

Conflict Resolution Guidelines: A Quick Guide

(Adapted from materials from the Olympia Washington Food Coop)



Conflict is inevitable when people work together. We have different beliefs, life experiences and values. It is critical to the smooth workings of a farm that the people who work there take the time to resolve conflicts in a respectful way. When conflict occurs, harm comes to the community, not just the people immediately involved. Work to resolve conflicts in ways that contribute to the health and harmony of the entire farm community.

Here are some suggestions:

Treat the other person with respect. Sarcastic, condescending and angry tones of voice block communication and create wounds that can fester for years.

Step 1: Confront the problem: find a place to talk the conflict over with the person directly involved.

- A. Choose a time when you are not arguing or angry and a quiet and comfortable place away from either party's turf. Check with yourself to make sure this is the best time to have this conversation.
- B. Define the conflict: describe the conflict in clear, concrete terms. Be specific – when, why, what, where, who. Describe behavior, feelings, consequences, and desired changes. Be specific and start sentences with "I", not "you." Speak for yourself and from your experiences. Focus on behaviors or problems, not on personalities. Avoid absolutes such as always and never. Absolutes turn the conversation away from the issues and onto the "facts" of whether a person did something 5 times or 6. Use constructive criticism techniques: "When you do (action), I feel (impact). I need (resolution)."
- C. Listen to really understand the other person's feelings and needs. Explore alternative solutions.
- D. With the possible exception of identical twins, almost all conflicts between individuals have the potential to include or trigger social power imbalances. (Social power issues include class, gender and gender identity, race, etc.) Try to remember that: It is always better to acknowledge the impact of social power imbalances than to pretend they don't exist. Being able to acknowledge your areas of privilege and work towards balance is strengthening to you and the group. When you feel you are the target, ask for help from someone you trust to be your ally. It is not useful to rank oppressions, it is useful to see where oppressions intersect.
- E. Keep the goal of resolution in mind – what will resolve this conflict. What do I need, what can I accept. Reach agreement on a workable solution you both understand and can live with. Make realistic commitments. An agreement is only as good as the ability of the individuals to implement the agreement.
- F. Evaluate after some time: check how well the solution is working and adjust if necessary.

Step 2: If step one does not result in a workable agreement, employees should meet with their immediate supervisor or with the Farmer who will hear their case and try to mediate a workable solution.

Step 3: If employees cannot resolve their conflict with the help of their supervisor or the Employer, the parties involved should turn to the services of the Center for Dispute Settlement and benefit from the help of trained mediators.

All along the way, parties to these conflicts are required to observe confidentiality. Second hand gossip can destroy a farm or business.