

Conflict Consulting

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss conflict consulting as an additional option during the conflict resolution process. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Three Phases of Conflict Consulting
 - a. Emotional Expression
 - b. Skills Building
 - c. Action Planning
2. Power of Conflict Consulting

1. Three Phases of Conflict Consulting

When preparing to engage in the conflict resolution process, there may be times when one party is ready to move ahead, while the other party is still unwilling to meet. When this happens, conflict consulting can be a helpful option.

Conflict consulting is an approach to conflict resolution in which the intervener steps into the role of conflict consultant to sit down with the interested party and help them develop skills to use moving forward when the other party refuses to meet.

The conflict consulting process has three stages:

1. Emotional expression
2. Skills building
3. Action planning



TERM TO KNOW

Conflict Consulting

An approach in which an intervener helps one party develop conflict resolution skills when other parties may not be willing to meet jointly or engage in a formal conflict resolution process.

1a. Emotional Expression

When someone comes to a conflict consulting session, they have a story to tell and want that story to be heard.

This is the time for you, as the intervener/consultant, to listen, allowing the party to vent their feelings and clarify their needs.

As part of active listening, you may ask some clarifying questions, and you may reflect back some things you hear, but you mostly want to make sure that the party is able to engage in full **emotional expression**.

This particular stage will go through a natural ebb and flow; when the person feels heard, they will be ready to move into the next stage.



TERM TO KNOW

Emotional Expression

The first part of conflict consulting, in which the intervener helps the party express feelings about the conflict and identify needs.

1b. Skills Building

This next phase is **skill building**, which provides the conflict consultant with the opportunity to offer some techniques or skills that the party might find helpful.

As always, you, as the intervener, want to take your cues from the person. You may choose certain skills that you think will be helpful based on what you've heard in the first stage.

Whether or not the person wants to move ahead with the conflict resolution process, you're simply there to offer skills and techniques that they can use at will, such as:

- **Role playing:** This skill can be very helpful for someone to step into the role of the person on the other side of the conflict. If this is something the party would like to try, the conflict consultant might play the role of the other person. Engaging in this kind of activity is a great way for the party to see things from another perspective.
- **I-messages:** This skill is helpful if the person would like to learn how to reframe or express their needs and feelings using I-statements. If there have been a lot of you statements or blaming statements at the heart of the conflict, learning how to use I-statements would be useful.
- **Conflict Styles Assessment:** This technique would be helpful for the party to look at what their approach to conflict is, and taking the assessment would be one way of doing that.
- **Conflict mapping:** With this technique, there's a lot to be learned from actually sitting with the person and mapping out the stages of the conflict, the different perspectives, and the issues.

These are just some examples of the options that you have for skills building with a party. There are a number of skills and techniques available, and the ones you use will be determined by the particular party's needs.



TERM TO KNOW

Skills Building

The second part of the conflict consulting process, in which the intervener helps the party develop skills using conflict resolution tools.

1c. Action Planning

After skills building, you're ready to move into the **action planning** phase. This is where the conflict consultant will sit with the party and help them devise strategies or solutions that make sense for the particular situation. These strategies are really next steps that the party can take in regards to the conflict, and they could be any

number of things, depending on the nature of the conflict.

The party might decide to talk to the other person, or maybe just write a letter. They could also choose to come back for another session.

In the action planning phase, you, as the consultant, help the party decide on whatever they think makes sense as a next step.



TERM TO KNOW

Action Planning

The third part of the conflict consulting process, in which the intervener helps the party develop strategies for engaging with other parties.

2. Power of Conflict Consulting

Conflict consulting can be a very powerful process because it really empowers someone to take the next step. Based on the skills the party learns and the plan the party puts together, the process can do a lot to help them resolve the conflict.

In some situations, the process might de-escalate the conflict by helping the party alter their perceptions of the other person involved. Then, if the party has learned how to use I-messages, they may approach that other person differently.

➞ **EXAMPLE** There's a conflict between some neighbors in a condo building, and this conflict has escalated to yelling and blaming. The conflict consulting process might reveal that communication has been really at the root of the conflict's escalation. Learning some different communication methods could then help de-escalate the conflict.

What one party learns in a conflict consulting session could also help strengthen their relationship with the other party.

➞ **EXAMPLE** There are two siblings who are in a very emotional conflict over how to care for an elderly parent. The sibling who comes to the conflict consulting session is at an impasse. Perhaps through doing some role playing, this person comes to understand the perspective of the other sibling, and realizes that their positions may not be so opposing after all. They both have their parent's needs at heart, and understanding this could strengthen the relationship.

The core emphasis is the same in conflict consulting as it is in any conflict resolution process. The process is based on win-win thinking and separating positions from interests.

Like any conflict resolution process, conflict consulting doesn't set out to change anyone's values. Instead, it's a matter of clarifying one's own values and developing a better understanding of the other person's perspective.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that conflict consulting is a very helpful process for people who want to work toward resolving a conflict when the other party involved is not willing to do so. There are **three**

phases of conflict consulting: **emotional expression**, skills building, and **action planning**. The specifics of each stage will depend on the particular party's wants and needs, or what they are hoping to get out of the process.

You now understand the **power of conflict consulting** as an option for parties involved in conflict: The process can really empower one party to take the next step, which can lead to a de-escalation of the conflict or even a strengthening of the parties' relationship. Additionally, conflict consulting shares the same core emphasis as any conflict resolution process: win-win thinking, separation of positions and interests, and respect of parties' values. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Action Planning

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Conflict Consulting

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Emotional Expression

The first part of conflict consulting, in which the intervener helps the party express feelings about the conflict and identify needs.

Skills Building

The second part of the conflict consulting process, in which the intervener helps the party develop skills using conflict resolution tools.