

Conflict Resolution Resources

If you have volunteers, chances are you will have conflicts. It is always appropriate to bring these matters to the attention of the on-site event managers and/or the Program Delivery Partner. You are not the one-and-only person expected to resolve all the conflicts for all participants, volunteers, teams, and mentors.

Ways to help de-escalate situations include:

1. **Respect personal space:** Move to a space where conversations can be heard without invading their personal space.
2. **Get ready to listen:** Turn off the event radio, put the phone aside.
3. **Their anger/frustration: It's (really) not about you:** Take a few deep breaths. Focus.
4. **Show you are actively listening:** Let them talk and then pause to say the sentences back to the volunteer - in your own words. Demonstrate that you are seeking understanding.
5. **Keep your tone and body language neutral:** Sit if the volunteer sits, keep your arms uncrossed.
6. **Keep your emotional brain in check:** Stay calm, rational, and professional.
 - a. Focus on their feelings: supportive words can help. Acknowledging that an individual is upset already sets you on a path to resolve.
 - b. Be empathic and nonjudgmental.
7. **Allow silence for reflection:** Silence can be the most powerful communication tool.
8. **Ask follow-up questions:** Don't rush to fill in conversation gaps. Count to eight, then ask a follow up question or two. This also allows time for you to gather your thoughts to answer appropriately.
9. **Allow time for decisions:** Allowing time brings calm. It's okay to tell the other person that you need a few minutes, and you'll circle back, or that you need to check in with someone else.
10. **Be sure to follow up.** Saying "I would like to follow up, how would you like me to do this?" is appropriate in all situations. Ask whether the individual would prefer email, a phone call, or later in-person if at an event.

Ways to start the conversation:

- **Try to avoid saying these words** - These typically make someone more upset:
 - "Please calm down." or "Settle down."
 - "That's not gracious or professional."
 - "I don't have time for this."
- **Try open-ended questions.** By starting with these phrases, you allow the volunteer to guide the conversation:
 - I wonder....
 - Can we at least agree on....
 - I'm sorry that happened. How can I help?

- **Never walk away from the situation:** Engage in non-judgmental, active listening mode. Many issues and situations can be resolved “in the moment.” Make yourself available and an ally in determining a resolution.
- **Options for help:** It is always appropriate to say, “please give me some time to help you resolve this situation.” Meet with the event manager and/or PDP on-site. Reach out to *FIRST* contacts for additional assistance.

Resources:

There are many online resources. Here are a few of our favorites:

- <https://hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/comm/articles/active-listening>
- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/active-listening-skills>
- <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/coaching-others-use-active-listening-skills/>
- <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/active-listening-skills-with-examples-2059684>