IHS Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention
SPECIAL DIABETES PROGRAM FOR INDIANS
Celebrating a Decade of Success

Communication Skills Training: Handling Work Place Conflicts

Discussion Guide

This communication skills training can be used for staff development in the area of conflict resolution. This guide is designed to help enhance collaboration and team work and develop good conflict resolution skills. Conflict Resolution skills provide a framework for analyzing and addressing conflicts.

As the discussion leader, you should review the entire training and print the *Presentation Handout* prior to using the training with your staff. The training takes approximately one hour to complete and provides one hour of continuing education credit. Once you view the training, you can choose to either use the entire training or only sections of it with your staff. To earn continuing education credit, each person in the group needs to watch the entire training and successfully complete the quiz (score $\geq$ 80%). Each person will be able to print a certificate at the end of the training. (See *Course Information* handout.)

Staff Development in Conflict and Power Differences

Section 1 (12 minutes)

This short video shows an interaction between Joe, a program director and Claire, a field supervisor. A short discussion of general principles of conflict resolution by the communication experts (Drs. Joyce Hocker and Chris Fiore) follows. The section demonstrates the challenges presented when power is unequal and resources are scarce. Both employees avoid the real problem and frustration builds. Follow this with your group and ask them to describe similar experiences of unequal power, resource scarcity, and the need to get the job done. Explore the following ideas and questions:

1. Give some examples of how you were tempted to avoid a conflict, but instead dealt with it. What allowed you to face the difficult situation?

2. What helps you to separate the person from the problem? When is this most challenging for you?

3. What thoughts allow you to give conflicts the time and energy to resolve them constructively?

4. As a group, discuss the challenges of acknowledging feelings. What are typical feelings you experience in conflicts at work?

Practice Applying Conflict Resolution Principles

Section 2 (10 min) and Section 3 (8 min)

These sections provide information from the communications experts on several strategies to approaching conflicts productively. Quiz questions are interspersed throughout the discussion, and can be used with the group to check their understanding of the strategies. The final part of Section 3 shows the interaction between Joe, the program director and

Claire, the field supervisor. In the second phone call, things go better because both use conflict resolution skills

Conflict Resolution and Team Building

1. Think of a recent situation in which the conflict or difficult situation could have been managed using the TRFC (Topic, Relationship, Face-Saving and Communication) process. For instance, if people get stuck on one level of the problem, how can they switch to another level?

2. Discuss how a leader might change the direction of an unproductive conflict. What strategies do you think would work?

Conflict Resolution with Difficult People

The experts coach us to focus on the problem, not the person. However, as we know, sometimes people are not constructively contributing to a discussion. What can you do when one person is "being difficult?"   Think of respectful ways to use the principles presented in this section.

Personal Reflections on Conflict Resolution

This aspect of the discussion guide can be carried out as a group discussion if your team is cohesive. An *alternative way* is to ask each person to write brief responses to the questions, and share them with one other person.

1. Consider your own style of approaching conflict. Are you someone who prefers to solve the problems and sort out the relationships later? Or do you like to preserve the relationships no matter what? What might be the downside to your usual approach? Pick one idea that might help you try a new approach?

2. Think of the most difficult ongoing aspect of your job that creates interpersonal conflict. Which idea in this training might help reduce the stress of this conflict? Envision applying this idea to your situation.

3. Can you see yourself committing to changing one behavior in the next two months or so? Write your commitment down or share it with someone.

Cultural Issues

1. Consider the entire conflict scenario presented (Joe and Claire) in this training. What cultural issues might be present?

2. Discuss how culture might influence what could happen (native/non-native, gender, power, role definitions).

3. In your culture, how is conflict "supposed" to be handled? How does this expectation influence what you are comfortable doing?