



Is the conflict resolution process intimidating?

Outlined are the steps and key considerations to ensure the conflict mediation process is not intimidating.

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Is the conflict resolution process intimidating?

Introduction

This is a reasonable – and not uncommon – question. Conflict resolution doesn't need to be an intimidating process. The key to making the process more comfortable is understanding the process fully so you know exactly what will be happening.

The conflict resolution process is a fluid process wherein you and the other party are offered tools by the mediator in an effort to help you bring the conflict to a healthy resolution. You are in charge of the exact course of your conflict resolution, but each conflict resolution session has certain steps that are common to every session.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process

1. Setting

- The first step involves creating a comfortable atmosphere for both parties. The atmosphere involves more than physical location, although that is certainly part of it, and the mediator may go to great lengths to choose a location that is neutral to both parties. However, atmosphere also involves consideration for time of day, the way opening statements are delivered, and what issues are discussed as well as what issues are respected as being off limits. These are the ground rules of the mediation. This is also the step where the mediator will likely explain that mediation is confidential and a confidentiality statement will be signed.

2. Story Telling

- The second step involves stating both parties' perceptions of the situation. During this step each party provides an outline of the situation from his perspective. The other party is asked to listen but not respond.

3. Needs

- This step occurs after opening statements are delivered and the stage is set for the meat of the mediation session to begin. This stage of the process is carefully moderated by the mediator to keep parties from getting off topic. If one of the parties starts engaging in behavior that isn't constructive, such as stereotyping or failing to recognize the other party's needs, the mediator can return the focus of the mediation back on topic, onto individual perceptions.
- The needs of each party are clearly delineated and confirmed.

4. Issues

- The fourth step of the process expands on step three. While step three allows participants to listen to and acknowledge each other's needs as individuals, step four asks that participants identify how their needs are similar and how they could work together to resolve their conflict.
- In seeing that they have shared needs and finding ways to work together, parties can strengthen their relationship, one of the advantages to the conflict resolution process.

5. Brainstorming Options

- Step five consists of generating options for the future. Parties are urged not to look to past conflicts but to focus on the most workable options for the future. Parties are often also taught how some of their argument tactics may be negatively impacting their relationships or impeding conflict resolution in this step and given tools to avoid repeating this misstep in the future.
- Brainstorming is the key in this step. This step is only limited by your unwillingness to work with the other party to resolve the problem. If you are willing to work openly and creatively with the other party to resolve the conflict, and to listen to his or her point of view with an open mind, then there are no limits to the possibilities in this step.

6. Narrowing Down the Options

- Step six consists of narrowing down the options generated in step five. This step is where you and the other party will decide what options in step four are doable in real world situations. Which options will be fair to both of you? You have the

opportunity to identify the options that stand a greater chance of success than others. Options that meet more of your shared needs are highlighted and may be agreed upon at this stage.

7. Reaching An Agreement

- Finally, in step seven you come to an agreement with the other party. This is where you agree on shared goals that will meet your shared needs. Ideally, these also meet most of your individual needs as well, but it's normal for an agreement to not meet all of your individual needs.
- The focus is on shared needs to resolve the issue. In this step, individual expectations and responsibilities are clarified so each party understands what their role is in the agreement.

8. Outlining the Agreement

- If an agreement has been reached, then you will draft an agreement and you and the other party can sign the agreement. If an agreement has not been reached in the initial session, your mediator may take one of a couple different steps. She may ask to meet again at a later date. An alternative is that she may explain other options you have for reaching a solution.

Key Considerations

There are steps to take

1. Prior to the mediation.
 - You can always jumpstart your understanding of the process by speaking with the mediator you plan on hiring prior to hiring her and asking her any questions you may have. Getting answers to your questions may go a long way toward easing your mind about the conflict resolution process.
2. During the mediation
 - Mediation is a safe place and your mediator is well trained to handle potentially intimidating issues that may arise in the course of the process, such as anger or power struggles.
 - A well-qualified mediator will help you with managing anger.
 - You will learn how to constructively express your feelings and your needs in each step, and expressing anger in healthy ways should be specifically addressed by your mediator at some point in the process.
 - There is no place for power struggles in the conflict management process. Mediation isn't a place to prove someone wrong or to win the argument. Your mediator may remind you of this as mediation progresses. If you find yourself feeling that the other party is trying to put you into a disadvantageous position, your mediator will offer tool to try to shift the focus back onto the partnership aspects of the process.

Final thoughts

The [conflict resolution](#) process can be enormously fulfilling. In understanding the process and fully engaging in it, you may resolve your issues with the other party as well as enjoy deeper and more gratifying relationships.