

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL FOR GROUPS

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## STAGES IN THE EVOLUTION OF A GROUP

### STAGE 1 HONEYMOON

- The initial stage where members get to know each other, the group dynamic and the facilitator's style; some aspects of idealization; like a love fest and seemingly great progress

### STAGE 2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- This is where the group members begin to surface conflict, disagreements, different opinions and viewpoints
- The goal of this stage is to see if conflict can be handled and resolved with deeper safety maintained
- This is the most dangerous phase of any group or relationship. **Research suggests that less than 30% of groups move through this stage to the final stage.**
- During this time, participants are deciding:
  - If they can tolerate the stress of being confronted with all the various differences
  - How they can create and enact a model of resolution that will enable them to hold a strong container for the differences while still retaining a good rapport and working relationship
  - If the group is safe and mature enough in its process to continue membership
- This is a difficult time for most members of the group. Many people have the realization that they **have no model of conflict resolution that is healthy and that affords them safety. It is frightening to acknowledge they have a low chance of moving through to the next phase.** As members begin to surface how they handle conflict, it is common for shame

and fear to emerge as members need to compassionately and honestly acknowledge their “shadow side” coping skills don’t work

- Common conflict resolution strategies with a corresponding high risk of membership exit and group implosion. These are **THE DON'TS:**

- Under the stress of conflict, many people “electrically reverse”. This needs to be addressed as without doing “reversal point” intercessions, it’s a safe bet for a poor outcome not only for the person who is “reversed,” but also for the whole group. Severe reversals manifest in polarizing and often traumatizing behaviors and the negative effects spread like wildfire in a group.
- Avoidance of conflict; denial that there is any conflict
- Run away from the conflict (exit group; remain quiet and passive and agree to anything the group decides; dissociate; miss sessions)
- Polarize into right and wrong; rationalize the position of right or wrong by declaring that God, Higher Self or Spirit has told them what is right or wrong
- Take a stand of righteous right or wrong, ie, “My position is emotionally accompanied by righteousness because I am on the side of good, history, statistics or science;” the implication here is that “ I am unbendingly right, so everyone should agree with me.”
- Oversimplifying the situation with lots of platitudes. “Oh, this isn’t so serious;” “He/she will get over it”; “This just boils down to ....; so, stop making it more complicated.” People tend to oversimplify or polarize into simplistic polarities because the complexity inherent in the situation feels too overwhelming
- Communication styles that are shaming and blaming
- Emotional dumping : This is where people dump toxic emotions into the group and then take no responsibility for the effects on the group relational container; True conflict resolution involves “I” statements of one’s feelings and assertively

asking for what one needs emotionally to take the process to completion or to deactivate strong emotions; The group does not have to tolerate members with temper tantrums or rage reactions

- Nonverbal displays of contempt. Contempt is one of the most toxic relational emotions. Its presence is scientifically correlated with higher risk of divorce in marriages. Contempt can be subtle or overt and is most likely to be demonstrated by nonverbals and tone of voice. Contempt is immediately processed by the brain as toxic and dangerous and activates defensiveness
- Passive aggressive and dismissive behaviors. Such a wide variety of behavioral expressions for this category, but dismissiveness is most commonly enacted by ignoring others' beliefs, stances or emotions or by putting members down with a negative emotional nonverbal charge.
- Resorting to power plays, creating power struggles amongst member or between members and the leader. Groups often deflect the underlying stress that conflicts surface by tying up the group's energies with power struggles between group members or members and the leader. Often the power play acts as a distraction from the deeper fears and issues that actually need addressing; Dynamics of setting up a winner/loser is common as a power play. This predicts a poor long-term outcome even if a short-term outcome seems on the surface to be successful. Whoever loses always remembers.
- Denying the importance of nonverbals. Nonverbals account for over 93% of the overall message in any communication
- Denying the importance of process and emotions; insisting that content trumps process and affect. With over 93% of any communication being governed by nonverbals, process is far more important than content. Denying this is a sure-fire way to group implosion/explosion

## **STAGE 3 CONSOLIDATION AND CONSTRUCTIVE FUNCTIONING**

- Having “gone through it together” and found a model that:
  - creates safety
  - supports relational harmony or tolerance
  - affords a structure or infrastructure that is resilient and can be applied to subsequent conflicts, the group intimacy and alchemy deepens and greater gains are seen in terms of the group’s purpose. With underlying security, they group blossoms to a new level
- Each time the group successfully follows its map, it re-commits to positive outcomes and builds a group neural network for successful resolutions
- Different groups have different ways of handling situations where decisions need to be made. Some groups agree that all resolutions need be consensus based; some groups decide that the majority rules and that the group will abide by the majority rule
- Groups differ regarding how they want to handle their differences while still maintaining a strong relational container. The relational container is extremely important. For example: some groups decide that during conflictual conversations they hold an energetic container of Love or Peace or Nonduality. Some groups decide that they call in their Higher Self and Guides and have them all connect. It’s a creative process.
- Differences are allowed, or accepted or tolerated and negotiations ensue
- There are on-going cycles of growth, consolidation and integration

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

**These principles can be added to groups periodically.**

1. A commitment to being given feedback that a member or members are “electrically reversed” and that the member will immediately intercede to “de-reverse” until the reversal is reversed and the affect is neutralized
2. A clear statement and commitment by members as to the preferred outcome and the preferred feeling state desired at the completion of the conflict resolution
3. A clear commitment to receive feedback about enacting shadow side conflict resolution strategies that promote the risk of poor outcomes
4. A clear commitment to behaviors and nonverbals that promote successful resolution
5. A commitment to being open to all sides of an issue; a commitment to avoiding “right” and “wrong” stances
6. A commitment to solve the problem
7. A commitment to receiving feedback from group members as to how members’ behaviors impact the group
8. A commitment to process over content; a commitment to shifting the relational atmosphere to the agreed upon value
9. A commitment to no interrupting
10. A commitment to using conflict resolution skills
11. A commitment to avoid threatening to leave the group unless you have really tried to work things out (threatening to break the container of the group hijacks most members limbic system and shuts down constructive processing)

## **SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND FEEDBACK SKILLS**

1. All members “de-reverse” before a conflict resolution meeting
2. The group should all decide what the default emotional or energetic container should be for all conflict meetings. Some examples: Love, Peace, Curiosity, Exploration, Grace, Compassion, Wisdom, Alchemy, Creation. After de-reversing, the group sits in a meditation

or energetic practice where the default emotion or energetic is secure into and around all the members.

3. The members energetically invoked whatever Higher Selves, Guides, Totems or powerful Beings that they feel will add energetic leverage to a positive outcome.
4. Each member clearly states the intended outcome and intended emotion they desire to have by the end of the meeting or meetings.
5. Groups can decide to appoint a member to monitor the shadow side behaviors and affects. When the group leader takes this role, the members are more likely to enact transference, so if the group is mature enough, a member taking this role is recommended. The more responsibility the members take for compassionately “naming the shadow”, the better.
6. Communication
  - Members agree to state **in behavioral terms** what he/she witnessed or experienced and how he/she felt about whatever the conflict is about. EG. “When you did this or said that or didn’t do this or that, I felt .... “(This does not include judgments or your interpretations). It is ok to say “When you said that in that particular tone of voice (or with the nonverbals you showed), I felt...
  - When members share their feelings, it should be accompanied by what you would like to have been different or what you would like to be different for the future. For example, “When you said ....., in the tone of voice you used, I felt shocked and taken off guard. I would have preferred it if you would have used a softer tone of voice. Would you be open to trying that in the future? “
  - Judgment or interpretations of other's motives or behaviors need to be expressed in a way that invites dialogue. Checking out perceptions and inviting the other to say what was going on for them is appropriate. For example, "When I heard you say .....in that tone of voice, I felt hurt. It made me wonder what was going on for you?" Or, "When I

saw you do such and such, I felt shocked. I wondered what was going on with you in that moment and if you were aware of the effect it had on me?”. Projecting your interpretation of another’s motives, feelings or behaviors without curiosity and an invitation to dialogue is a sure-fire recipe for poor outcomes.

**Note: Just because we have perceptions and resulting feelings about another’s actions, behaviors or nonverbals, doesn’t make those perceptions and feelings accurate.** Perceptions and feelings are a starting point, an invitation for dialogue. If we take our perceptions and feelings as pure truth, then there is no point to having a dialogue. **Conflict is an invitation to be curious and to dialogue, to achieve empathy and understanding and ultimately to create a foundation for such deep understanding and empathy that all parties come out feeling even more safe than before.**

- As mentioned above, Projecting, Blaming, Interpreting and Defensiveness have all been identified in the literature as some of the leading causes of relational break-up. Antidote: Listen so attentively that the other FEELS FELT. This creates a healing moment. It requires connection to the other through the entire array of emotions.
- **The most frequent mistake in conflict resolution is thinking that just sharing your feelings is all that is needed. Mostly this turns into an emotional dump.** It isn’t clean or clear communication to simply state how you feel or what you observed, particularly if that is done with a blaming tone. It is incumbent upon the person sharing their feelings to come up with what they need or want from the group to further their process and or the group’s process.
- **Many therapeutic strategies that incorporate brain functioning as part of their model actually advise therapists, leaders of groups and members when they see**

**“hijacking” to simply sit still and do nothing until the “hijacked” brain gets back to basics. Trying to get clients/members to process when hijacked, just doesn’t work and actually makes things worse.**

- **YES, THIS IS A LOT OF WORK!!** But with less than a 30% chance of positive group outcome, it just makes sense to make the effort. Without all of this clarity, individuals and groups just get into slinging mud and the shadow just goes round and round. To truly take responsibility for a communication, we all need to be clear about what we want to accomplish and how we want to accomplish it.
- When there is conflict or distress, it is helpful to come to the discussion with a clear idea of what shadow aspects you enacted. **Safety happens more easily when each party comes to the discussion having sorted out what their shadow may have been and how it contributed to the conflict or distress. This vulnerability promotes safety.**
- Deep conflict resolution assumes that:
  - There is a baseline of caring for the other
  - An intention to come to a deeper understanding of the other
  - An intention to “own” your piece of the puzzle,
  - An intention to find a nondual resolution. **THIS DOESN’T MEAN AT THE END OF THE RESOLUTION, THAT WE ALL AGREE!! IT MEANS WE FIND A WAY TO BRIDGE WORLDS, TO ACHIEVE EMPATHY, TO HOLD EVERYONE’S POSITION IN A GREATER WHOLE.** This of course could take more than 1 round of discussion.
- Brain research shows that in a close relationship, the mere mention of leaving the group (ie, I want to leave or I will leave under such and such conditions) triggers emotional distress for everyone. For some, it will be so distressful (and unconscious) that it will hijack the brain and stimulate dissociation. But even when that does not happen, the



group process is hijacked, so much so, that in well researched good marital therapy, therapists often insist there are no threats of separation during the therapeutic process. So, I recommend that you not threaten to leave the group until you give the group process a chance to resolve. And certainly, don't resort to threats to leave as power plays.

- **Lots of people take a look at the list and get depressed or demoralized. Yes, it's true that conflict resolution takes time and energy.** But more and more, we are seeing co-housing groups take up the challenge and even take up the challenge of consensual decision making. T
- The simple truth is: if you want a deep connection and you want to sustain love, you need to be prepared to take time to resolve conflict
- **The way out, is the way through.**

## **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GUILT AND SHAME IN GROUP DYNAMICS**

### **SHAME**

1. Many people don't enjoy feedback and any feedback within a group context can provoke feelings of shame. Even good and positive feedback can provoke shame!
2. Shame is a toxic emotion that is felt in response to something in a relationship. It can be a relationship between parts of the self or in a real relationship between or among people. It stirs up feelings of unworthiness, badness, incompetence and just plain yukky stuck feelings. It is toxic for the person feeling the shame and tracks back to childhood generally.
3. Shame freezes the emotional brain; stops the process and ends up with the shamed person energetically cutting off from another person or from a group. This is another one of the most important feelings that direct positive or negative outcomes in relationships. When shame is present, it stops dead the constructive process of conflict resolution. **The brain is hijacked**

during shame and or other trauma and has a hard time hearing any input much less processing it.

4. **When you see a member's brain "hijacked", either:**
  - a. **Ask them to de-reverse, but only if they already know the process (don't try to teach them while hijacked)**
  - b. **Simply sit still and do nothing until the brain gets back to basics. Trying to get clients to process when hijacked, just doesn't work. In time, the brain will return to equilibrium but it could take a while.**
5. Shamed feelings require the person to first identify the feeling; and identify that the feeling has triggered their inner child
6. The shamed person needs to take the charge off of their feeling by using EFT or by working with the inner child
7. Just because you feel shamed, doesn't mean you were shamed! Shame is a response that can be triggered by another person but not caused by them. Shame is generally triggered by unresolved feelings and experiences in childhood though it can track back to adult traumatic experiences.
8. It is important for the "shamed" person to hear other members have some empathic response to them. It is important for the "shamed" person to restore interpersonal energetic connection.
9. If the shame was triggered by appropriate communication within the group, the "shamed" person needs to process the original feedback from the "shamer" from the perspective of their adult; not inner shamed child. This most likely has to be done after the group meeting as it can soak up a lot of the group's energy which may not be appropriate.
10. The process encourages the "shamed" person to come to terms with their inner child and also to come to terms with the group feedback in order that the process is complete. One without the other leaves the process dangling and incomplete. Inner self and outer group completion allows for positive outcomes.

11. Many processes start with shame and move to healthy guilt.

## **GUILT**

1. Guilt is a healthy emotion though rarely pleasant to feel. It is the healthy acknowledgment of a shadow side, a mistake, a screw up, a misunderstanding etc. Guilt is the result of one's inner adult squarely facing the truth and owning the underlying root cause and the full acceptance of consequences.

2. To fully resolve guilt, the guilty party offers amends and always emotional repair.

3. To enact a full resolution of guilt, the person needs to be in their adult inner part and not their shamed inner child.

Resources

De-reversing Strategies

<https://www.spirit-evolving.com/eft-tapping>

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