

# LEARNER GUIDE

## Unit 10 - Conflict Resolution



RSAS Training Strategy Project 2018

# Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS)



A message from  
our CEO, Sally  
Sinclair.

Dear colleague

Welcome to the NESAs Remote School Attendance Strategy Training Project. We recognise the importance of the role that you are doing and we are committed to supporting you throughout this role with a range of training offerings.

We appreciate the positive impact of your role within your local community and the opportunities you create every day by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage in school. We also understand that your role will be both rewarding and challenging, and we are confident that the training we are offering will assist you further in your role.

NESAs RSAS Training Strategy Project will involve a blended training approach that includes the following:

- Face-to-face forums with each forum running for three days in your local community
- Online training that will offer short courses that you are able to select
- Individual coaching and mentoring throughout your training
- The option to complete accredited units that will count towards a formal qualification

Our team are here to support you and we are available if you have any questions about this programme or the training you are completing. Our office number is (02) 9119 3090 and our email address is [rsas@nesa.com.au](mailto:rsas@nesa.com.au). We are available Monday – Friday between 9.00-5.00pm (Sydney time) - please feel free to give us a call or pop us a line; we are more than happy to discuss any questions you may have.

We wish you all the best in this important role and we look forward to working with you throughout this project.

Yours sincerely

Sally Sinclair  
CEO

# Conflict Resolution

## Objectives

This unit takes RSAS workers through the various types of conflict, the causes of conflicts and possible ways to diffuse a conflict situation. Techniques such as mediation and how to actively manage and pre-empt a situation are the core aspects of this unit. RSAS workers have the opportunity to role play work-like scenarios where they will be able to apply new techniques and approaches in a controlled format.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:

- Understand the different types of conflict
- Understand the signs, symptoms and triggers that lead to potential conflict
- Understand the key principles in how to resolve or prevent conflict in their role as a RSAS worker
- Understand the core techniques including mediation and how this could be utilised within the role

## Resources

The resources provided are a Learner Guide, Workbook and Trainer Guide.

This Learner Guide provides a resource to support the activities in the Unit 8 Workbook. It is designed to help trainers, RSAS officers and members of the community better understand how to work effectively with others.



This icon represents action when an individual task needs to be completed. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit 10 Workbook



This icon represents action when a task is to be completed as a group. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit 10 Workbook

## Part 1: Understanding Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of our lives. We all have different opinions, different goals and different ways of seeing things, and this leads to disagreements, some of which are mild and others that can become quite hostile.

### Types of Conflict

There are three types of conflict that you will encounter as a RSAS officer:

- **Interpersonal conflict** which happens between two people. This can occur for many reasons: poor communication; different opinions; different ways of doing things or a lack of mutual respect. Sometimes people dislike each other for no apparent reason and will disagree over anything.
- **Intragroup conflict** is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team
- **Intergroup conflict** takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization or across a community.

### Triggers that Lead to Conflict

Can we predict conflict before it occurs? To some extent we can, by recognising what triggers conflict.

There are eight common causes or triggers:

1. Conflicting resources or a shortage of resources
2. Conflicting styles
3. Conflicting perceptions (seeing things differently)
4. Conflicting goals
5. Conflicting pressures
6. Conflicting roles
7. Different values
8. Unpredictable or changing policies





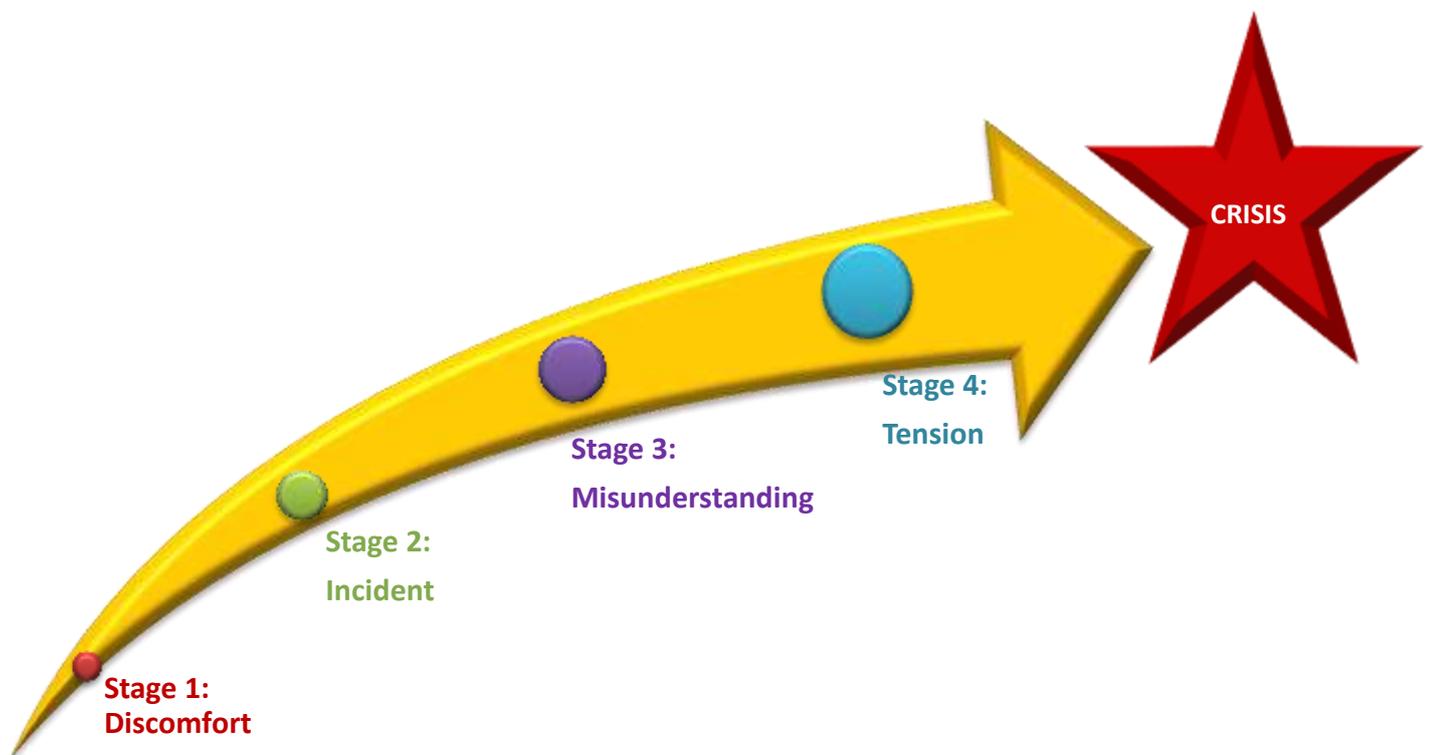
## Activity 1: Discussion

What kinds of conflict have you found in your RSAS role?  
What are the causes of this conflict?

### Stages of Conflict

Have you ever wondered how you got into a conflict? Sometimes conflict escalates slowly and sometimes very quickly, however there are four recognizable stages in conflict before the crisis or explosion.

The following diagram shows those stages.





## Activity 2: Stages of Conflict

Choose a conflict example from one of those discussed earlier. It could be any type of conflict however big or small. Discuss each of the phases of conflict and what happened.

### Stage One

How did this situation arise?

### Stage Two

Was this incident a repeat of something that happened before?

Were words exchanged that made you feel angry or sad?

### Stage Three

Do you believe the other person didn't understand what you were trying to do or say? Why?

Do you think you may not have understood what they were trying to do or say? Why?

### Stage Four

Have you avoided the person because of this conflict?

Do you feel it's unresolved and you can't carry on a normal relationship with the other person as a result of the conflict?

### Stage Five

Has there been a big crisis?

What was threatened?

Were the threats carried out? eg. I am leaving my role, I am not bringing my child to school etc.

Was the outcome positive or negative?

## Part 2: Handling Conflict

Consider your reactions during the stages of conflict you have just discussed. We all have a preferred way of handling conflict. This sometimes works and sometimes it doesn't.

These are the most common ways:

- Some people avoid conflict
- Some people confront it
- Some people compromise or give way to conflict
- And some people compete and try to win at all costs
- Some people collaborate and try to work it out together

How do you handle conflict?

- Most people **avoid** it until it is too late. It rarely goes away and the time to deal with it is at the beginning.
- **Confronting** conflict is good – just so long as you keep your anger in check
- **Compromising** is also OK so long as you don't feel bad about the outcome.
- **Competing** only works for one side – the side that wins – so the conflict continues or erupts again at a later stage. It doesn't resolve anything.
- **Collaborating** is what you will learn today.

We always have a choice in how we deal with conflict and we are always a part of it in some way. Reflecting on how we handle conflict and our role is a good way of learning to manage conflict better.





## Activity 3: Reflection on Our Role in Conflict

For this activity you might like to work alone, or you might like to choose a partner to work with. Your trainer will lead you through the process.



1. In more detail, describe the incident you were part of in Activity 2 and what happened. You can use a journal format, a mind map or simply a quiet inner reflection.
  - a. Look at your feelings.
  - b. How did you feel as the event unfolded?
  - c. What emotions did you display?
  - d. What emotions did the other party show?
2. Identify your feelings at the time and how others felt
  - a. How did you feel, physically and emotionally?
  - b. How do you think the others involved were feeling?
3. Evaluate what was good and bad about the experience
4. Having established the emotional state of all parties involved, assess whether your own emotions and behaviour affected the outcome.
  - a. Did you cause the heightened emotions in the other party?
  - b. Did your emotions make things worse?

- e. Did you try to anticipate the potential emotional reactions of others?
  - f. Did you try to prepare for the incident and how others might respond?
  - g. Did your emotions divert the focus from the desired outcome?
5. Having identified your emotions and your part in the incident and how this impacted on the outcome, consider what you would do now when faced with a similar situation.
- a. What would you do differently?
  - b. What did you do well and could you have done more of this?
  - c. If you lost control of your emotions, what techniques might you use to gain better control?
6. When you have decided what you should and could change in regard to your emotions and behaviour, create a plan to achieve the changes you want.
- a. Set a clear objective
  - b. Make it small enough to be achievable
  - c. Specify the tasks required
  - d. A time frame for doing this
  - e. How you will monitor your progress.



There is no single way of handling conflict, but there are ways that work better than other ways.

## Anticipating and Preventing Conflict

There is no single way of handling conflict, but there are ways that work better than other ways, and processes that can help us get to a better resolution.

The best stage to intervene in conflict is right at the beginning – at the time we feel uncomfortable. Now that we know the most common triggers for conflict, there are some tools we can use to help prevent it.

Trigger	Preventative Action
Conflict over resources	Make sure people have what they need to do their job. If there is a scarcity of resources, prioritise the resources and allocate them fairly.
Conflicting styles	Manage this kind of conflict in a team by considering the way people like to work and be flexible about the ways things are achieved.
Conflicting perceptions	Encourage open communication and try banning negative gossip. Establish a “let’s talk it over” policy for the team.
Conflicting goals	Different people expect different things from us. Ensure that goals are clarified and learn how to negotiate goals that work for everyone.
Conflicting pressures	It is difficult if you are waiting for someone else to complete a task so that you can do what you have to do. Learning how to prioritise and helping others develop this skill helps overcome this.
Conflicting roles	Have you ever unknowingly stepped into someone else’s territory? The first step to preventing this is to clarify roles, then negotiate a solution that works for everyone.
Different values	It is difficult when we are asked to do things we feel are wrong or conflict with something like our family time. Within a team, understanding each other’s values is an important step to accepting our differences.
Unpredictable or changing policies	When rules or policies change, we all need to understand them. If you are a team leader, make sure any changes are communicated as soon as possible and explain the reasons for the changes.

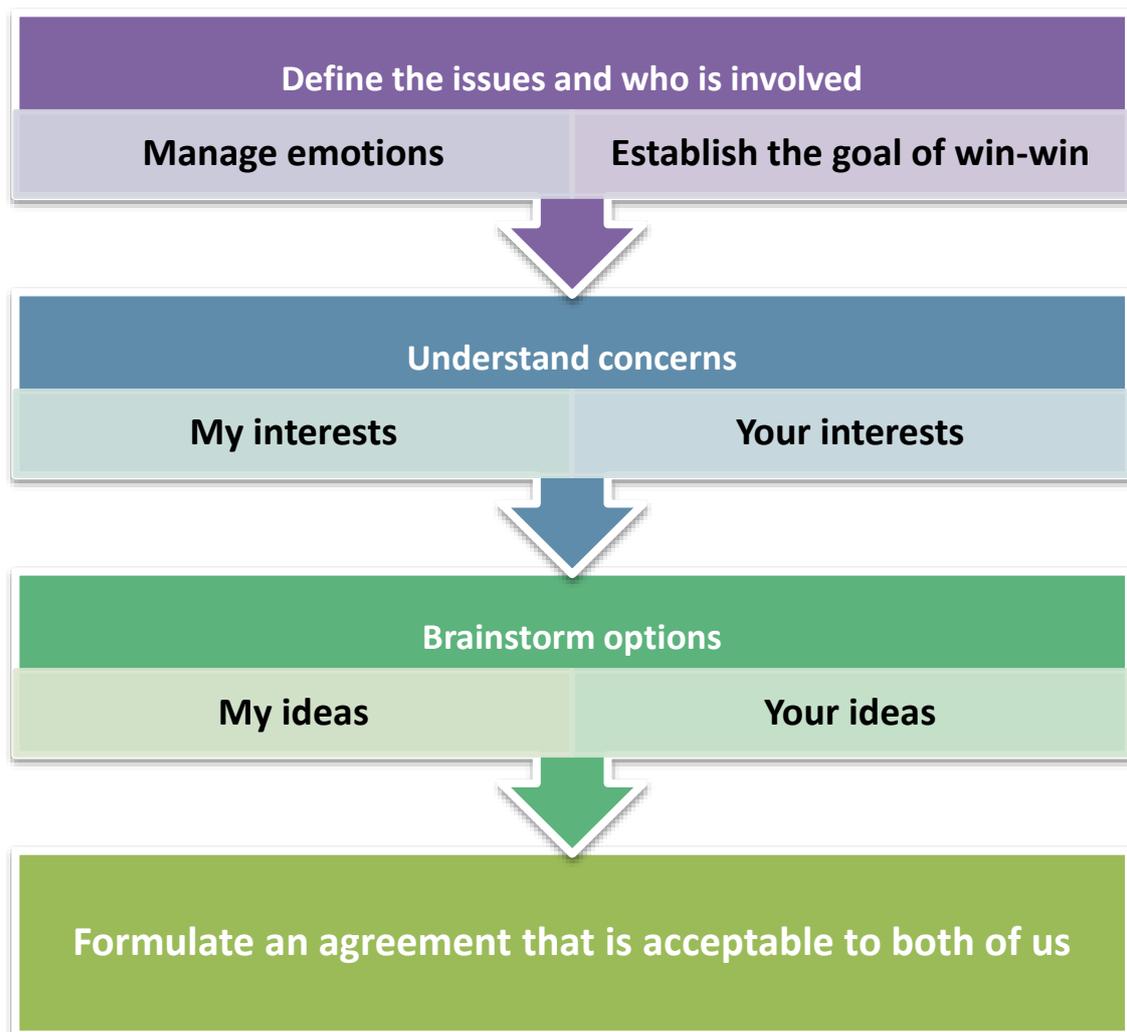
## Resolving Incidents

No matter how we try at the early stages to prevent conflict, some conflicts will escalate. If you find yourself facing an incident such as an angry exchange or someone walking away, or maybe going behind your back to complain, now is the time to try to resolve the conflict through a resolution process.

Below you will find a useful process which relies on a win-win model. Win-win means coming up with a solution which satisfies each person and nobody feels they have lost face or lost ground.

**Remember: If someone loses in the process, the conflict has not been resolved – you have only managed a temporary peace.**

## Conflict Resolution Process





## Activity 4: Interactive Role Play

Divide into groups of four.

Choose another conflict situation that you are facing or have faced where there has been an incident.

Two people will take the role of one side, and the other two will take the role of the other side.

Once you have decided on your conflict situation and your roles, each group will role play the conflict resolution process in front of the full class group. Your trainer and the audience will act as coaches to help you through the process.

## Part 3: Conflict Resolution Skills

Resolving conflict requires skills such as;

- Empathy which is about establishing a connection and openness between people. Without it people are less likely to consider the needs and feelings of others. A good way to build empathy is to help the other person feel that they are understood.
- Patience
- Negotiation or bargaining skills to come to an agreement
- Active listening which means listening with your full attention and checking you have understood what has been said.
- Stress management which helps you keep your temper in check
- Creativity to come up with a resolution





## Activity 5: Your Conflict Resolution Skills

What skills do you use in the conflict resolution process?

What skills do you need to develop? Your trainer will provide a guide to developing these skills.

Skills I Use	Skills I Need To Develop

### The Key to Success

The key to your success when dealing with conflict is creating a positive 'win-win' situation with those that are involved with the conflict.

- By talking about the problem not attacking the person
- By wanting to jointly problem-solve with the other person
- By entering into discussion calmly
- By stepping out of the conflict situation to find the best solution



## Part 4: Mediation

If people can't resolve problems themselves, or the conflict escalates to a crisis, it is a good idea to seek mediation.

Mediation is a process where an independent person steps in to help resolve the conflict.

RSAS officers may act as mediators when others are in conflict, or they might seek mediation if they are involved in a conflict that they have not been able to resolve.

Mediation can be **informal**, where you in your role as a community leader might be asked to step in as a mediator, or you might ask an elder to mediate. Or the mediations could be **formal**, where a trained mediator is called on to help. Some government agencies offer mediation as do most legal firms and organisations such as Relationships Australia.

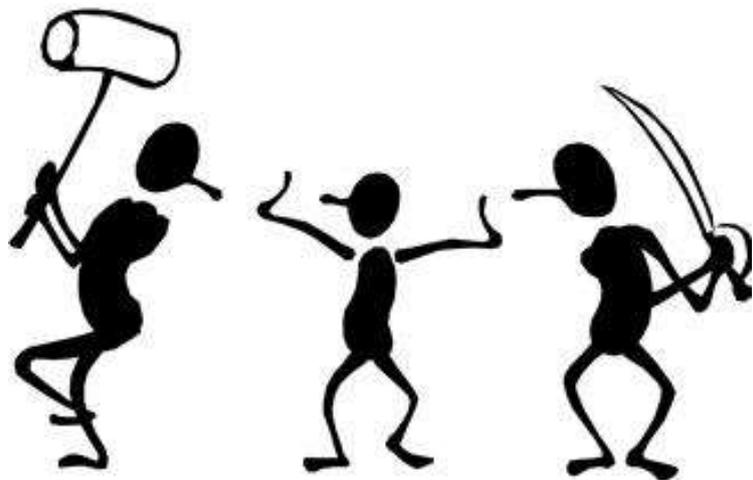
Most mediations we are involved in are informal.

### The Mediation Process

#### Introduction

Mediators make sure that the mediation is held on neutral territory. The mediator always waits until both parties are present and then makes introductions. Most mediators will ask that if children are present, they wait outside. The mediator will then give an opening statement, making sure that people understand he or she is neutral and will not take sides. Next, the mediator will tell people what is going to happen and set the time frame for the process.

Parties should not interrupt at this stage; the mediator will give each party the opportunity to fully share their side of the story.



#### Statement of the Problem by the Parties

After the opening statement, the mediator will give each side the opportunity to tell their story uninterrupted. Most often, the person who requested the mediation session will go first. The statement is not necessarily a recital of the facts, but it is to

give the parties an opportunity to frame issues in their own mind, and to give the mediator more information on the emotional state of each party.

## Information Gathering

The mediator will ask the parties questions and may repeat back key ideas to the parties, and summarize.

## Problem Identification

The mediator tries to find common goals between the parties. The mediator will figure out which issues are going to be able to settle or those that will settle first.

## Bargaining and Generating Options / Reaching an Agreement

Methods for developing options may include group processes, discussion groups or sub groups, developing scenarios, or a mediator's proposal where the mediator puts a proposal on the table and the parties take turns modifying it.

Once the participants are committed to achieving a negotiated settlement, the mediator will propose a brainstorming session to explore potential solutions. This can lead to a final agreement, which diffuses the conflict and provides a new basis for future relations.

The mediator may decide to hold private sessions with both parties in order to move the negotiations along. These sessions will be confidential. This provides a safe environment in which to brainstorm and surface underlying fears. The goal of the session is to find some common ground by exploring lots of options, and to bring about possible solutions for the parties to think about. Parties can also entertain alternative solutions to their problems without committing themselves to offer the solutions as concessions.





## Optional Activity - Observing mediation at work



- a. As a group decide on one conflict that one or more of you have found really difficult to resolve.
- b. Two volunteers will be called on to take the parts of each side.
- c. For this activity, your trainer will act in the role of a mediator.
- d. At the end of the demonstration, discuss
  - i. what you noticed
  - ii. what you learnt about mediation that is different to other forms of conflict resolution
  - iii. anything you liked and disliked about the process
  - iv. how you could use mediation

## Part 5: Putting It All Together

During this unit you have learnt a lot about conflict: what causes it; how to prevent it; how to resolve conflict; what you need to know, and the skills you need to develop.

Now is the time to look back on this and work out a plan for resolving conflicts.



### Activity 6: Planning for Conflict Resolution

- Choose one conflict or potential conflict that you have discussed today.
- Decide what you need to do to prevent it or resolve it.
- Decide when you will do this.
- Identify the skills you need to prevent the conflict escalating in the future.
- Which skills need to be developed? (See Activity 5) Work out with your trainer how you will develop these skills.

The conflict:			
Action Required	Date	Skills I Need	Skills Development



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