

## Section 1: Note to Users

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*These tools aim to help you to develop foundational skills such as listening, asking probing questions, managing conflict, and so on.*

*It is useful to engage with these tools before, during, and after the training workshop to prepare you for facilitation in a community-led approach. Extensive practice with reflection is needed in order to master the skills that these tools seek to develop.*

*The tools may be used individually or in small groups. This section enables individual reflection by providing space for reflective writing, using a workbook format. Each tool in this section requires 60–90 minutes to complete.*

*On an ongoing basis, it is useful to think about which skills you need additional practice on, which challenges (internal or external) make it difficult for you to use a particular skill, and how you will take steps to improve. In small groups, you may want to reflect with three to five colleagues, with group discussion of the questions posed in these tools and of what can be done to deepen particular skills within your agency.*

## **FAC 9. Nonviolent Conflict Management**

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A key task of the facilitator is to enable constructive dialogue among many different community members for the purposes of collective planning and action in regard to supporting vulnerable children.

Constructive dialogue is a process in which different people express a range of views and the reasoning and values behind them. In this approach, the dialogue participants see divergent views as positive since they enable everyone to deepen their understanding of the issues. As the dialogues proceed and ideas are explored fully, particular ideas may come to be seen as having greater merit than others, leading to a general agreement among the participants. In this way, conflict may be constructive.

However, divergent views are not always expressed in a constructive manner, and conflict can become quite destructive. It is normal for some people to want to consider different views in a quiet, reflective manner, whereas other people want to have a debate that has a winner and a loser. This competitive turn can spark strong emotions and can unleash anger, frustration, and other negative emotions. Also, in discussions about harms to children and how to address them, some participants may express their views in a passionate manner and engage in heated disagreements with others who have expressed opposing views.

As conflict escalates during the discussion, people may say or do hurtful things, berate the other person or views, or become so angry that they attack the other person verbally or physically. The person or people who feel attacked may experience anger, frustration, or humiliation, leading them to strike back. In this way, conflict may be destructive and can spiral out of control.

A key question, then, is how to manage conflict so as to prevent destructive conflict from occurring and limiting it when it does occur. This tool offers some general suggestions for doing these things. Recognizing that every context is unique and that there may be a number of local ways of managing conflict in a nonviolent manner, a useful approach is to begin by eliciting local ideas about how to keep discussions constructive.

### **Eliciting Local Views**

Before initiating a community-wide dialogue process, it is important to have a basic understanding of power dynamics, behavior and social norms around discussions, and local mechanisms for handling conflict. The emphasis here is on the latter two since the preceding tool focuses on understanding power dynamics in communities.

### **Behavior and Social Norms Around Discussions**

It is useful to ask various key informants (e.g., women, men, teenage girls, teenage boys) questions that help one to learn how discussions usually go, what is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable behavior in discussions, and what are the social rules regarding discussions, and

what forms disruptive behavior typically takes. Here are some potentially useful questions to ask key informants:

- In discussions, who usually speaks more—women or men? Children or adults?
- In discussions among ordinary people, what do people do when they disagree? What is the socially appropriate way to express disagreement?
- Are there some issues that tend to provoke strong feelings and difficult behavior (e.g., displays of anger, shouting, accusations) during discussions? What are they?
- When strong feelings and difficult behavior occur during discussions, what are some things that typically help to calm things down and get discussions back on a constructive track?
- Are discussions here sometimes interrupted by disruptive behavior of bystanders (non-participants in the discussions)? What can be done to manage or prevent such disruptions?

### **Local Mechanisms for Handling Conflict Constructively**

Because destructive conflict threatens social harmony and well-being, most societies have developed mechanisms for managing and preventing destructive conflict. These may include laws, social norms, processes for settling conflicts, and means of reducing conflict such as cooperation and relationship-building, prayer, proverbs, humor, song, dance, story, etc. For example, in rural Sierra Leone, as former child soldiers were about to return home, many people feared the children, seeing them as killers or as people who behaved like animals. A significant turning point—one that used a combination of empathy and reframing—came when religious leaders reminded people that, “These are our children, they have suffered, too, and they are our responsibility.” To learn about local mechanisms, it can be useful to ask key informants questions such as the following:

- If two people here get into a heated argument and cannot agree, what things are done to help them come to an agreement?
- Are there particular people here who help to settle disputes when they arise?
- What role do religious leaders and faith communities play in handling disagreements?
- Do elements such as proverbs, songs, humor, etc. play a role here in managing or resolving conflict? Please give an example.

### **Preventing Destructive Conflict**

In most circumstances, it is important to prevent destructive conflict rather than allowing it to occur and then trying to pick up the pieces and restore relationships afterwards. For facilitators,

important means of prevention are engaging with local mechanisms for constructive conflict management, effective framing, finding common ground, and structuring discussions.

## **Engaging with Local Resources and Mechanisms**

In a community-led process, it is natural for community resources and mechanisms for handling conflicts in a constructive manner to find their way into the community dialogues and problem-solving discussions. However, this may not happen all at once, or particular elders and religious leaders may not engage initially since they want to wait to see which direction the discussions will take. It can be valuable, then, for facilitators to reach out and deliberately engage early on with key people and mechanisms that can help to manage conflict in a constructive manner.

Having learned about the local people and community processes for handling conflict, the facilitator should engage with the ones that seem best positioned to support the community-led dialogue and decision-making process.

For example, there may be religious leaders or lay leaders who are recognized as having a “cool head” and the ability to keep discussions from becoming too heated. The facilitator should engage with these leaders, explaining the importance of having constructive dialogues and asking whether they might be willing to participate and help manage conflicts as the need arises.

Their early engagement and buy-in could help to keep the dialogues moving in a positive direction and reduce the chances that destructive discussions might occur, thereby discouraging some people from participating. Also, it sets the stage for their ongoing participation and spirit of ownership, which can contribute to the sustainability of the process.

In many societies, it is customary to open meetings and discussions with prayer. A way of building on this local resource is to say the prayer in a way that invites listening, open sharing and dialogue. If multiple religions are present in the community, it would be valuable to open with multiple prayers, not privileging any one faith. This approach is not only contextually appropriate but may help to bring the deeper values of people’s faith—which may include tolerance, respect, listening, humility, etc.—to the fore, thereby supporting constructive dialogue.

Similarly, the facilitator should engage with community mechanisms for handling conflicts, taking care to discern ones that are congruent with human rights. If, for example, the community had established By-Laws against behaviors such as fighting or name-calling, the facilitator should engage with the chief and/or elders who are responsible for implementing the By-Laws. Although it is extremely rare for such mechanisms to have to be brought into play in community-led processes of child protection, it is important to respect such mechanisms and to recognize that they could serve as valuable referral mechanisms in the unlikely situation that fights erupted. This approach is consistent with the idea of building on local resources and processes rather than imposing mechanisms from the outside.

## Framing

The manner in which one frames or introduces a dialogue process or a particular discussion can have a significant impact on how it unfolds and whether it leans toward being a constructive or destructive process. To see the importance of framing, consider the following introduction of a community discussion about which harm to children to address:

1. “Over the past weeks, the community has been in a process of discussing which harm or harms to children to address through community-led action. Already you have identified eight different harms to children that need to be addressed. Now we need to discuss which harm(s) to address. Let’s please bring out many different ideas and make sure that we decide which one has the greatest merit. Who would like to begin—which harm(s) to children do you think the community should address and why?”

Take a couple of minutes and jot down a few notes on what you see as the likely strengths and weaknesses of this framing message.

*Write below:*

Strengths: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Weaknesses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you notice how framing this as a debate could encourage people to assert their own views and defeat those of other people? Although debates are useful for a variety of purposes, they often do not promote positive relationships, and often they reduce people’s willingness to listen deeply since the priority is on “winning” by defeating one’s opponents. The framing above has the strength of inviting many different ideas. Yet some people may not feel comfortable sharing their ideas in a debate forum.

Now consider a second way of framing the same discussion:

2. “We are in a process of listening and learning together about the various harms to children in the community, and already in previous discussions you have identified eight different harms to children that ought to be addressed. Now we need to think through together which one harm to children the community should address through its collective action. It’s important to recognize that

there are no “right” and “wrong” answers—please feel free to suggest your own opinion. We are not here to debate, so if someone presents a view that differs a lot from your own, there is no need to argue or to talk down the other person. Our aim is to hear each other’s views, which will give each of us much food for thought. We are not trying to take a decision today as there will be many discussions on this topic over the next few months. What is important today is that we share our own views openly and seek to learn from each view that is expressed. Let us go around the circle and have each person who wants to say something speak for a minute or so. As we do this, let us adhere to the ground rules we had established earlier that call for listening, respect, no shouting or name calling, and mobile phones off.”

Please take a couple of minutes to jot down what you see as likely strengths and weaknesses of this framing.

*Write below:*

Strengths: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Weaknesses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The second framing has significant advantages over the first. It explicitly states that this is not a debate but an effort to think through which harm to children to address through community action.

By emphasizing there are no right or wrong answers, it puts people more at ease in presenting their own views. In an effort to promote listening and learning, this framing states that the goal is to hear each other’s views and learn from the views that are shared.

By noting that there will be multiple discussions over some time, it helps to reduce any felt pressure to assert one’s views or achieve a final choice today. This approach helps to create space for dialogue, without pressure for immediate decision-making. The reminder of previously established ground rules regarding listening and respect helps to set the stage for constructive dialogue. Since this manner of framing encourages and creates space for listening, sharing, and discussion, it is more likely to set the stage for constructive dialogue and to get things off on the right foot.

## Finding Common Ground

A second strategy for enabling constructive conflict and also managing difficult situations is for the facilitator and the participants in the dialogue to identify common ground. Typically, this entails finding cross-cutting or similar issues or identifying common underlying values. When people who hold different views see there is common ground, they often feel less inclined to cling to their own view and become receptive to endorsing a view that has collective support, even if the support is not unanimous. In addition, finding common ground helps to build positive relationships among participants. After all, other people do not seem so very different from me if they hold some views that are similar to my own.

Quite often, people are more willing to listen to and affiliate with people who hold views that bear some similarity to their own. And they are less likely to radically oppose, put down, or fight with people who are seen as holding similar views. In these regards, finding common ground helps to prevent destructive conflict and enable constructive handling of the differences that exist between people or groups.

In finding common ground, there are several steps, the first of which is usually to look for common or overlapping elements in the different views that have been expressed. For example, assume that the facilitating group is bringing together representatives of the three communities to try to help them select a single harm to children to address by all three communities. Also, assume that three different communities identified the top three harms to children as follows:

<i>Community 1</i>	<i>Community 2</i>	<i>Community 3</i>
1. heavy work	1. teenage pregnancy	1. sexual exploitation
2. out-of-school children	2. out-of-school children	2. teenage pregnancy
3. teenage pregnancy	3. early marriage	3. early marriage

Of the issues identified, which ones are cross-cutting, that is, identified in more than one community? Is there an issue identified in all three communities? Please write in your answers below.

More than one community \_\_\_\_\_

All three communities \_\_\_\_\_

By helping participants see these cross-cutting issues and also commonalities in associated issues, one can help people to find common ground in deciding on a single harm to children to address. This can be done by asking questions such as those above to the participants. The fact that all three communities identify teenage pregnancy as one of the top harms to children qualifies it as a source of some agreement and common ground. The ways in which teenage pregnancy represents common ground may also be apparent in listening carefully to people's explanations about why particular issues are important.

For example, people who indicate that teenage pregnancy is a key harm to children may also rate being out of school as an important harm to children. Important connections exist between these issues, as in most low- and middle-income countries, a teenage girl who is pregnant cannot attend school.

Similarly, there may be links or connections between teenage pregnancy and issues such as early marriage, as girls who marry at age 15 may be very likely to become pregnant during the teenage years.

Another way to help people find common ground is to appeal to their sense of working for the collective good. This can sometimes be done by including in the framing a statement such as: "Although it is important for each person to share her or his views openly, it is also important for us to listen and find points of general agreement and to not put our own views in the way of finding general agreement."

We have now reviewed three different ways of preventing destructive conflict—engaging with local resources, framing discussions, and finding common ground. However, destructive conflict may still occur, and we need to be ready to handle it.

### **Defusing or Containing Destructive Conflict**

In some situations, destructive conflict occurs in the form of shouting or expressing outrage at another person's ideas. Sometimes, in discussions of which harm to children to address, people can get so impassioned that they lapse into a debate style, try to refute the other person's ideas, and even get upset and shout at the other person when their own views are not supported. This may occur even if one had framed the discussion in an appropriate manner that was aimed to prevent destructive conflict.

Think for several minutes how you might handle such a situation, picturing it in your mind as clearly as possible. Please jot down a couple of ideas for handling it.

Write below:

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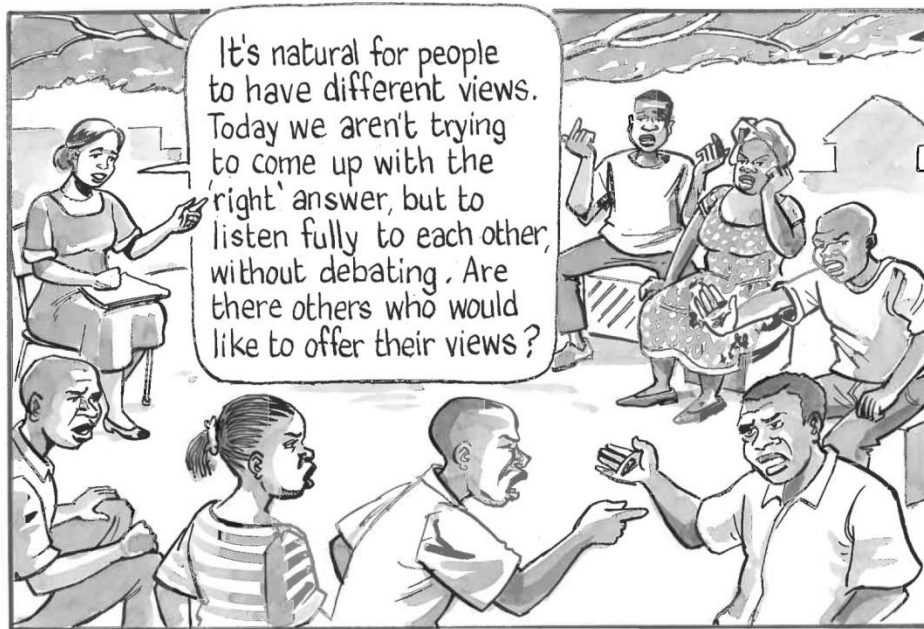
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Numerous strategies can be useful in defusing this type of destructive conflict:

- ***Stay calm and focused on the problem.*** It helps to attend to one's breathing, making sure to take long, slow breaths that keep one relaxed. Seeing someone be calm amidst heated arguments can sometimes help other people to remain calm and focused.
- ***Intervene early, avoiding having the conflict escalate further.*** Your intervention should be kind but firm and could include elements such as those below.
- ***Remind the participants of the aims and ground rules of the dialogue.*** The aim is to explore different ideas, without claiming that one is right and the others are wrong. A ground rule is that each person should be free to express their ideas. People will not feel free to express their ideas if participants raise their voices or criticize each other harshly. Also remind everyone that this is not the only venue for the discussions—there will be many more, and there is no reason to press to reach agreement today.
- ***Call attention to our common purpose and the importance of good process.*** Remind participants that we are all working to help prevent and address harms to children. These harms are so complex that there are no easy answers. It is important to be humble in the face of complexity and to work toward our common goal together by listening and learning from each other.
- ***Use appropriate humor*** to lighten the mood and help get the discussion moving in a constructive vein. It is crucial, though, that the humor should not take sides or make one or both people in the argument appear foolish.
- ***Gently invite a shift to hearing other people's ideas.*** This is in the spirit of full participation and the importance of each person's ideas. Enacting the shift, though, needs to be done with care and respect for the people who were arguing and with effort to avoid humiliation.

## MANAGING CONFLICT



On a rare occasion, destructive conflicts that are ongoing in the community find their way into the discussions that are part of the community-led process of action on behalf of vulnerable children. In such cases, it is important to seek the advice of wise, equable people in the community on how to manage the situation. Also, it can be useful in advance of the group dialogues to have one-on-one meetings with the people who will likely clash at the group meetings. Conducted in a respectful manner, such meetings can help to bleed off steam, keep the conflict limited, and also remind the individual of the collective purpose and aim of the dialogues as well as the ground rules.