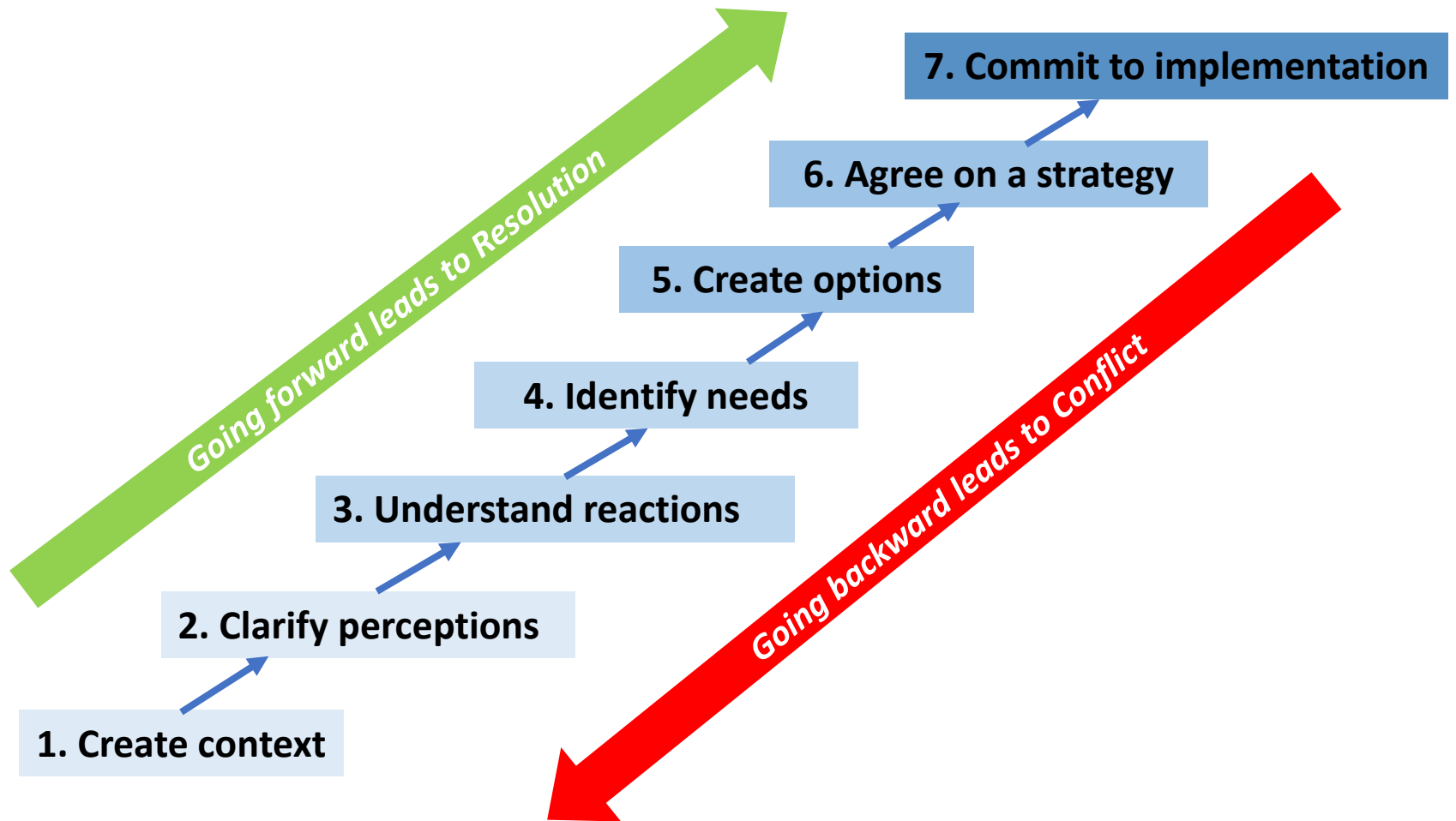
2

Facilitator models appropriate dialogue between participants through paraphrasing.

3

Facilitator gets out of the dialogue and remains alert to the possibility of intervening again if the communication becomes dysfunctional again.

Stages of Conciliation



Stages of Conciliation

7. Commit to implementation

Participants agree on a strategic plan for implementing a trial, with specific, measurable commitments, mutual actions and joint monitoring of results.

6. Agree on a strategy

Participants jointly assess the options and agree to try one.

5. Create options

Together participants explore strategies that would allow everyone to meet their basic needs without hindering the others from meeting their needs.

4. Identify needs

Each participant shares personal interests, needs and strategy (used so far) to meet those needs.

3. Understand reactions

Each participant expresses feelings and reactions to conflict without blaming the other.

2. Clarify perceptions

Each participant shares observations and beliefs.

1. Create context

Establish space & rapport for those who are willing and able to talk.

Role of Facilitators in Community Conversations

- **Make the activity meaningful**
 - Clarify purpose and structure of the conversation
 - **Create a positive atmosphere**
 - Encourage participation
 - Listen calmly & attentively
 - **Give emotional support when necessary**
 - **Inspire self-confidence and leadership**
- **Help participants process and reframe their crisis experience**
 - **Promote personal and collective actions**
 - Identify skills that unite and move the group forward
 - Help group identify their resources (internal & external)
 - **Suggest processes and tools for making plans and decisions**

Inspirational Quote

There is nothing more important to assess the quality of a relationship than the quality of the conversations we have with that person.

Rafael Echeverría



We trust your commitment

GFSC retains the copyrights on all training materials. We distribute our materials at no cost for use with agencies, groups, communities and organizations in need.

If you receive payment for your services using **GFSC** materials, we hope you will [make a donation to GFSC](#) so that we can continue helping other communities!

Contact us if you would like to keep posted on future GFSC workshops, activities and updates to our model.

Through our support of volunteer facilitators worldwide, GFSC helps communities build their capacity to work through their challenges and create sustainable solutions.

If you value what we do, you can help us, too:

<https://globalfacilitators.org/donations/>

info@globalfacilitators.org

<https://globalfacilitators.org>