

Nipping it in the Bud

Managing conflict in the workplace



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Forward

We understand that sometimes tensions in working relationships can develop in the workplace and if left unresolved this can develop into a source of conflict for colleagues with potential conduct related consequences.

We have spent time talking with colleague, manager and union groups to get views on how we currently respond to complaints from colleagues about:

- Working relationship difficulties in the workplace
- Incidents that have a dignity at work impact
- How we handle serious complaints about the conduct of others

The Conflict Prevention and Resolution project reporting into the D&I Programme Board has been set up to address these areas and we are working towards launching a resolution framework in 2022 with improved processes for handling grievance, discipline and dignity at work complaints. This framework will enable us to look both at how we can intervene early and resolve concerns using informal interventions but also how we constructively address serious complaints through formal mechanisms. In the meantime we have been listening to colleagues/managers to understand how we can all recognise and feel comfortable in confronting difficult situations.

We have heard from colleagues/managers during the engagement that we ran during Summer 2021 that having a clear Code of Conduct setting out standards expected in the workplace plus how we respond and manage this at the earliest opportunity at work is key. Our refreshed Code of Conduct is due to be launched in December 2021.

In support of the Code of Conduct, “Nipping it in the Bud” is a training resource designed to equip and support management colleagues with the skills to ensure that early signs of workplace conflict is recognised and stopped before it progresses. We aim to give you the confidence to have early dialogue with team members to create more productive conversations leading to a happier and healthier workforce. This training is just one of the ways in which we are working towards a better working environment for all colleagues, an environment where we can minimise and seek to prevent conflict from happening from the start, or responding in a quick, and effective way when it does.

Early interventions are hugely important for everyone’s wellbeing and help to foster positive relationships in the workplace which in turn helps make NHSBT a great place to work.

Suzanne Hunter

Associate Director - People Directorate.
NHS Blood and Transplant

Aim

This workbook is designed for Team Leaders, Supervisors, Line Managers, Donor Care Supervisors and all who manage people. You will learn how to identify, prevent, and respond to conflict in the workplace by ensuring it is nipped in the bud and formal complaints and grievances are minimised. This learning resource is also helpful for all colleagues to develop the skills and confidence to address concerns between individuals directly, moving to assertive, adult to adult dialogue.

Introduction

We recognise that workplace conflict is an inescapable and an inevitable part of modern working life and can be stressful and difficult. However, we believe conflict can be managed in a positive and constructive way and nipped in the bud early by managers and supervisors so that it doesn't escalate.

Through managers and supervisors addressing conflict early, those involved often find shared solutions which are innovative, realistic, and sustainable.

Before you start:

- ✓ Make yourself comfortable
- ✓ Make sure you can see and hear what you are going to watch, listen or read
- ✓ Give yourself a chance to avoid being interrupted

The workbook is in two sections –

- Section 1- Focuses on the manager's role and key skills for having these conversations.
- Section 2 – Focuses on an outline process for having conversations with parties involved and then facilitating them talking together. It will provide a role play example for you to watch and reflect on to embed your learning.

Section 1 – The Manager’s Role and Key Skills for Facilitating Effective Nipping Conflict in the Bud Conversations

What is conflict?

Conflict is a normal, natural, and inevitable aspect of working life.

"Conflict occurs when an individual (or a group of individuals), believe that another individual (or a group of individuals) is preventing them from achieving their needs or goals; preventing access to the resources they need to achieve their needs or goals; or preventing them from expressing their values or beliefs in a way which they consider to be reasonable. Our actions, our reactions and our interactions determine whether the conflict becomes and remains constructive or whether it becomes destructive... "

David Liddle, 2009

Destructive conflict is not healthy – it is avoidable, and it is escapable. The root cause of destructive conflict is a sense of loss arising from our unmet needs (Loss of confidence, face, esteem etc.). The loss triggers negative emotions and behaviours which can become, hostile, divisive and eventually harmful.

The Manager's Responsibility

Recognise and manage conflict early

Managers should recognise conflict when it is in its early stages and seek to address it informally as soon as possible and hopefully prevent it from escalating or needing more informal interventions supported by HR.

Whilst clearly articulating your expectations as their Line Manager about what you need from them, try to remain un-phased, impartial, and fair, to gain the trust of all parties. By defusing anger and responding to aggression in an assertive and non-threatening way, the parties will feel safe.

As manager you should encourage and facilitate where possible outcomes known as "win/win" and encourage them to focus on their interests and needs rather than their rigid positions. Focus on the future and learn from the past. Realistic expectations should be worked towards, which meet the needs of all parties, the team, service and NHSBT. We need to facilitate each party moving away from notions of blame. The use of 'I' statements rather than "you" statements is vital for nipping it in the bud.

People's perception of the content of the conflict is affected by their view of themselves, of the other person and the situation and can be affected by their own prejudices, experiences, points of view, beliefs, backgrounds, cultural viewpoints.

Knowing Self

What is your conflict management style?

From Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument also known as the TKI (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc., 1974–2009)

Avoiding – “The Turtle” (withdrawing)



Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflict. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and the people they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict rather than face it.

Competing – “The Shark” (forcing)



Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them and their relationship is of minor importance. Sharks seek to achieve their own goals at all costs. They are not concerned about the needs of other people. They do not care if other people like or accept them. Sharks assume that one person winning and the other person losing settles conflicts. Sharks want to be the winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of inadequacy and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming and intimidating others.

Accommodating – “The Teddy Bear” (smoothing)



To teddy bears the relationship is of great importance while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy bears want to be accepted and liked by other people. They think that conflict should be avoided in favour of harmony and believe that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt and that would ruin the relationship. Teddy bears give up their goal to preserve the relationship. Teddy bears say, “I’ll give up what I want and let you have what you want in order for us to get along.” Teddy bears try to smooth over the conflict and avoid causing harm.

Compromising – “The fox”



Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and about the relationship with other people. Foxes seek compromise. They give up a part of their goals and persuade the other person in conflict to give up part of their goals. Foxes seek a solution to conflict where both sides gain something- the middle ground between two positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

Collaborating – “The owl”

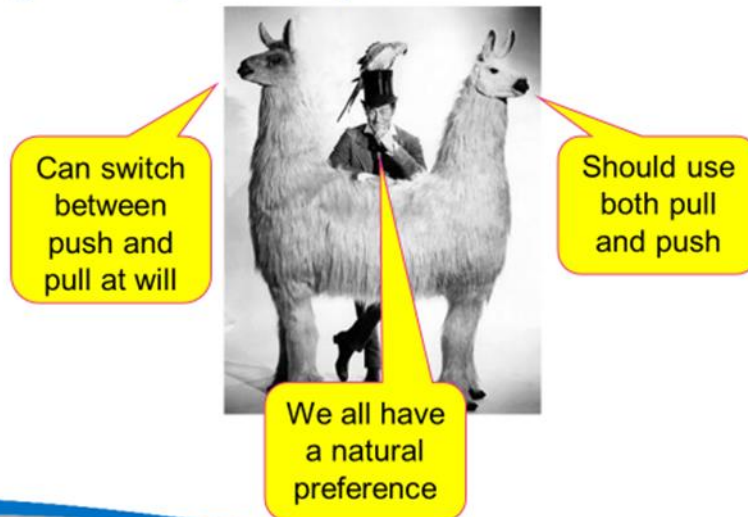


Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their own goals and the goals of the other person involved in the conflict. Owls see conflict as an opportunity for improving relationships by reducing tension between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their own goals and the other person’s goals. Owls are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

Key Skills

To manage conflict well we need to be able to use a range of influencing/communication skills to be able to both push – clearly stating what is acceptable and what is not and being clear about our expectations of staff in line with NHSBT behaviours and values. We also need to practice active listening and asking appropriate questions to better understand the staff members experience and help them to also understand their situation better themselves and perhaps notice difference viewpoints and experiences.

The Manager's Responsibility



Watch the following 'Little TED' talks by Warren Scott (former Head of OWD) to understand more about PUSH and PULL.

1. [Influencing Skills – Push and Pull Part 1 of 3](#) - In this NHSBT 'Little TED' talk, Warren Scott introduces the concepts of both 'Push' and 'Pull' influencing styles and how they might be effective in the workplace.
2. [Influencing Skills – Push and Pull Part 2 of 3](#) - This short NHSBT 'Little TED' film continues from part one and explores how to use the 'push' and 'pull' energies when you are trying to influence others. It also explores the pitfalls of using too much of overusing either of the energies and the impact it can have.
3. [Influencing Skills – Push and Pull Part 3 of 3](#) - In this final video with Warren Scott talking about the art of influencing, he discusses some of the practical applications of using both 'Push and Pull' energies and some of the benefits of using them too. Warren also poses some meaningful questions about how you might currently influence and what you could do to improve this beyond where you are now. This is the final video in this three-part series.

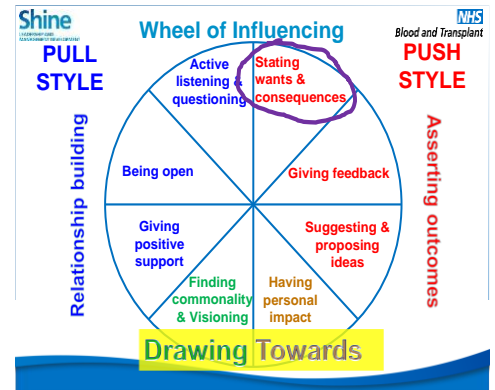
Let's look in more detail at two specific styles. The PUSH style of stating wants and consequences (if necessary) and the PULL style of active listening and questioning.

Stating Wants & Needs

Tells others what want/need/expect from them in clear unambiguous terms and state's standards required.

Tips, when you are stating wants...

- Use 'I'
- Be clear about what you want before you start talking.
- Use short sentences.
- Not justifying or giving reasons.
- Positive expressions are more likely to get a positive result.
- Be clear about what must happen (bottom line).
- It is what you want them to do.



Communication

WORDS: The key to this style is to say clearly what you want, without trying to justify the fact that you want it.

- Use the words: *"I want / need / expect..."*
- I would like (less impact)
- Using the word "I" makes it clear that you feel real responsibility for making this happen.

Examples of "I want" statements would be:

"I need to talk to you about the argument that happened in the office this morning".

"I want you to be honest with me".

"I expect us to have an adult-to-adult conversation".

Increasing the Impact 'Stating Wants'

- Use the technique of 'broken record' if you fail on your first attempt. Repeat the "I want" statement three or even four times, having actively listened and reflected to the other person first to show you have heard their view.

Outlining Consequences - Only to be used if you need to strengthen your position after stating expectations. You are telling others what the benefits of fulfilling the expectation would be or the negative consequences of not doing so, in order to gain compliance.

When to use it

- Use when the 'stating wants' style has failed to give you what you want.
- To be used (particularly in the case of 'penalties') when you are not willing to concede beyond a certain point.
- When it is imperative to you that you achieve what you want or need from them as their Line Manager.
- The aim is to leave the other person in no doubt about your intention. The reward should be motivating and the penalty, if used, should create a feeling of pressure (without aggression).
- To escalate push so that 'receiver' knows, in no uncertain terms, the consequences of action/non-action.

Tips, when outlining consequences...

- Preceding style is always Stating Wants.
- Use with rewards alone first.
- Penalty is the last resort.

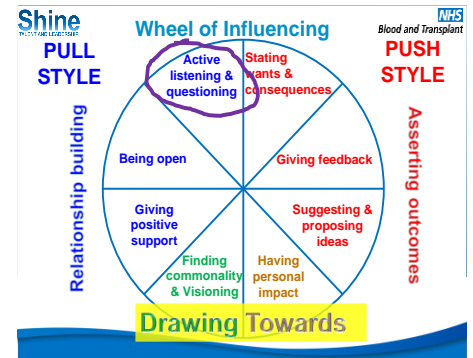
Active listening

Listen to others without offering solutions so that they can talk through a problem or issue and explain their opinions and feelings. Listening is done actively to show understanding.

Using this style will help you to understand the underlying issue or problem and should be used to deepen your awareness of facts and feelings that might otherwise not come to your attention.

When to use it

- When you need to clarify the points being discussed or when misunderstandings might occur.
- Helps to calm someone who is feeling emotional, e.g. angry, upset, anxious.
- When you use this style, you should want to create a climate of mutual trust and openness and demonstrate your willingness to listen and help the other person constructively.
- To gather data / facts / opinions / feelings.
- To get 'below' a presenting issue or problem.
- To understand a person's views and experiences more fully.



Tips, when actively listening...

- Periodically paraphrasing what you have heard, regarding the content or feelings.
- Summarising at the end.

Communication

WORDS

- "ENCOURAGING - Please tell me more.... You were saying earlier... Could you explain how you felt.
- ACKNOWLEDGING I understand... I see... That sounds important to you...
- CHECKING - You seem to be angry... Am I right in thinking that you said...
- CLARIFICATION - I am not sure that I understand... Did you mean...
- AFFIRMATION = Thank you very much for sharing that with me... I know that it is not easy, but you are doing well...
- EMPATHY - It sounds like it has been a difficult time for you... I realise that you are getting impatient/upset/angry...
- ASKING A VARIETY OF QUESTIONS - Use of open questions to elicit a full response -. What, why, when, who, where, how?
- REFLECTING - So, you say that you want them sacked - why is that? You are clearly upset about their behaviour. What is it that particularly upsets you?
- SUMMARISING - So, you are saying... If I could just summarise quickly what I think you have said...
- BALANCE - Balancing the need let them explain the past along with moving forward.
- REFRAMING -: Individual: My supervisor is so indifferent towards me; they never listen. Manager: So, you would like your supervisor to take more interest in your work and to take time to listen to you.

Reflective Learning Space



What is my conflict management style?

What is my preferred style of influencing?

How well do I use PUSH and PULL?



How is this working for me?

So, what am I going to do now to enhance my skills?



For Action

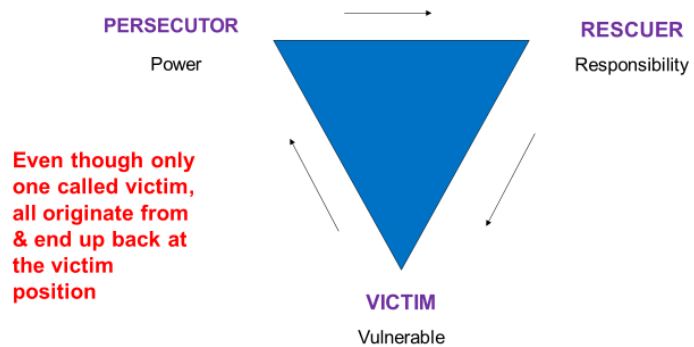
Karpman's Drama Triangle

There is often a drama triangle being played out within the dynamics.

Watch the 3min 21sec video [Understanding the Drama Triangle vs. Presence](#) that explains more about this.

Karpman's Drama Triangle

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Understanding the drama triangle can help you to explore different view points and perspectives about what has occurred and how different parties may have been impacted.



What are my thoughts?

How do I see this playing out with individuals and/or in my team?

As the manager how can I avoid becoming part of the drama triangle?

Identifying Individual's Needs to move forward

Help parties move forward

Help parties to move away from their stated positions (e.g., "he was wrong and I demand an apology") to being able to identify their core interests and needs.

Common needs between individuals often include:

1. To feel trusted.
2. To be shown respect.
3. To be treated fairly and equally.
4. To be understood.
5. To be listened to and to be taken seriously.
6. To feel safe and to have a future.

Identifying needs can develop understanding and empathy between parties leading to consensus and ultimately an agreement that meets everyone's needs. This helps with moving away from positions which tend to be negative, blaming, historical and destructive. Interests tend to be focused on the impact and the concerns of the conflict and are less blaming and present an opportunity to become more future focused. They present opportunities to identify commonality.

Recognising Needs

You might hear this:

I want him to recognize that
 I want her to know why
 I want him to know it won't happen again
 I want it written down
 I want to be treated like the others
 She breaks her promises
 You can't trust him to keep it to himself
 He doesn't ever ask me how things are going
 She's always telling me what I've done wrong
 He doesn't listen to a word I say
 I'm never included in emails
 She never does what I ask her to do
 He is always missing deadlines
 She's completely selfish
 He is constantly looking over my shoulder
 She is a micro-manager

Probably need this:

recognition
 understanding
 reassurance
 clarity, reassurance
 fairness, reassurance
 trust, fairness
 confidentiality
 support
 appreciation, being valued
 to be listened to, consulted
 inclusion, being informed
 respect, valued
 fairness, reliability
 consideration, being noticed
 space, to be trusted
 autonomy

Encourage empathy for the other person –

Consider using questions like - How do you think the other person will hear that? How do you think the other person will feel/ react to hearing that? What do you think the other person might think about that? What might make it easier for him/her to hear that? How do you think the other person is feeling about the joint meeting? What might the other person need from you in the joint meeting? What do you think they will say to you today? How would the other person describe it? How would you feel if the other person said that to you?

Linking empathy and goals –

Consider using questions like - What do you want the other person to understand about that? How do you think they will react to hearing that? Is that the reaction you want? How could you say it in a way which helps the other person understand what you need them to understand?

The Art of Questioning - One of the keys to conflict resolution and good communication in general, is developing the ability to ask questions that move a discussion forward.

Open Questions - Open questions open to an area of concern, create empathy, enhance understanding, stimulate movement and change, empower the other person, and enable previously unthought-of solutions to emerge. Radical open questions ask the unaskable, e.g., 'what do you like about the other person?'

Types of open questions

Focus question	What exactly is the problem/difficulty? 'What aspect of the behaviour impacts you?'
Observation question	'What did you see or hear?'
Analysis question	'What do you think are the reasons for...?' What do you think about...?'
Feeling/need question	'How are you feeling?' 'Do you want...(need)?' Is...(need)...important to you?
Visioning question	'(Ideally) how would you like things to be?' 'What would you like to happen?' 'What changes would you like to see take place?'
Change question	'What would it take for change to happen here?' What would it take to change such and such?'
Considering alternatives	What other ways/options are there?' 'How else could we go about this?'
Hypothetical question	'What do you imagine might happen if you...?'
Consequences question	'How would that affect you or your group?' 'How would they respond to that?'
Considering obstacles	What are the obstacles to...?' 'What might get in the way of that happening?'
Support questions	'What sort of support would you like?' 'What help do you need to achieve that?'

Reflective Learning Space



What do I need to STOP/START/DO OR DEVELOP more of?

What have I learnt to strengthen my questioning and listening skills?

So, what am I going to do now to enhance my skills?



For Action

Section 2 – Example Process to Nip Conflict in the Bud and Role Play Videos

Introduction – Section II

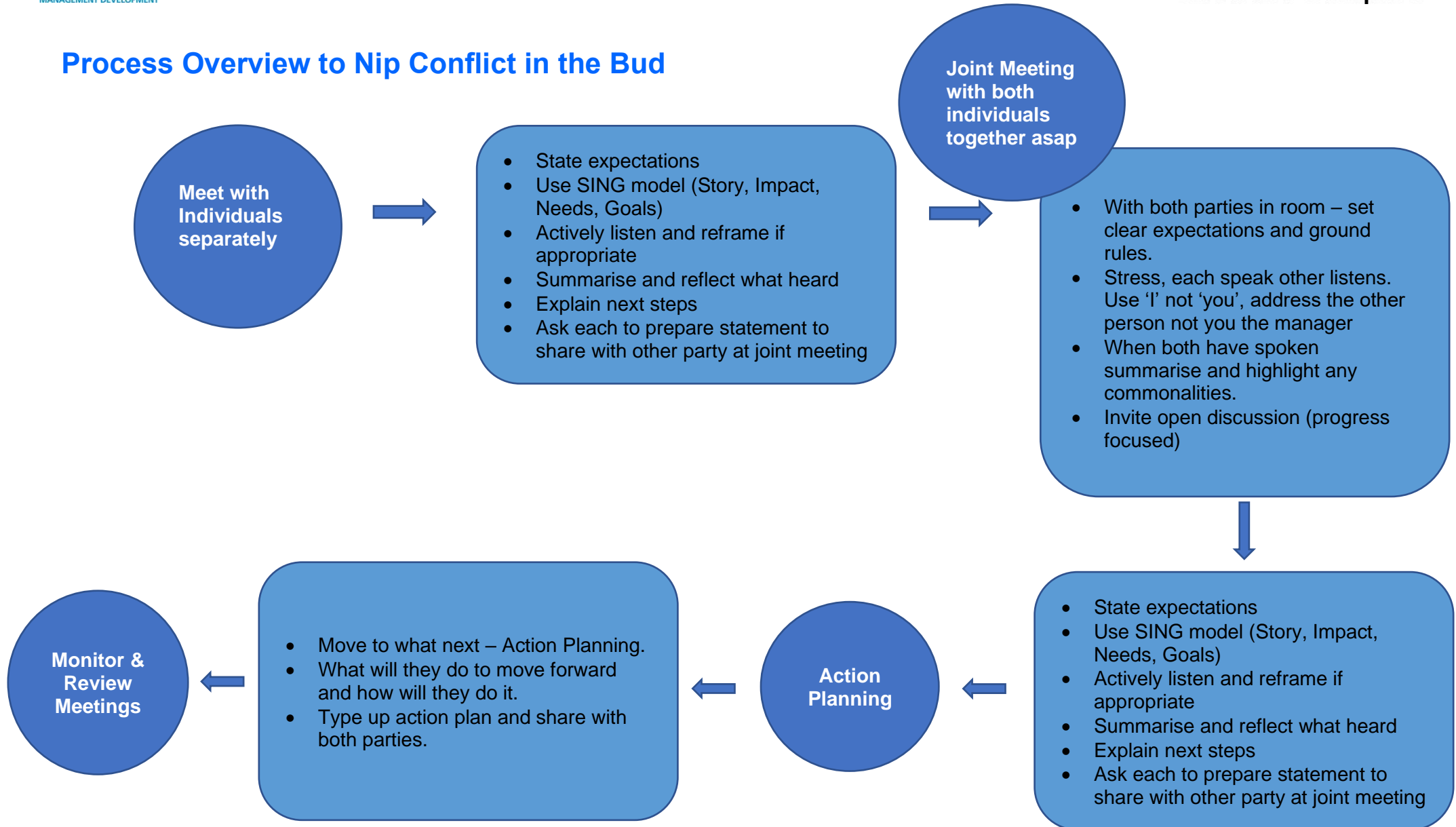
In the following section we will outline a process/steps to take or adapt for your specific nipping it in the bud conflict scenario.

This includes separate conversations with the individuals involved to help them to think through the impact the situation has had on them, what they need to move forward, the consequences of nipping this in the bud or not and what actions they could and would like others involved to take to draw a line and move forward.

Once all individuals have had this opportunity, they should be invited to prepare for what they want to say to each other in a carefully facilitated joint conversation.

We have prepared some 'role play' video scenarios for you to watch and reflect on in the following session which will hopefully bring this to life for you.

Process Overview to Nip Conflict in the Bud



Meeting with the individuals Separately

A separate meeting allows for each person to share their story of the conflict with you and for you to listen carefully to what is being said.

OBJECTIVES:

- You, as Line Manager can clearly state your expectation of being able to draw a line and agree a way forward.
- To listen to the individual's story and enable the party to vent and feel heard.
- To bring focus, clarity, and structure to the story.

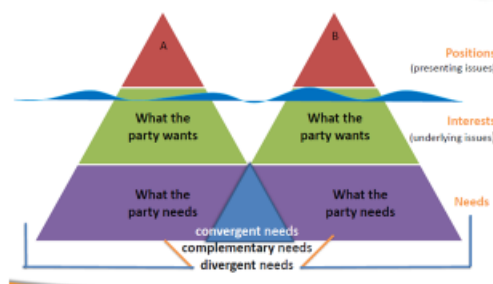
Close the meeting by explaining what happens next – ask each individual to prepare for a joint meeting and consider what they want to say to the other.

SING Model

Use the SING model below to help to structure your conversation

The SING model – Each individual exploring needs

- Story
- Impact
- Needs
- Goals



1. Speak to each party
2. Listen, using SING
3. State wants/needs regarding exploring in same room & agreeing way forward. Help preparation of what want to say to each other.

Real Play – How would you manage this?

The SING Model in Action

Let's have a look at the SING model in action in a role play video with Sarah (Manager) and Lauren and Kate (Direct Reports).

The Conflict Situation – Lauren and Kate

Lauren and Kate work together in the same team, in a high pressure and challenging environment.

Lauren is new and works with Kate.

Past four months worked well together - their team was identified as example of best practice during recent review.

Lauren and Kate are now involved in worsening conflict. Began a week ago -Lauren was on phone to colleague, Emma, and apparently called Kate “disorganised” and “unprofessional” during a conversation. Lauren is very organised and finds an unplanned approach stressful. Kate is a ‘seat of your pants’ kind of person – likes to work on multiple projects and when it is quiet, becomes bored and distracted.

Kate overheard the comments and didn't say anything at the time. After a few hours felt upset and wanted to talk to Lauren about it. She approached Lauren to clear the air, but Lauren claimed that she shouted at her and she felt intimidated. She has since avoided Kate which has frustrated her as she has made numerous attempts to talk to her.



For Action

Now, get yourself comfortable, it will take around 30 mins to watch all three videos on the following pages.

Allow yourself some additional time for note taking and reflection.



For Action

First watch this 8.25 min video –

[Nip It In The Bud - Video One – Sarah \(Manager\) and Lauren](#)



Use this space to take note of your thoughts.



What was the story, impact, expressed needs and goal for Lauren?

Did Sarah make clear her needs and expectations as the Line Manager?

Story:

Impact:

Needs:

Goal:



For Action

Now watch the 9.57 min video –

[Nip It In The Bud - Video Two - Sarah \(Manager\) and Kate](#)



Use this space to take note of your thoughts.



What was the story, impact, expressed needs and goal for Kate?

Did Sarah make clear her needs and expectations as the Line Manager?

Story:

Impact:

Needs:

Goal:

The Joint meeting

Purpose

The purpose of this meeting is to enable each individual to have uninterrupted speaking time where they will hopefully share the impact the conflict has had on them and what they need to be able to move forward. It will allow them to vent strong feelings, constructively discuss key issues, hear, and empathise with each other and hopefully get both to a point where they are ready to look to the future.

As manager be clear about the rules of engagement to create a feeling of safety and set a positive and relaxed tone for the meeting.

1. Welcome both parties. Thank both for coming and appreciate that this may be difficult for them.
2. Set and agree the ground rules (mutual respect, courtesy, listening)

Uninterrupted speaking time

Ask parties to address each other directly and for them to listen carefully to one another without interruption. Encourage second party to speak and not to respond yet to what they have heard. Ask parties to address each other directly and for them to listen carefully to one another without interruption.

Draw out the key elements of both parties' stories, including the impact, needs and goals.

Highlight key commonalities and differences in the stories

After each party has had their uninterrupted speaking time, it is helpful for you to explore further by asking questions like –

- “Can you say more about how this has impacted on you”? Parties are less likely to reveal their vulnerability unless prompted by someone they trust. This can help “re-humanise” them in the other party’s eyes.
- “What is it that you need from xxxx (the other person)? This question puts a future focus on the session.

The Exchange (following the uninterrupted speaking time) - Key Points:

- ✓ Be assertive, remember it is their conversation but reemphasise your expectations.
- ✓ Give the parties space and time to talk – invite them to respond to what they’ve heard or ask questions of the other party.
- ✓ Do not interrupt right away, even if it becomes challenging.
- ✓ Provide positive reframes – keep it moving forward.
- ✓ Make a note of key issues raised and progress – this could form the Action Plan.
- ✓ Direct any questions or statements aimed at you back to the parties.
- ✓ Keep summarising and provide a positive focus.
- ✓ Don’t be afraid if it gets heated – But keep it safe and respectful.
- ✓ Give time out if required.

Problem-solving & action planning

A series of options may be generated for their future working relationship. This may happen naturally, or it may require an intervention from you. This will enable the individuals to gain a greater understanding of each other's needs and put in place a plan for restoring an effective working relationship.

Key Points:

- ✓ Thank them for the hard work they are doing, and the progress made.
- ✓ Agree the headings of the action plan, e.g., rebuild communication; restore respect; support each other; resolving future difficulties. It can be helpful to write these on a flip chart.
- ✓ **Use problem-solving techniques to generate options for the Action Plan under each of the agreed headings:** - e.g., use Brainstorming - Stop, Start, Continue.
- ✓ **Quantity, not quality:** At this stage, you are encouraging the parties to generate lots of options, so anything goes! Make sure both parties are taking part.
- ✓ Begin to draw ideas down and get the parties to evaluate them.
- ✓ Focus on positive progress and provide consistent and balanced summaries of what is said and agreed.
- ✓ Reality check the agreement – is it doable and SMART.
- ✓ Type up the action plan and ask the parties to sign it.
- ✓ Discuss follow-up arrangements.



For Action

Finally watch the 9.27 min video –

[Nip It In The Bud - Video Three - Joint Meeting](#)



Use this space to take note of your thoughts.



What did you notice about this joint meeting? Did each party express the impact the conflict had on them and what they needed to move forward?

Did Sarah make clear her needs and expectations as their Line Manager? Did she highlight key commonalities between them?

What did she do to keep the meeting safe for all parties?

Impact:

Needs:

Goal:

Action:

How could I have used the SING model?



Think of a conflict situation that you've previously been involved in –

How could you have used the SING model?

What would have been the benefits?

Closing the meeting

State clearly your expectations, be positive and honest. If it has been a difficult meeting, acknowledge this as well as any positive outcomes.

- ✓ Agree feedback and evaluation systems
- ✓ Ask parties if they have anything that they would like to say to each other.
- ✓ Thank them for their hard work and close the meeting.

Summary



Set the right **environment (Push/pull)** and **ground rules**



Move each person through the **SING** model using **active listening**.

Both parties in the room, **focus on needs**.



Once you've established their needs, use **problem solving techniques** to work out next steps

Further Resources

What online support is available to help me?

[How can I manage difficult conversations effectively?](#)

[How do I have meaningful conversations with my team?](#)

[What is expected of me as a Manager?](#)

[What key skills do I need to develop to manage my teams' performance?](#)

[How can I help my colleagues develop their career?](#)

[How do I ensure PDPR's are inclusive and meet the needs of my diverse team?](#)

[How can I help my team get the best from their PDPR's](#)


Reflection:

What have I learned about managing conflict in the workplace and nipping it in the bud?

Give yourself some time to think about what you have just experienced:

What have I learned?	
What does this mean to me?	
What am I going to do differently?	
What impact will what I am going to do have?	
How might others be impacted? Is that a good thing or bad thing?	
Are the things I am expecting of myself and others reasonable?	
What obstacles might I face and how will I get around them?	
Do I need support? How will I get that support?	
When will I start?	
How will I know I have been successful?	

So, what am I going to do now?



For Action



For Action

Now that I have successfully completed this module:

- What are my key learning points?
- What have I put into practice?
- What actions do I need to take as a leader manager?
- How will I review my progress and the impact of these?

My Action Plan

Immediate Action	Description of action and outcome
Short term (within 3 months)	
Medium term (within 6 month)	
Long term (6 months plus)	