

Guidelines for Managing Conflict and Difficult Behaviors

Conflict is: A state of disharmony within one's self, between persons and/or organizations regarding incompatible needs, values or ideas.

As a facilitator you may need to occasionally intervene when conflicts and difficult behaviors seem to be escalating to a level that threatens the process and safety of the family meeting. The following are strategies and guidelines to support you in responding to such circumstances:

- Assess what is at stake, the seriousness of the conflict or behavior and their impact on the family meeting
- Gather information regarding how the conflict or behavior affects those involved. It may be more of a problem for you than the family
- Assess if there have been previous barriers preventing the conflict or problem behaviors from being discussed in the open
- Assess what each party wants and acknowledge that
- Make a preliminary determination of the outcome that will be achieved by effectively addressing the conflict or behavior
- Share your awareness of the conflict or the problem behavior
- Communicate your understanding of what is at stake
- Gather ideas from all involved for how best to proceed
- Assess with family members their preferred alternative future
- Agree for all to actively listen to all family members' concerns without allowing interruptions
- Ask all involved to try to objectively understand each person's point of view
- Stick to the issues, don't side track
- If comments become personal, redirect attention back to the issues
- Reach mutual understanding with all parties on the decision that best addresses the conflict or behavior
- Listen repeat, reflect and clarify information shared
- Acknowledge progress

Use of storyboarding can be of great value in managing conflict or difficult behaviors during family meetings. Writing on flip chart paper, each person's position can effectively facilitate self awareness and clarify all disparate positions. Such a visual process may make it easier for all to

move to resolution with limited involvement of the facilitator beyond documentation of the various concerns.