

## Steps to resolving conflict

1. Identify the problem and avoid blaming each other.
2. Brainstorm several potential solutions to the problem. Refrain from judging or evaluating the solutions. The aim is for quantity rather than quality at this point.
3. Encourage both sides to take equal responsibility for going through the list point by point, evaluating each suggestion. The pros and cons of each proffered solution should be clearly stated. At the end of this stage there should be one or two remaining solutions that seem to be likely ways to effectively handle the problem. These may not be an ideal solution for either party – but a compromise for both.
4. Select the solution that is the most mutually acceptable. An implementation plan should be drafted at this point and, providing there is a fair and equitable distribution of labour and responsibility between the two parties, there is every chance the conflict will be effectively resolved.
5. When both parties have reached agreement, lock it down. If necessary have each party sign an agreement. When both parties agree to a resolution there is greater commitment by both sides to the outcomes of that agreement. The implementation of the agreement must be monitored.

Remember, in conflict resolution the emphasis has to be on achieving agreement. It does not require a feeling of win-win. It does not require the parties to love or even like each other, or to like you as the manager of the situation. Hopefully, if you have achieved agreement, there will be a respect for the manner by which you handled the process. If you can achieve that, then the likelihood of resolution the next time improves.

## Conclusion

Most people are not comfortable or confident in dealing with conflict. They see it as an unnecessary interruption or distraction from what they want or need to do. They feel that involvement in handling conflict is too stressful and so they will either avoid it or deal with conflict through aggression as it seems the quickest and easiest solution. However, both avoidance and aggression will lead to greater levels of conflict in the long run damaging future cooperation, collaboration, contribution, cohesion and teamwork.

The ADF relies on effective team work to get the job done. Conflict jeopardises that effectiveness by threatening to destabilise working teams. ADF personnel should apply the strategies discussed in this fact sheet to resolve conflict in its earliest stages. Personnel could also seek advice from the following sources.

## Where to seek help

In an emergency, call 000.

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Other than in an emergency situation, contact your local ADF Medical Centre or Psychology Section. Navy personnel can seek help through their divisional system, local Alcohol and Drug Program Advisor (ADPA) or can directly contact their local Alcohol and Drug Program Coordinators.

## Mental Health Resources

**Local Medical Centres** Your local medical officer can provide immediate assistance and referrals as required.

**Psychology Support Section** All Psychology Support Sections offer after-hours, critical incident support through the local Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

### Defence Community Organisation

<http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dco/> or [www.defence.gov.au/dco/](http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/)

The DCO provides services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week all year round including public holidays. During normal business hours the first point of call is the Duty Social Worker or Military Support Officer. Outside these core hours and on Public Holidays, calls should be directed to the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) on 1800 801 026 or if calling from overseas +61 2 93594842.

**Chaplains** There are Chaplains connected to all units in Australia who can provide support and appropriate referrals.

### The Family Information Network for Defence (FIND) (1800 020 031)

FIND is a phone service that provides easy access to personnel information on matters of everyday interest and concern. It is a confidential service that is available to every Service person and family anywhere in Australia.

**Lifeline (131 114)** If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

**Veterans and Veteran's Families Counselling Service (VPCS)** This service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families. VETLINE – 24 hour emergency line (1800 011 046).

**ADF Mental Health Strategy All-hours Support Line (ASL)** The ASL is a confidential telephone triage support service for ADF members and their families that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. (1800 628 036) (FREECALL within Australia) and (61 2 9425 3878) (outside Australia)

### Australian Defence Force Mental Health Strategy (ADFMHS)

Defweb Address <http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dsg/sites/dmh/>  
Internet Address [www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/i-dmh.htm](http://www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/i-dmh.htm)  
Email [DMH.mentalhealth@defence.gov.au](mailto:DMH.mentalhealth@defence.gov.au)



Australian Government  
Department of Defence

# ADF Mental Health Strategy CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PREVENTION AT WORK

be  
well

work  
well

live  
well

## What Is Conflict?

Interpersonal conflict is a communication problem between two or more people. It tends to arise when there is a perceived difference in opinion, or when one party believes that another is preventing them reaching a goal. Conflict is more likely to occur when people differ in personal characteristics, such as cultural background, previous experiences, ability to perform tasks, gender, sexual orientation, education and intelligence.

Once conflict arises, it often escalates as each party tries to convince the other that their viewpoint is correct. If one party displays aggression, the other may respond with greater hostility, and this causes the argument to continue. Unresolved interpersonal conflict can affect the long term relationship between the parties involved and may lead to more conflict in the future.

## Conflict In the Australian Defence Force (ADF)

The changing working environment in which more work is being done by fewer people can result in frustration, physical and mental tiredness, backlogs, changed procedures and limited training and development. This is the environment in which interpersonal conflict is likely to occur. In the ADF, team work is an imperative in delivering an effective fighting force. However, often those teams are spread over several locations rather than being co-located. Research has shown that distributed teams as opposed to co-located teams are likely to have more frequent and more severe conflict.

## Conflict does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes

Conflict, left unattended, is almost inevitably going to damage the relationship between those involved. Conflict can lead to resentment, hostility and make serious inroads into the productivity of the relationship. The effective resolution of conflict, however, can be productive – leading to a deeper understanding and mutual respect of the other party's position and needs.

## Ineffective approaches to conflict

- avoiding conflict or denying that it exists
- becoming angry or adopting a blaming attitude towards the other party involved
- using power and influence to force a resolution (usually in their favour). This approach frequently leads to resentment on behalf of the 'loser'.

## Resolution versus prevention

Traditionally, conflict resolution has been reactive – waiting until the problem occurs, dealing with it only when it developed further, and adopting a crisis management model with the aim of reducing the inflammation. Resolution has tended to involve shifting one or more of the conflicting parties because of 'personality difference' and/or applying sanctions to those involved as a 'lesson' to them and others. An alternative approach involves accepting that conflict may be inevitable in certain situations and can be dealt with most effectively through a joint problem-solving approach.

## Basic principles of conflict resolution

- The aim is to achieve resolution by commitment to an agreed action through a combined effort of problem solving.
- Carefully analyse the facts.
- Analyse the other person and the direction from which they are coming. Look at the situation from their perspective. Put yourself in their shoes. Try to identify their needs, concerns and anxieties.
- Deal with the emotion, stress and aggression and separate them from the facts.
- Keep hold of your own agenda and focus on the desired outcomes.
- Learning to disagree in such a way as to minimise the risk of escalation of the dispute is essential.
- Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal communication and the message that you might be sending the other party.
- Finally a mediator may be required where a subordinate is not confident in dealing directly with a superior (this option is available to all Defence personnel under the Equity and Diversity legislation).

## Managing the emotion

Initially, when faced with an angry person the best response is to listen. Keep talking with them rather than at them. Sometimes you will simply need to agree with them at first as a way of acknowledging some truth in their point of view. This is not about 'caving in', but is a validation of their perspective. It is very difficult to maintain an angry stance when the other person is agreeing with you. Assure them that you are willing to listen to their concerns and that you will attempt to resolve the issues raised. Empathy is important here. Understand both their message and the emotion they have behind it. Genuinely acknowledging their response on both levels can quickly diffuse a volatile situation.