contact a family
for families with disabled children

Strengthening Parent Carer Participation
Managing Conflict and Understanding Mediation

• Welcome to this Contact a Family Webinar

• If there is a technical hitch, please do bear with us

• Those of you joining by pc, laptop, tablet or smart phone should now be able to see this introduction slide
Timing & Questions

- As there are so many attendees, it is not practical for verbal questions to be taken, therefore you will all remain ‘muted’ throughout.

- If at any point you have questions, please use the question icon on your GoToWebinar tool bar on your screen.

- This will allow you to type your question in to the text box and submit this to the Webinar administrator.

- I will select as many questions to answer as time allows, if similar questions are received I will condense these where possible.
• Further relevant questions, not covered in the time allowed or that need a more considered answer will be answered and posted on the Contact a Family website along with the recording of this Webinar, details of which will be circulated next week.

• At the end of the Webinar a short questionnaire will launch, please take the time to complete this as this will assist with future online training events.
Introductions

My Name is Jacqueline Wye and I have worked with Contact a Family as an Associate for several years both in London and in the counties. Some of you will have worked with me – Hi 😊

During the past few years, I have supported parent forums on a range of issues which of course included dealing with and resolving conflict.

In an earlier life I was a senior manager in a London Local Authority managing family support and child protection teams. I am a single parent to two children.

Over the years I have had much experience of conflict resolution and mediation and today I hope to give you some helpful insight and tips on dealing with the everyday conflicts that arise in your forums.
Managing Conflict and Understanding Mediation

Umm.....Conflict can be tricky
Agenda

1. We will look at the different types of conflict that occur in your Forums

2. We will also explore some common causes including conflict via social media

3. Preventing Conflict

4. Some behaviours that may escalate conflict

5. We will look at how we commonly react to conflict

6. The impact on you, your relationships and the group dynamics

7. Taking care of yourself first

8. Our ability to recognise signs of hidden conflict

9. How to use the positive aspects of conflict and how to use difference creatively

10. Some useful techniques and approaches to defuse and resolve it

11. Finally, let's take a look at Mediation, what is it and how it might help to resolve issues of conflict in your forums
A **conflict** is a difference between people and is commonly caused because of conflicting ideas and/or interests.

**Conflicts** can be between two people, several people, be within a group or between organisations.

Remember that most groups have conflict, you are not alone and it’s a completely natural occurrence in our every day dealings with people and life.
Different types of conflict

1. Conflict between Steering Group Members

2. Conflict between founding members and newer members of your steering groups

3. Conflict that arises for parent/carers as wider members of your forum

4. Conflict between an individual forum and its partners agencies. These may include:
   - The Local Authority or managers /departments within it
   - The Clinical Commissioning Groups or managers/department there
   - A host organisation supporting a forum and holding the grant
   - Other Support Groups within your local area
Common causes of conflict Between steering group members

- Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities
- Differences of opinion about who should do what and when and how to get the job done.
- Inadequate Communication
- Different styles in our communication and interaction
- Poor chairing of meetings and inability to stay on task
- No minutes taken and members can’t remember decisions
- Key information isn’t shared among members
- Financial information isn’t shared

It’s not surprising then that differences can occur and these differences can be difficult to handle and resolve
Between founding and newer or other members of your steering groups

- It’s not uncommon for conflict to arise between founding members of the group, longer serving members and new members
- **Founders** or **established members** may treat the forum that they set up as their own work
- They may feel very protective of it’s values, mission and what it does
- As a consequence, they may want to keep a firm grip on the direction of the forum

- **Newer members** often come to an existing forum with new ideas
- They may want to explore taking the forum in a new or different direction
- Or have thoughts about how to build on what’s already in place
- They might be critical about how things are currently done
Conflict between committee members

- Individual members making decisions without discussing them in a committee meeting – chairs/treasurers can wrongly assume powers.
- Withholding information from other members
- Spending forum money without agreement from the committee
- Manipulation of the group into factions or cliques
- Dominance of decision making by one or more members
- Direction of organisation not clear or agreed by all committee members
- Committee members not following forum constitution, procedures or policies
- Differences about the role of the forum – campaigning rather than partnership or wanting the forum to have more of a supportive role for individual families challenges with the local authority
- Friendships coming before good decision making
- Self interest coming before the good of the forum
Conflict with forum members or other parent carers

Although not a conclusive list issues that create conflict include:

- Parents not understanding the role of the forum - want the forum to challenge the local authority more strongly or campaign
- Parents in conflict with the local authority talking about their individual issues in strategic meetings or events
- Parents who dominate meetings or are negative and disruptive
- Parents who think the forum could do a better job
- Parents who think the forum is trying to take over the role of their support group
- Parents being prevented from becoming members – directly or indirectly
- Parents who think the forum is focussed on one disability over others
Between an individual forums and it’s partners agencies

• The Local Authority or managers /departments within it

• The Clinical Commissioning Groups or managers

• A host organisation supporting the forum

• Other Support Groups within your local area
Relationship with the Local Authority, Health & Others

From a forums perspective:

• Limited or no communication
• Not invited to SEND/Health meetings or given little notice
• Meetings set at inappropriate times for parent representatives
• Parent representatives not given due respect by professionals
• Professionals who don’t know about the work of the forum or don’t support its work
• Limited regard given to Forums during Ofsted inspections or Health reviews
• Local authority lack of understanding about co-production and what it means in practice

From a Local Authority/Health perspective

• Forum not representative of a wide range of parent/carers in the local area
• Forums may focus on negatives and do not appear to give a balanced view
• May come across as ‘Lobbying Group’ against the LA/CCGs as opposed to working in partnership with them
• Staff members may face angry outbursts from parents at Forum meetings and receive limited support from forum members in difficult circumstances – and may not want to be involved with the forum in the future
Conflict with a host organisation

- They may not involve the forum in decision making about the grant

- Could make decisions about the work that the forum will do and how it will develop

- A worker from the host organisation may assume roles within strategic groups and not put work into developing parent involvement

- The host may not keep the forum up to date with financial information about the grant spend

- The forum committee may leave everything up to the host organisation to do and only attend committee meetings and not commit any other time to develop the forum

- The forum committee may not have a clear plan, make clear decisions and communicate these to the host organisation
Conflict raised via social media

Many forums now use social media as standard issue in their ‘Communication’ Tool bags. Some basic tips for avoiding conflict that arise via social media

- Make sure your forum values and principles are clearly displayed
- Give members information and a clear focus on the issues up for discussion
- Ask your online community for both their positives and negative experiences in your discussion groups
- Actively discourage/remove the use of patronising, demeaning or condescending language
  - Ignore the trolls and delete offensive posts
- Take time to think clearly before you respond to criticism online – do they have a point – do you need to respond via email rather than publicly online?
- Keep a check of whether your members have previous personal arguments affecting their ongoing interactions
Preventing Conflict

• **Constitutions, policies and procedures** – ensure everyone in the committee has a copy

• **Code of Conduct** - for steering group meetings and strategic meetings

• **Induction process** – make sure you have one for new members (look at the Co-production webinar on the CaF website to help new members understand the purpose of your forum).

• **Develop a co-production agreement with your local authority** (your advisor has copies)

• **Share information within your committees**

• **Have positive communication with you LA/Health contacts**

• **Update your website and social media**

• **Let your LA know what you’re doing to widen your networks** – (put information about forum membership and numbers attending events on your websites).
More on Prevention

• Let your wider membership know who parent representatives are, which strategic groups they are on and how they can get involved.
• Talk about your successes – both on a strategic level and about the forum itself – increasing membership numbers; positive survey results; new parent reps; new areas of forum activity etc.,
• Be positive about your forum to others – even when the going gets tough.
• Think about some Facilitation, communication and personal development training for your chair and committee.
• Get some support for yourself – a coach or mentor to support and guide you and boost your confidence to manage things effectively.
• Talk to your advisor about our trainer and associate list or use a local freelancer to have an away day for your committee.
Recognising signs of hidden conflict
Recognising signs of hidden conflict

- A distinct lack of motivation
  - Ongoing unpleasant behaviours which may initially be subtle
    - Previously regular attendees just stop coming
      - Factions start to emerge
        - Falling productivity – members appear less committed
        - A deterioration in previously good levels of communication
      - Inability to reach a partner who previously was available to you
  - Sudden reduction in co-production or consultation opportunities
Behaviours that may escalate conflict

• Shouting and raised voices
• Pointing and aggressive posturing
  • Hearing but not Listening
  • Ignoring
• Aggressive & accusing language
• Withholding information/knowledge
  • Ignoring the feelings of others
  • Creating factions or cliques
• Only focusing on the negative
  • Active sabotage
• Non participation or withdrawal
  • Monopolising
  • Scapegoating
• Procrastination - going on and on and going nowhere
## Conflict

### Impact on you, your forums, group dynamic and your wider partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On individuals</th>
<th>For the group dynamic</th>
<th>Your Partnerships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>Could cause factions</td>
<td>Impact on trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not in control</td>
<td>Impact on perceived loyalties</td>
<td>May cause setbacks</td>
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<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Send some running for the door</td>
<td>Lead to exclusion</td>
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<td>Excited</td>
<td>Leave others deflated and depressed</td>
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<td>Under attack</td>
<td>Opens lines of communication, albeit that addressing disagreement is rarely easy or</td>
<td>Can lead to a better understanding between the forum</td>
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<td>Angry</td>
<td>comfortable</td>
<td>and partner agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>Ultimately may bring groups together and make them stronger</td>
<td>Lead to Growth and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>More determined</td>
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<td>More resilient</td>
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<td>Part of a team</td>
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Different styles and responses to conflict

There is no one way to resolve conflict - the best response is well matched to the situation and may involve a combination of different approaches over time.

- Accommodating
- Avoidance
- Collaborating
- Competing
- Compromise
The Win/Win Solution
Conflict

I ❤️ ME
Taking Care of yourself first

- Take a break if you need it or agree to come back to it
- Accept your own feelings & manage your own response to conflict
  - Keep an open mind use active listening
- Stay focused on the present conflict or disagreement
- If necessary, talk to someone about what happened
Managing one to one conflict

• Good listening—draw out specifics of what the person does and doesn’t want in the situation
• Think about body language - be open, objective, keep eye contact, using nodding to show you have listen to and understood the other person
• Draw out the facts – the person may give a lot of opinion/perspective and not all of it will be factual
• Don’t feel pressured to find a solution or agree to something that may be unreasonable— it may be the forum committee need to think about a solution or the person may have thoughts about the outcome they’re looking for
• Only when you have fully listened can you start to get people focussing on the solutions and the outcomes wanted
Managing conflict in forum committee meetings

- Suggest a coffee break
- Split the committee into smaller groups working on flipchart so that everyone can be involved – then draw down to what’s realistic and achievable, the positives and negatives of each option and take a vote to get to the final decision.
- Be positive about different ideas – encourage everyone to contribute – don’t let one or two members dominate discussions or get bogged down in one idea over another – ask: “what do other members think”, “how else could we do this/manage this”
- Change the group dynamics – think about the meeting room space, layout of the chairs and tables, is everyone comfortable enough, do people know each other well, how do you start meetings – think about using positivity to open up a meeting – see list of ideas on the positive meeting handout
- Remind people about the goal – what are you all trying to achieve – sometimes this can get lost in the debate
- Emphasise common concerns and points of agreement
- Perhaps leave a decision for another time – draw out ideas and come back to it
Techniques for facilitating conflict in meetings

- When people are in conflict and not dealing with it, the energy of the group will often be sluggish. Check out what’s happening if you sense an energy loss.
- Set some ground rules – things like ‘no put-downs’ or ‘using I statements.’
- Revisit the group’s purpose. Have people temporarily forgotten what they are there for or are people working towards different goals?
- If the conflict has become too big, it’s sometimes best to stop the meeting. Conflict might be better dealt with just between the people concerned or using an outside facilitator. Speak to your Adviser for contact details of forum aware facilitators.
- People often bring things up that are irrelevant to the purpose but still important to them. Use a ‘parking lot’ piece of paper for issues not relevant to the agenda item - this lets people know they aren’t forgotten. The issues can then be dealt with either after the meeting or at the end. If the issue is big enough, consider calling another meeting to deal with it.
More techniques

- Acknowledge people’s anger and give them time to explain why they’re angry. Often trying to shut people down or offer explanations or solutions too early is counter-productive.

- Reflect back what they are saying so they know you have heard and understood. For example, try ‘So you’re really annoyed that you weren’t informed about this project earlier?’

- Ask others if they are also concerned about the issue.

- If the person still needs to talk and time is limited, suggest taking the conversation somewhere else – for example, ‘I can see you’re concerned about this. Is this the right place to talk about it or would you prefer to meet when we have more time?’
Using rounds to resolve group conflict

**Materials:** Whiteboard or flipchart.  

**Time:** 1–2 hours.

**Process:** The process uses ‘structured rounds’ where everyone in the group is given a set amount of time to comment on the issue in question.

1. No one can interrupt or comment on what that person has said while they are speaking.

2. During the first round, the facilitator encourages people to state their feelings and what they see as the issue.

3. During the second, and possibly third or fourth round, the facilitator encourages people to identify solutions to the issue.

4. Both the issues and suggested solutions are written up where all can see. Once the alternatives have been listed, have a round where people state their solution preferences.

5. It’s useful to start each round with a different person.

6. If people don’t want to speak, they can ‘pass.’
How to recognise positive aspects of conflict and how to use difference creatively

“Hidden within virtually every conflict is the potential for a tremendous teaching/learning opportunity. Where there is disagreement there is natural potential for growth and development”

“Divergent positions addressed properly can stimulate innovation and learning in ways like minds can't even imagine”.

Positive energy is a renewable resource
Conflict makes you fully aware that problems exist.

Discussion leads to better solutions.

Dealing with conflict is quicker and more efficient than letting conflicts fester.

Challenging old assumptions can lead to positive change and development in your forums.

It requires individuals to dig deep and find creative solutions for best outcomes.

Conflict requires each person involved to consider the others perspective.

It makes us recognise what’s important to others.

Conflicts are challenging, but dealing with it appropriately helps build self-esteem.

Conflicts create opportunity.
Some Top Tips for Resolving Conflict

1. Define Acceptable Behaviour – make sure everyone knows the rules
2. Remain calm or take a break
3. Remain positive not negative – have a balanced view
4. Express yourself appropriately
5. Listen well
6. Recognise differing perspectives
7. Don't Exaggerate to make a point
8. Look for common ground
9. Commit to working it out
Mediation, what is it and how it might help to resolve conflict in your forums
A definition;

**Mediation** is a voluntary process conducted confidentially in which a trained neutral person, known as a mediator, assists the parties in working towards a negotiated agreement of a dispute or difference, with the parties themselves remaining in control of the decision to settle and the terms of any agreement.
Mediation and how it might help you to resolve conflict in your groups and forums

- All parties in mediation are encouraged to actively participate in the process.
- Mediation focuses primarily upon the needs, rights, and interests of the parties.
- Mediation remains strictly confidential. No one but the parties and the mediator know what happened – any sharing of information has to be agreed by all parties.
- Each party has time to speak confidentially with the Mediator and nothing is repeated to the other party without their permission.
- The Mediator uses a wide variety of techniques to guide the process in a constructive direction and to help the parties find their optimal solution.
- Mediators are trained in working with difficult situations and helps those involved to find agreed solutions to the dispute.
Mediation might work for us – how do we find out more?

• If you think Mediation might work for you and you want to give it a go, talk to the other party/parties and see if they would be prepared to participation.

• If the situation is tense ask you Advisor or Mediator to speak to them to see if they would be willing to take part.

• Remember it’s completely voluntary and will only work if all parties have buy in.

• There are lots of companies and organisations that specialise in providing mediation – you’ll find several on the internet or try checking your networks to see if other forums could give a recommendation or ask your Contact a Family Advisor.

• Bear in mind that Mediation doesn’t work for everyone - but sometimes taking part in the conversation can help ease the situation even if it isn’t fully resolved.
Conflict Resolution

**Last word**

When things are tough and a solution to a disagreement or conflict is hard to find –

take a deep breath and remember that, at the end of the day - and even though you may disagree on how to get there, we are all after the big prize

Getting the very best outcomes and making the very best futures for all our children, young people and their families
Questions?
Thank You

• Thank you for attending with us today

• A short questionnaire will launch at the end of this webinar

• Please take the time to complete this it will help us plan future online training events including other topics you would like to see

• The recording of this Webinar, presentation and questions will be on the parent participation Resources page of Contact a Family’s website next week – an email confirming this will be sent to you once this is available