

Conflict and group facilitation



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Conflict resolution The areas of conflict in the confrontations between David and Munro are primarily (a) differences in beliefs about parenting and (b) cultural beliefs. As a result they are unable to arrive at a consensus on parenting styles and this is placing them at odds and functioning as a block. According to Karl Steyaert, by blocking, a person publicly opposes a proposal, thereby creating group tension and division and potentially reducing the chances of finding a mutually desirable outcome. (Estes et al, 2006). In order to resolve such a situation, open communication is necessary between the parties, with a skilled facilitator mediating the discussion so that the genuine concerns of both parties can be understood and a mutually acceptable solution found. (Estes et al, 2006).

There is a strong conflict existing between David and Peter and it is likely to polarize the group along two different lines. Therefore, there is a need for mediation of a dispute, by getting the two parties to face each other in a non confrontational manner. A skilled facilitator may be used, or suitable members from the group itself may be used as mediators. Conflict resolution in schools between disputing students has been found to be improved through using peers to mediate the resolution of such disputes. (Schrumpf et al, 1991). In this case, the individuals selected to mediate must not offer any opinions or assume responsibility for solving the dispute. Their only function is to listen and enable both Peter and David to fully express themselves and their dissenting viewpoints.

The process of mediation must first of all establish certain ground rules, such as not allowing any personal vilification and requiring the parties to address each other calmly, with consideration and respect for each others' viewpoints. When one party is speaking, he must not be interrupted, but

allowed to speak and to fully express his feelings on the matter. Since it is the underlying emotion that each party feels regarding parental and cultural issues which is the source of the conflict, they must learn how to deal with their feelings and keep them under control while interacting with others in the group. This would help to prevent escalation of the conflict.

Once each party has had their say; the conflict areas must be clearly defined. In the case of David and Peter, the specific areas on which they disagree and the reasons for such differing opinions must be clarified, so that the underlying causes of the conflict are clearly laid out, whether they are cultural, religious or personal. The mediator/s selected must not attempt to push a solution on the two parties, rather the two combatants as well as group members must be encouraged to suggest possible alternatives to resolve the conflict and the parties must be assisted in finding a solution to their dispute on their own. Possible solutions may be put forward, based on the common areas where both David and Peter agree and this can form the basis of an agreement between the parties. When they agree to respect each other's differences and allow each other to express themselves fully without rancor, then the goals of the group can also be advanced. Moreover, by focusing on the common areas of consensus, the goals of the group will also be advanced, accommodating individual differences yet allowing for group consensus on important issues.

The best way to resolve this conflict is therefore to use facilitators or mediators from members of the group itself, to function as neutral sounding boards where both parties can state their viewpoints and find the common ground between them, while also agreeing to respect their individual differences and their right to express their views. This will also be helpful to

other members of the group because it enables them to realize that they have the freedom to express their view points fully, but that it must be done with courtesy and consideration for others. Encouraging different points of view helps everyone to have a deeper and better understanding of the problems involved in parenting. Lastly, the entire conflict resolution process must be evaluated and its degree of success assessed, so that it can be used as a general guideline to guide the resolution of future conflicts within the group.

In order to restore harmony within the group, the skilled facilitator/mediator who is not a part of the group itself can highlight the value of different opinions in gaining a better understanding of the overall issues. Explaining that conflict is healthy, provided it is not used as a forum for personal animosity, will enable other members of the group to overcome their unsettled feelings regarding the dispute between Peter and David. The resolution of the conflict is likely to restore the harmony and cooperation that existed earlier, especially because it will not belittle one or the other party, but allow each one full expression, while also helping them to deal with their feelings and arrive at a consensus using common areas of agreement.

Reference:

- * Estes, Caroline, Briggs, Beatrice, Bressen, Tree and Steyeart, Karl, 2006. “When we should use ‘ blocking power’” *Communities*, 133 : 26-31
- * Schruppf, Fred, Crawford, Donna and Usadel, H. Chu, 1991. “ Peer mediation: Conflict resolution in schools.” IL: Research Press