

OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING INTERPERSONAL TENSIONS

Precursors to Dealing with Tensions: There are things you can do before you actually have any tension with someone that can help!

- *Actively seek positive interactions.* Find a way to increase your positive interaction with someone, which will balance and cancel out frustrations. Shared meals, go for a walk together, dance party, coffee hour, etc.
- *Recognize that feedback comes in many different forms, and receiving it is important for us to learn and grow,* even if it's uncomfortable. A lot of feedback is indirect, which can be more confusing to interpret. For example, if someone averts their gaze from you in the hallway once, they might just be preoccupied, whereas if it's happening regularly, they may be unhappy with you.
- *User Manuals:* It's good to get some guidance in advance for how to handle unhappiness with someone. If each person in your group fills out a personal "user manual" form answering questions such as, "If you're unhappy with me, here are suggestions for how to approach me about it," and the group keeps all the forms in a centrally accessible location (e.g. library, bathroom, or online drive), then everyone can reference it when needed.

Menu of Options—There is no one right way to address or resolve a tension. For example, you might:

- Walk, run, journal, dance it off, spend time in nature, perform a ritual, do your own private spiritual work to let it go.
- *Do an “innerwork” exercise* (such as those listed on Kavana's website)—these are exercises for getting in touch with your own piece and empowerment, for example looking at what you have to learn from the other person, or imagining a conversation with them where the conflict is resolved.
- *If you choose to vent to a friend, be careful not to draw that person into blaming the other.* If you are listening to someone vent, don't fan the flames—be constructive and encourage them to take responsibility; invite options on how they are going to proceed with the other person.
- *Approach someone on your own,* being thoughtful about how to set up conditions where the other person will feel respected and safe.
- *Request help and support from other people* who can help hold a fair and neutral space for conversation.

Conflict Resolution Key Points & Principles

- *Separate the people from the problem*—work together against the problem, instead of against each other.
- *Disentangle intent from impact* (and assume the intent is good).
- *Focus on interests, not positions*—how can the underlying needs be addressed?
- *Reflective listening is the tool of first resort!* Inside anyone's own mind, their actions make sense; even if you disagree it's helpful to understand someone else's narrative.
- *Remember you're at choice* (on how to approach resolving any conflict)—you can't control the other person, but you have power over your own choices.

(more on reverse)

INTERPERSONAL TENSIONS

(continued)

Reflective Listening, tool of 1st resort—This means paraphrasing or saying back what you heard. It's a good way to see if you get what the other person is conveying, and to build (or rebuild) empathy and rapport.

- You always have the power to offer good listening to someone you are in tension with. If you do, chances are high that you will gain more understanding and also that they might be willing to listen to you next.
- Be nonjudgmental, listening with as much genuine heart and compassion as you can muster.
- Good reflections are CLEAN, SUCCINCT, and ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS/ENERGY.
- "Clean" = when reflecting, avoid adding your own spin or interpretation. If you're adding something else, clearly label it as such.
- You don't have to parrot back the same words. Focus on their story and especially the feelings involved, and offer back the essence of what you heard.
- This takes practice! Be open to feedback on improving your reflective listening skills.

Options for Direct Engagement—If you choose to engage directly to address a tension, routes may include:

- Talk privately one-on-one.
- Each bring a buddy along for a small group conversation. Witnesses can help the conversation stay civil and safe.
- Recruit a third party as a mediator.
- Discuss in a larger circle, for example at a community meeting.
- At larger scale, there are restorative justice processes that may involve many stakeholders.

"Grey Zone" options are not quite as direct, while also not entirely ducking around the situation. For example:

- Ask the other person's friend for advice.
- Someone else checks for whether the other person is open to talking with you about it.
- "Shuttle diplomacy"—Intermediary goes back and forth between the conflicted parties, seeking a resolution that is mutually acceptable.
- Write a letter or email—this can easily backfire, so be careful about it. In general, written communication is not the best way to address upsets, because it's one-way communication. However, occasionally a thoughtfully worded apology can be really helpful. Like anything else, it depends on the person and the situation. If you try it in writing and it makes things worse, follow up with a live call or in-person conversation, with support if needed.
- If your group has a conflict resolution team, ask them for support and see what they recommend.