



Information sheet

Libraries & Learning

Conflict resolution and negotiation skills

The following brings together a number of key learning activities that library staff have participated in over the last 2 years.

This is not designed as a document with answers on what to do, but instead provides tips and tools that you may be able to use to enhance your customer service and interaction with others.

What is conflict?

Conflict is a disagreement through which the people involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns

In any situation the person with the greatest behavioural flexibility also has the most power in being able to manage conflict and negotiation. This is also demonstrated by the person who can adapt and try different things.

5 levels of conflict discomfort

Concern (heightened attention, focus)

Controversy (both are now in the situation)

Clash (exchanging words, survival is about winning, more inclined to take the win/lose stand, logical response becomes less enabled)

Contest

Combat

What to do on the floor

- Be sensitive to what is happening around you
- Listen to those thoughts that flicker through your own mind – pay attention, they may be alerting you to something
- Experiment in stepping in sooner and talking to customers – active engagement



Communication styles

Understanding the communication styles of others will help us to work better with customers and each other

Aggressive – almost always covers up insecurity

Passive – avoids eye contact, closed body language

Passive aggressive – being 2 faced

Assertive – gives confidence to others by being assertive, high level of awareness

Successful negotiation

Don't:

Don't correct minor details – this can escalate problems

Don't quote policy

Don't demand calm – demanding someone to calm down can escalate issues

Don't one-up – their problems are real, talking about your problems can make them feel small and insignificant

Do:

Put your personal safety first – if someone is about to harm you, walk away into a safer setting

Show your respect and concern – be calm, collected, and empathic

Share mutual purpose – Resist the temptation to solve the problem too early. Let them talk it through, paraphrase, actively listen

Get to the facts – Listen carefully and find the real facts, clarify these with the person

Resolve the problem - agree to jointly resolve the problem once you understand what it is



RESPECT – the key in conflict resolution and negotiation

Giving respect de-escalates conflict, so how do we do this?

- Listen
- Acknowledge that they are there
- Be present with them
- Active listening (“so what I’m hearing is”
- Show empathy (genuinely try to understand)
- Name what is happening
- Eye contact
- Refer to them by name
- Thank them (only if you can be genuine)
- Sincerity
- Give time frames when you will act

Calming someone down

In order to be able to calm down an angry person must be able to feel:

Heard

Understood

Consider using R.O.V.E.R. as a guide to your behaviour when managing difficult situations

Respect	focus on the person, willing and able to listen, work with them in professional, unbiased manner
Openness	actively engage with the other person, asking relevant questions and using active listening skills
Verify	continually ensure you have understood other persons questions
Empathise	warmly acknowledge through voice, tone, body language and right choice of positive words
Result	at conclusion of each interaction ensure something has taken place to move ahead



Importance of language

Words that inflame conflict include **WHY** and **BUT**.

Why implies judgement and criticism.

BUT negates everything that came before it (also, don't use However).

Consider using the work **AND** – go on try it!

It is very easy for any of us when dealing with others to use disempowering statements that can actually cause and create disagreement. Examples of this within the customer service environment include:

We can't do that

You shouldn't have done that

Will you speak up I can't hear you

He's not here, I have no idea where he is

These are our conditions, I didn't make the rules

I wouldn't know that I'm new

Why are you asking me

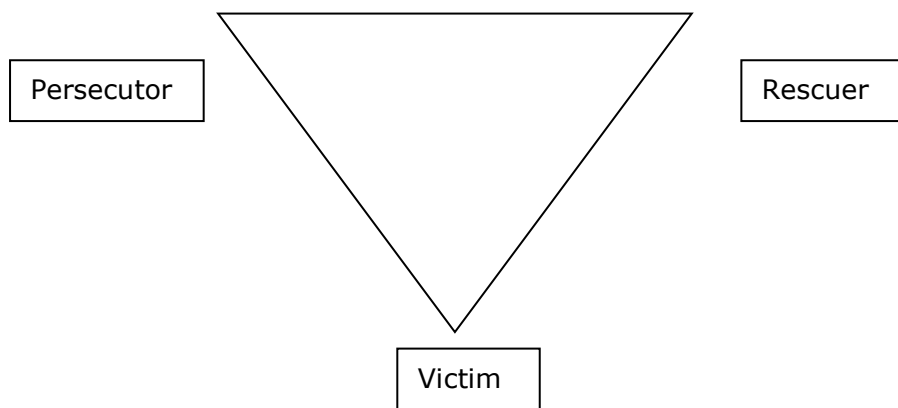
He wouldn't have said that we don't do that here

I can't help you without your membership number

Drama Triangle

The drama triangle is a way of looking at how we can behave within a conflict situation. People can play roles within conflict. The triangle is a blame game, where the focus is not on people's attention, energy and dialogue from personal accountability to one of blame, defensiveness and rescue.

The roles that are played in the drama triangle include





Victims: usually feel helpless, hopeless and powerless. Tone of voice often indicates the victim – a whiny voice of “poor me”

Persecutor: always putting others down. They blame, discount and accuses the victim. Persecutors often have control issues and believes things wouldn’t get done properly if they didn’t do it themselves.

Rescuer: See themselves in a one-up position considering others as hopeless, helpless and in need of their help. Rescuers discount victims and persecutors as not OK.

However, when we are involved in a drama there is an alternative to the drama triangle.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Don’t be a Victim | Be a Learner (what do I need to know, how can I do this better) |
| Don’t be a Persecutor | Be a Teacher (give information) |
| Don’t be a Rescuer | Be a Coach (what do you need to achieve, inspires/requires, get own resources) |

Supporting each other

It’s important within a conflict situation that staff know that here are colleagues around that can assist especially when there is conflict with customers.

This doesn’t mean that it takes a group of staff to manage a situation.

It’s a bit like being on the tennis court – be on the balls of your feet to anticipate what is happening and to be able to step in when needed.

The Libraries & Learning department have some clear guidelines for staff on how teams should be working together to manage issues and set boundaries. Have a look at those and consider what that means for you.

All these guidelines are for all staff and it’s not about what position you are in. All staff have the responsibility to set boundaries and clear expectations whilst at the same time effectively managing conflict. The most important thing is to ask for assistance when you need it and seek professional support if there are problems that you are experiencing



Other tools to use:

Rage-breaker

The rage-breaker is purely and simply a loud explosion of noise designed to move people's attention away from the often physical aggressive situation that they are in.

Most commonly you can use a book slammed hard on the table, a very heavy hand clap (though hard on the hands and not as effective) and possible even a whistle. It is simply designed to break the pattern and get attention to somewhere else. This is often used with two staff, one to make the noise, another to step in, or move other customers/staff out of the way

"Purple folder"

In a team situation, staff may see a colleague in the midst of a discussion with a customer that may have elements of discord or anger, may have been going on for a long time or show other signs that may alert colleagues that there could be a problem.

Rather than just stepping in and taking over, use the "Purple folder" ploy.

Excuse yourself to the customer and staff member and ask *"I am sorry to interrupt but I was wondering if you had the purple folder, it's urgent that I get it"*.

The staff member in the midst of the discussion with the customer has two choices.

"Yes I have it" – means that they need to be taken out of the conversation.

"No I don't" means they are doing ok and are resolving the issue with the customer and comfortable on how things are going and don't require assistance.