



## **Conflict Resolution Policy**

Approved 05/04/2021

### **Definition**

Conflicts are disagreements that can arise with regard to any aspect of cohousing, including resources; goals, and how to achieve them; clash of values, lack of honesty (even with the best intentions) and personal conflicts. How we respond to conflict is influenced by our individual perception of the situation, which itself will be based on a number of factors including our life experiences, culture, values and beliefs. (1)

Resolution is the process by which we work towards solving conflicts with the aim of avoiding the build up of tension, either spoken or unspoken, which brings with it the risk of conflict escalation and distancing within the group.(2) Resolution is the priority, rather than 'winning' or 'being right'.

See also the Draft policy for a Consensus Approach to Cohousing. The Conflict Resolution policy is written in adherence with Our Vision, and Principles of equality, inclusion, diversity and democracy detailed therein.

### **Principles for Conflict Resolution**

- We recognise that conflicts are inevitable and we commit to a shared approach to solving them
- We recognise that we have a right to solve our own conflicts whenever possible, and to live our lives in community to the full (3)
- We accept that conflict raises all sorts of hurt and defensive feelings, some resulting directly from the conflict and others resulting indirectly from other times and experiences in our lives. We therefore commit to remember the positives of trying not to take the conflict personally, and of seeing the other's point of view (4)
- We commit to focusing on the problem rather than the person
- We commit to mutual respect in working to solve the problem, including no put-downs; no intimidation, implied or direct; no physical contact; no avoidance or making excuses (5) (6)
- We will listen without interrupting, and try to listen for the feelings being expressed as well as the content of what is said. We do this knowing that listening deeply makes it easier for others to hear us when it is our turn to speak. Also, we may hear the other person say something that raises our understanding and changes our mind. (7)

- We will be conscious of the words we use, including using calming instead of escalating language, and using open questions instead of leading ones (8)
- We commit to using ‘I’ statements (accepting ownership/personal responsibility) rather than ‘you’ statements (blaming others) (9)
- When using ‘I’ statements, we will avoid giving mixed or covert messages by using a tone of voice that corresponds with taking responsibility and not blaming others (10)
- We will keep in mind that when we successfully resolve conflicts there is an increase in trust, and in our confidence that we can survive disagreements and challenges (11)
- In the interests of social sustainability, following resolution of any conflict we commit to our own personal development and to accepting responsibility. The ongoing development and cohesion of the group benefits as a result (12)
- We will abide by any group agreements regarding any delicate or sensitive issues that are off limits for the conflict resolution process (13)
- We commit to working on a conflict either until it is resolved, or until an outcome is reached that both parties can agree to
- We agree to use the conflict resolution protocol

### **Protocol for Conflict Resolution**

- 1) As conflicts tend to be draining and time consuming, those involved must first decide whether the conflict is worth the time and energy of a resolution process (14). In some cases, they may be able to agree to disagree, in other cases not
- 2) The next step is for those involved to meet together to try to resolve the conflict directly. In doing this, they will first set out what they can both agree are the ‘facts’ of the situation.(15) In good faith and in the spirit of the principles detailed above, they will try to resolve the situation together through discussion, negotiation and an exploration of their options
- 3) If resolution is not reached, the members will agree another member they’d like to help mediate and solve the problem. The mediator agrees to maintain confidentiality; to maintain impartiality and not to collude; to attend an initial meeting with those involved together with any follow up meetings as necessary, and to use a written agreement plan to record decisions and actions as agreed by all involved
- 4) If the conflict is still not resolved, it may be necessary to approach an outside facilitator or mediator to help. The facilitator or mediator must be acceptable to both/all parties involved in the conflict; be clear and transparent about the process they will use for resolution; outline potential further options in the event of the mediation process failing; give information about their background, experience and training in the field of conflict resolution, and explain their confidentiality policy and any limitations that apply to it
- 5) In the event of there being a major conflict between two members, or between one member and the rest of the community, that they are unwilling to resolve, it will be necessary for a community meeting to be called in order to work towards resolution of the situation. Any resident member can call this, and it will be required that both members attend. More than one meeting may be necessary. If no satisfactory progress

is made, an outside facilitator, acceptable to the members in conflict, will be involved, ( and the process detailed in 4) above will apply

## **References**

The following resources have been drawn on throughout, most directly at the points indicated by the bracketed numbers

**Colombia Ecovillage Guidelines for Conflict Resolution, accessed as a Policy Example on [www.oldsite.cohousing.org](http://www.oldsite.cohousing.org), accessed June 2020 (1) (3) (4) (6) (7) (11) (14) (15) and especially Point 5) in the Protocol section above**

**The Fellowship for Intentional Community, best of Communities VI Agreements, Conflict and Communication 2013**

**Olaf Dejgaard, resident of Munksogard Senior Cohousing, cited by Charles Durrett in Senior Cohousing, A community Approach to Independent Living, The Handbook (Habitat Press, 2005) (2) (5) (8) (9)**

**Robena McCurdy, Towards Sacred Society in: Creating Harmony, Conflict Resolution in Community, ed: Hildur Jackson (Gaia Trust/Permanent Publications, 1999) (10) (12) (13)**