

Emotions as Signposts

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll continue our discussion of the role emotions play in the conflict resolution process. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Expressing vs. Experiencing Emotions
2. Addressing Emotions in Conflict Resolution

1. Expressing vs. Experiencing Emotions

When we are in a conflict situation, our emotions are good indicators of whether or not we perceive our needs as being met. In this way, emotions can be **signposts**, or indicators of a need or interest in the form of a display of emotion.

As you know, each person expresses emotion differently. Some people are more demonstrative in the way they express things, and others are less so; however, everyone tends to feel things deeply.

Whether or not they express it, people may be feeling one emotion more deeply than another, depending on its significance to them. This concept is called the **intensity of emotion**, or the degree to which a given emotion is felt or experienced by a person.

It's important to emphasize that this intensity is in regards to how strongly someone is feeling or experiencing the emotion, not how visibly they express it.

IN CONTEXT

We probably all know people who are very demonstrative in the way they express their emotions: "Oh, it's fabulous. This was great. It's the best thing ever."

Other people might be feeling great about something, but they'll express it less strongly: "Well, it was pretty good." If you know them well, you might understand that when these people say pretty good, they mean fabulous.

Whether an emotion is negative or positive, different people may use different words to express it even if what they're feeling is the same.

**Signpost**

Regarding conflict resolution and emotion, an indicator of a need or interest in the form of a display of emotion.

Intensity of Emotion

The degree to which a given emotion is felt/experienced by a person.

2. Addressing Emotions in Conflict Resolution

In the conflict resolution process, the role of the conflict-resolver is to look at these emotions as signposts in order to see what the real, underlying needs in the conflict are.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone who is demonstrative might have an outburst of some sort during the conflict resolution process. This outburst could be yelling, crying, expressing alarm, etc. The person is expressing his or her emotions strongly, so the mediator needs to acknowledge this expression of emotion in order to get to what's underneath it. Questions can be helpful with this:

- *It sounds like you were very nervous at that point, so what did you do?*
- *That sounds really important to you; can you tell me more about it?*
- *What led you to say that?*

By asking these questions, the conflict-resolver is acknowledging the emotions and indicating to the party that they, as the mediator, are present and want to hear more about what's happening.

The answers to questions asked by the conflict-resolver may then reveal other emotions that have not yet been expressed, but are important signposts in terms of what the party's real need or interest is.

➞ **EXAMPLE** There might be somebody in the conflict resolution process who is not expressing emotion. This person is silent, and maybe can't find the right words.

In this case, the conflict resolver might ask the following questions:

- *How does this concern you?*
- *How did that make you feel?*
- *What matters most to you here?*

By asking this person about their experience, the mediator can draw out someone who is not expressing emotions as readily or intensely as someone else might be.

**BIG IDEA**

It's important to address all the emotions in the room so that a more demonstrative person doesn't automatically get more airtime than someone who is more reserved.

The conflict-resolver should acknowledge that there may be different emotions present and allow everyone to

speak so that the real needs and interests at the root of the conflict can become evident.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned the **difference between expressing and experiencing emotion**. While our emotions can be signposts revealing our needs and interests, some people may not express these emotions as readily as others, even though they may experience the emotions just as strongly. You now understand that when **addressing emotions during the conflict resolution process**, it's important for the conflict-resolver to acknowledge and draw out all the emotions present so that each party can be heard. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Signpost

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