

Living in community

Principles for mediating conflict

- Maintain mutual respect: Ask yourself/get parties to ask: "How can I discuss our differences in ways that allow the other person to retain his/her dignity? How can I avoid having the other person feel denigrated or put down?"
- Seek the common ground: Explore overarching goals, values and shared purpose. Try to see things through the other person's eyes (e.g., his/her culture, race, gender, age, or other life experiences).
- Focus on the problem, not the attack: focus on what people are saying about the problem.
- Objectify the situation: help people focus on what happened, the behavior causing the problem, what the impact is and what ideas they have for solutions.
- Emphasize and acknowledge both people's situation: try putting yourself in both people's shoes and try to understand the emotional impact which the situation is creating for them.
- Acknowledge the needs of both people: empathize verbally with them and allow them to vent their emotions so that you can establish yourself as being understanding of both sides.
- Validate feelings: help make emotions explicit and acknowledge emotions as legitimate.
- Listen actively: verify and provide feedback to both parties: let both parties know that you are genuinely trying to understand both parties' position and interests, and that you are trying to help. Summarize what you are hearing as the more neutral source. Seek clarification on your feedback to make sure that what you heard is correct.
- Separate fact from opinion.
- Keep perspectives open: help both parties see the situation from their own perspective, from the other person's perspective (getting into the other person's shoes), and from the perspective of a neutral third party (or fly on the wall).
- Be non-threatening: avoid any statements that criticize, are sarcastic, and put people on the defensive.
- Encourage use of "I" statements: "I" statements have four components:
 - what the person experienced or what he/she perceived,
 - what the person felt about that experience, what they liked or did not like and why,
 - what the person would like to see happen differently in the future (what the person needs from the other person), and
 - the consequences the person sees if things don't change.

Covenant making

In the biblical text, the people of God are repeatedly invited to live in relationship with God, others and the world out of a covenant. A covenant by definition is an agreement by an individual to another or group that they will engage in or refrain from specific action. When we think then of a covenant for this

community and your household, we desire to see not so much a list of do's and don'ts but a desire for a way of life. Covenants were and are to be life giving.

The intention of covenants is that they are an agreement made by an individual that can be broken by that individual. Each one is accountable to keep the covenant. We are not dependent on others for accountability but offer ourselves to be accountable to the group. Therefore, in Service Adventure we ask that each individual agree to a covenant and work to hold themselves accountable, returning time and again to the group asking how well they are doing. This takes vulnerability, honesty and integrity.

From the biblical tradition, we take the sense that living within a covenant is a blessing to our lives and helps us to live as a blessing to others. When we think of creating a covenant as a household, we understand that there will be a need to at times place ourselves second to the needs of the group--a realization that how we live affects those around us and affects the value and strength of our relationships.

By bringing together this group under a covenant, we have made a choice not to have a list of rules and consequences. In some ways a list of rules is easier, more clear cut, less gray areas and no need for conversation. If you break the rule, there is a consequence that is incurred. Instead we have chosen the messier way of building and living under a covenant together. This means we need to regularly return to this work and ask ourselves how well we are living out what we have agreed. It also means that we have given others in the group permission to enter into conversation with us on how well they see we are living up to what we agreed. This is part of the messy work of living in reconciled peace with one another. We must be willing to live in vulnerability, honesty, and integrity. We must be willing to listen with openness to others' counsel and insight.

What follows is a list of topics for you as a group to discuss. There will be more that you may want to add to this list. The covenant making process includes times of silence and prayer for reflection on what we each bring out of our values and experiences to this process. We will spend time discerning what issues are important for us to address in our desire to live in community together. As we continue to define a covenant that will bring life to our community, we will narrow down and define in a written form the words that will in part guide our actions. It is important that all are able to agree to the covenant and that we willingly commit to living out what we have said with honesty, vulnerability and integrity.

Topics for conversation:

Health of our relationships, communication, listening, confidentiality, exclusive relationships, spiritual growth, time, safety, cleaning, cooking, space, sleep, living simply, money, values, T.V., hospitality, food, electronics, etc.

"They did what?!" - Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll in the Service Adventure unit

Assessing the seriousness of the situation

Need to assess: What's happened and who's been affected? What relationships and responsibilities are implicated? Who needs to be notified and included in communication? Who should participate in the accountability process?

*Keep in mind: in any serious violation of program policy, MMN is an (indirectly) affected party.

Initial response

- Don't overreact!
- Determine who's involved and talk to them directly (and individually, if that seems appropriate)
- Find out what happened before talking about policies or consequences. Say, "Here's what we know." Then, "So, tell us what happened." Make it clear that you expect a full and honest account and keep asking questions if the story doesn't sound right or details conflict.
- Avoid making assumptions and accusations. Instead, ask them to tell their motivations and explain their actions: "Why did you do this?" "What were you thinking?" "Did you realize that you shouldn't be doing this?" Again, keep asking questions if the explanation is muddled.
- Don't feel that the matter has to be resolved all at once. It might be good to let them stew awhile!

Accountability process

- Don't feel the need to rush the process - make sure it's done right.
- Set clear boundaries for the process: who is to participate; when the matter is to be discussed; etc.
- Lay out process so it's clear to all involved and so offending participant(s) know what's expected of them.
- Frame the process with prayer (e.g., read a penitential psalm and have everyone recite the Lord's Prayer together).
- Do not accept excuses or otherwise let them avoid personal responsibility-expect them to admit their wrongdoing.
- Focus on relationships, relationships, relationships-not policies, policies, policies.

- Affirm the offending participant(s) as members of the community, reminding them of the covenant promises made at the beginning of the term.
- Address how their actions have failed their obligations and harmed relationships.
- Ask the offending participant(s) what they think needs to be done to make things right.
- Engage in communal discernment concerning appropriate consequences.
- Avoid arbitrary consequences: make sure that consequences are linked to the offending actions and are aimed at righting what has been wronged.
- Decide what accountability measures are needed to ensure follow through on consequences and to avoid future offending (if necessary).
- Emphasize that the choice to continue as a member of the community belongs to them--it is their choice whether or not to live according to the lifestyle expectations and program policies.
- Be sure that forgiveness is stated clearly and directly to the offending participant(s)

Process styles

Kim Hurst, in *The Art of Debriefing*, offers the following thoughts on group time. As you incorporate journaling or individual reflection time, remember there can be a variety of ways to process an experience. Encourage participants to express themselves in their journals through art, writing a poem, writing a song, etc. Your group times will be greatly enriched as they bring their own unique reflection styles back to the group.

Everyone processes their experience differently! If you only sit around and use a discussion format, you lose half the group. Team members have distinct needs; use several different process styles. Try using some of the different styles below in your group meetings.

<u>Style</u>	<u>What they Love</u>	<u>What they hate</u>
Chatty Charlie	Big group discussion, leading questions, conversation-based briefing	Silence
Poetic Pam	The ability to talk in non-linear and random form.	Structure and "right answers"
Journaling Jake	To have free time to write their thoughts.	Answering questions on the spot, having to put feelings into spoken word.

Rita Resolution	Putting experience into action.	Abstract thinking about what they learned.
Aimee Artist	Images, not necessarily things the rest of us will understand.	Not using her creative energy to express herself.
Wendy Worship	Emptying their mind of everything and just “being” with God.	Always having to think about things and process them consciously.
Tommy Thinker	Turning things over and over in their heads for a long time.	Not having time to deal with things in their own time. Time sensitive expectations.
Daniela Dancer	Free expression of movement and rhythm	Having to sit still all the time.

(Laura Bartlett, NSTMC workshop, 2006)

Group conversations

(Adapted from Laura Bartlett, NSTMC workshop, 2006)

It is important, as much as possible, to hold group meetings. Allow participants to talk about how it is going with the group. What is working well? What needs to be changed? What frustrations are you experiencing? Group meetings should bring connectedness and renewed energy to the group as opposed to dwelling on negatives.

Here are some ideas for team time:

- Thoughts in a hat. Write up a variety of statements or questions that range from serious to fun. Then have everyone go around the circle and pull out one of the unfinished statements and finish it. Be sure to mix up serious with fun! You might try: “The three words that best describe this group are...” “My head hurt when...” “What I like best about the cold showers are...” By using humor, you may be able to soften any negative experiences. *The Complete Book of Questions*, by Gary Poole, is a great book for these types of questions.
- Affirmation circle. There are many variations to this idea, but basically everyone goes around the circle and says what they appreciate about each of the other participants. You can do one

person per meeting, or even record the thoughts so participants can refer back to them throughout the year or once they get home.

- **Activities.** When the group is gathered, lay different colored sheets of construction paper on the floor. Instruct each person to choose any color they want and then by tearing the paper make it into something that is symbolic of their experience the past few days. Have them throw the shreds of paper on the floor. When everyone is done go around the group and have each person explain the significance of the object they made. Then have them look at the pieces on the floor and ask: What are the things that had to be torn away from their lives for God to make them into a new creation? Another variation is to use pipe cleaners. Pass out the pipe cleaners and have the participants shape their pipe cleaner into a shape that reflects what is happening to them. This could be used several times during the year.
- **Empathy circle.** This exercise is a good tool for encouraging participants to place themselves in the circumstances of others. For this exercise, participants sit in a circle and tell the story, using a first-person narrative, of someone they've met whose life presents special challenges and difficulties. (For example, "My name is Maria. I am the widowed mother of four children..."Spend three minutes telling Maria's story as a first-person narrative.) Tell what you know about Maria's life, the triumphs as well as the tribulations, as though you are her. Each participant tells the story of a different person.
- **Prayer walking.** If conditions permit, spend some time prayer walking around the areas where you are serving. Talk about possible ways to pray before departing.
- **Listening prayer -"Lectio Divina".** Choose a passage from Psalms or Lamentations (or any book, but these tend to be a good place to start) and read it out loud to the group slowly several times. Ask them to focus on any words or phrases that stick out to them or that the Spirit might want them to meditate on. Rather than analyzing the text, encourage them to just "sit" with the words and experience it. Have them repeat that phrase or word back to themselves. Read the text again out loud slowly, now asking the team to share out loud what things came to mind. At the end of this time, read the text again and spend time in thanks for what God has done during this time individually and corporately.
- **Participant ownership.** Ask participants to lead part or all of a particular meeting. This is when knowing the gifts of your group come in handy! Utilize those that can lead worship, have a way with sharing scripture or prayer time. Encourage two people to plan it together. Discuss possible ideas with them, but remember to release the responsibility you gave to them.
- **Games.** Cards, spoons, Uno, group favorites, you name it. Keep it light and fun.
- **Surprise field trips.** Go get ice cream, a sightseeing spot, out for coffee or to visit a church members' home. Take advantage of this informal time to converse one on one with participants about how they are doing.

Challenging participants: Specifically, "The Party Pooper"

(Anyone can potentially be a party pooper during the year at some time—even YOU!)

Definition of a "Service Adventure Party Pooper"

- A team member who technically fulfills most or all commitments but exudes no joy or even negative energy.

- One who attempts to alter the entire team's mood and/or actions by manipulation.
- One who can alter the entire team's mood and/or actions by genuine angst.

How does a "Pooper" affect your team?

- By becoming a speed bump or road block to group progress, energy, spirit, dynamic, etc.
- Other teammates want to include and help the "pooper," but he/she does not desire to be included.
- Sucks joy from group activities.
- Negative body and verbal language makes other feels tense or uneasy.
- Makes communication difficult.

How does the unit leader minister to this team member?

- Determine true needs: Is the imminent issue (e.g., illness, chronic fatigue, injury, excessive complaining, unfounded fear, etc.) a need that should be addressed, or is it actually under the category of the larger need: that of a proverbial "butt whoopin..."?
 - Ignore the rant or huff and carry on with plans.
 - Present the person with a choice: Do you want to participate or not? (Sometimes that will mean the choice is to "sit under and tree and wait for us" and other times that might mean choosing to go home.)
- Make it clear to the person that his/her actions will not alter the group dynamic.
- Find the chinks in the person's armor and hit him/her with grace in those areas (using these areas to form a bond which could potentially lead to some spiritual development in the relationship).

Do not shelter this person or walk on eggshells around this person—the leader must deal with him/her as if he/she is a maturing adult; hold to the same standard as all other team members. Duplicity issues: address the person on the basis of the faith he/she claims to have outwardly.

- Pray mightily for this person to open his/her heart to God for change!

How does the unit leader minister to the other members of the team?

- Set an example of not responding to "the poop." (e.g., the tantrum, the facial expressions, etc.)
- Be a listening ear "I understand how you are feeling..." talk about ways to deal.
- Reach out to the pooping team member on the basis of his/her stated faith and morals.
- Advise team members to suggest that the party pooper come speak with YOU about things. How do you balance the needs of the party pooper with the needs of the team?

Substance use and abuse

Important notes: (1) Having a relationship with the participant is important in determining the difference between what is normal and what is unusual behavior. (2) It is also important to know whether there has been drug use in the past. If you know or suspect that to be true, then it will be all the more relevant to be aware of the signs of use.

How do you know if a participant is high and on drugs? What are the signs?

Physical

- Poor physical coordination
- Slurred or incoherent speech
- Unhealthy appearance, indifference to hygiene and grooming
- Bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils
- Memory lapses, short attention span, difficulty in concentration

Behavioral

- Avoiding eye contact
- Irritability, secretiveness, anger, hospitality
- Acting strange – either overly happy or overly withdrawn
- Reduced motivation, energy, self-esteem, self-discipline
- Diminished interest in things that once were interesting

Other

- Odor of drugs, smell of incense, or other “cover-up” scents i.e. cologne/perfume
- Possession of drug-related paraphernalia—pot leaves, bong, etc.

Changing patterns of performance, appearance, and behavior may signal use of drugs. Look for changes that form a pattern associated with drug use.

So, a participant is getting high.... what are the next steps?

It is easy to deny the evidence and postpone confrontation. Yet the earlier the problem is found and faced, the less difficult it is to overcome. If you suspect that a participant is using drugs or alcohol:

Discuss your suspicions with the participant in a calm, objective manner

- Blaming and judgment have no place here
- Create an emotionally safe environment for the person to be honest and open
- Don't feel pressured into giving consequences on the spot. It can be a natural consequence to have to sweat it out a bit.

Devise a plan of action

- Inform members of your support committee. Get their feedback and discuss preferred course(s) of action.
- Inform program director. Get feedback. Advise of plan established with support committee and/or discuss possible course(s) of action.
- Talk to people who can offer insight and assistance
- Ask yourself what is best for this participant? What is best for you? What is best for the unit?
- Figure out what you want to happen. Take into consideration: what are the underlying issues, has there been a history of use, is this about being away from home and rebelling, what is the attitude of the participant, etc.

Impose consequences

- Some ideas: calling parents, apologizing to the unit, urine tests, community service, regular accountability (i.e.- increased 1:1 check-ins), informing service assignments, educational options (i.e. visit a support group or program, reading), counseling
- It is essential to follow through on consequences. This is not so that the participant will be punished, but so the participant is ensured that she/he cannot be allowed to continue making the choices they make without ramifications.