Purpose of the Guide

This guide is designed to help you and your team better understand your processes and to help you find ways of strengthening team-based care in your primary health care (PHC) organization.

The guide is divided into ten standalone modules. Each module contains background information and theory related to the topic (Part A). Some modules (i.e., 3, 4, 7, and 10) also contain companion tools and resources to address the topic (Part B).

The modules are not sequential. Choose the module that addresses a specific challenge you have identified and use the tools that are most applicable to your situation.

The Introduction module contains background information about interdisciplinary teams, interprofessional care and other types of teams. The Introduction module also includes acknowledgements and key references.

It is recommended that before beginning any of the suggested activities, both the facilitator or group leader and the participants take the time to review the whole module. This will help to ensure that the facilitator and all participants have the information necessary to fully engage in all discussions.

Each PHC organization should decide who will be responsible for overseeing team development and addressing any problems that arise. This usually falls to the existing leadership or a newly-established quality improvement team/leadership team. From time to time you may also involve an external consultant to facilitate team building activities, although external facilitation is not required to use these modules.

Visit our website at http://www.hqontario.ca/quality-improvement/primary-care/tools-resources for the complete set of modules including:

- Introduction
- Module 1: What Is an Effective Team?
- Module 2: Building a Team
- Module 3: Clarifying Roles and Expectations
- Module 4: Making the Most of Meetings
- Module 5: Evaluating Team Performance
- Module 6: Understanding Change
- Module 7: Enhancing Collaboration
- Module 8: Improving Communication
- Module 9: Leadership and Decision-Making
- Module 10: Conflict Management

* “Primary health care (PHC) organization” refers to a group of providers, allied health professionals and other staff, etc. within a FHT, CHC, NPLC or other practice model with multiple providers. A number of teams may function within one organization. In the case of solo-provider practice models, “organization” may refer to an individual provider and staff.
Conflict Management

Part A

What Do We Mean by “Conflict”?  

Conflict arises when at least one party believes that another party’s actions or intended actions threaten to harm their own interests. Conflict can be between individuals, between teams, or within a team. Developing effective interpersonal skills can help teams through the process of conflict resolution.

Conflict can arise because of:

- Scarce or limited resources
- Differing needs or desires
- Conflicting values or beliefs
- Structures external to the team/PHC organization
- Different and seemingly incompatible interests

Learning about different conflict styles can be helpful at any stage of team development, particularly during storming.

Checklist for Conflict Management Systems

The checklist below identifies potential mechanisms for identifying and defusing or resolving conflicts within teams. It can be used to assess the ability of your PHC organization to effectively manage conflict. It may also be used to gather the opinions of your team members to get a sense of what conflict management strategies they believe should be in place. Finally, each of the questions can serve as the topic of a team discussion.

- Do we have options for preventing, identifying and resolving problems of all types?
- Do we have a culture that supports resolution of conflict at the lowest level through direct negotiation and encourages discussion of conflict?
- Do we have a culture that supports the belief that mistakes and problems are opportunities for learning?
- Do we have clearly stated policies about how conflict will be resolved?
- Have we involved a variety of stakeholders within the organization in the design of our system?
- Do people understand what their roles and responsibilities are within the conflict management system?
- Are we flexible in our design so we may meet differing needs based on respect for diversity?
- What other written documents need to be revised to support conflict resolution (e.g., job descriptions, manuals, personnel policies)?

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☐ Are there multiple options for addressing conflict and are employees empowered to make the choice?
☐ Do the leaders in our organization do enough to support conflict resolution?
☐ Do we have a body overseeing the conflict management system that is made up of a variety of stakeholder groups?
☐ Are there training opportunities for developing the skills needed to resolve conflicts?
☐ Do we have sufficient resources to support the system we have designed?
☐ Are there institutionalized incentives to prevent and resolve conflict?
☐ Do we have a communication strategy so that everyone in the organization knows what to expect?
☐ Do we evaluate our system and make changes as needed?

**Conflict Styles**

The table below provides a list of different styles for managing conflict.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Style</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiding</strong></td>
<td>Is hoping the problem will go away and steering clear of conflict. No attention is given to one’s own needs or those of the other team members. Avoiding might be letting an issue go, being overly diplomatic, or simply withdrawing from a tense situation. This style is effective when time, place or personal health make it inadvisable to pursue discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodating</strong></td>
<td>Is meeting the concerns and needs of the other person while ignoring your own. This is giving in or yielding to the other person’s views. This style is used when you want to work co-operatively with the other person without trying to implement your own ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compromising</strong></td>
<td>Is looking for a mutually-acceptable solution that somewhat satisfies both parties. You give up something and they give up something in order to come up with a solution upon which you both can agree. Compromising may work when you and the other person both want the same thing and you know you both can’t have it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competing</strong></td>
<td>Is a style where individuals use their own power or control of resources to assert their needs. Competing means trying to win and getting your own way. It is used when there is no concern for the other person’s interests. The style is useful when an important principle or need is at stake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborating</strong></td>
<td>Is working toward solutions that satisfy the needs and concerns of both parties. However, it takes time to look at the competing issues and interests. This approach combines searching for new alternatives with creating solutions that end in a “win-win” situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part B of this module contains the following exercises and activities, which address the themes we have already discussed. The following exercises can be facilitated by an internal facilitator who feels confident in dealing with conflict. Outside facilitation is recommended if there seems to be a lot of conflict or if no one feels comfortable facilitating discussions about conflict.

10.1 - Understanding Behavioural Styles in Discussions, Debates and Conflicts
10.2 - Conflict Management Systems
10.3 - Defining Conflict Styles
10.4 - Analyzing a Conflict Case Scenario
Part B

Conflict Management

Activity 10.1 - Understanding Behavioural Styles during Discussions, Debates and Conflicts

Preparation:
- Review Part A, Module 10

Time Required:
- 30-40 minutes

Materials:
- Handout
- Pens

This activity requires the following handout for participants:
- Participant Worksheet

Goal:
The goal of this activity is to develop norms for how people will engage in discussion, debate and conflict.

Steps:
1. Have all team members write down the behaviours they believe are both acceptable and unacceptable in terms of discussions, debates, and conflicts.
   - These behaviours might include use of language, tone of voice, emotional content, expectations of involvement and participation, avoidance of distractions and timing of response
2. Have each team member state their preferences to the rest of the team, as one person captures the similarities and differences between lists
3. Discuss collective preferences, paying special attention to areas of difference.
   - Arrive at an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours to which all members can commit
   - The leader may have to play a key role in facilitating agreement
Activity 10.1 - Understanding Behavioural Styles during Discussions, Debates and Conflicts

Participant Worksheet

The goal of this activity is to develop norms for how people will engage in discussion, debate and conflict.

Step 1 - What behaviours do you believe are acceptable and unacceptable when it comes to debates, discussions, and conflicts? Consider things like use of language, tone of voice, emotional content, expectations of involvement and participation, avoidance of distractions and timing of response, etc.

Step 2 - Share your preferences with the rest of the team. Are there similarities and/or differences between team members’ preferences?

Step 3: Are there:
- Preferences shared by all group members?
- Significant differences between lists?

Step 4: Develop a list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours upon which all your team members can agree.
Activity 10.2 - Conflict Management Systems

Preparation:
- Review Part A, Module 10

Time Required:
- 20-30 minutes

Materials:
- Handout
- Pens

This activity requires the following handouts for participants:
- Survey for Conflict Management Systems

The Checklist for Conflict Management Systems, provided in Part A of this module, identifies mechanisms for identifying and defusing or resolving conflicts within teams. This checklist can also be used as a survey to assess the ability of your organization to effectively manage conflict.

Using the checklist as a survey:

1. The checklist can be used as a survey to gather the opinions of your team members to get a sense of what conflict management strategies they believe should be in place
2. Have everyone on the team complete the survey anonymously and return it to one person
3. Have a small group of people representing different components of your team analyze and summarize the data
4. Report the findings of the survey to the team at the next meeting and discuss the results.

Using the checklist in a discussion:

1. Each statement in the survey can be used as the basis for a group discussion in team meetings. Select a series of questions you would like to focus on after you have administered the survey and have a sense of your team’s opinions.
### Activity 10.2 - Conflict Management Systems

#### Survey for Conflict Management Systems

The following survey identifies potential mechanisms for identifying and defusing or resolving conflicts within teams. 

Complete this survey using a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 means you totally disagree with the statement and 5 means you totally agree with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our organization supports conflict resolution through direct negotiation</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and encourages discussion of conflict.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a culture that supports the belief that mistakes and problems</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are opportunities for learning.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have clearly-stated policies about how conflict will be resolved.</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have involved a variety of stakeholders within the organization in</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the design of our system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are flexible in our design so we may meet differing needs based on</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect for diversity.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are multiple options for addressing conflict and all employees</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are empowered to choose.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leaders in our organization do enough to support conflict resolution.</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a body overseeing the conflict management system that is made up</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of a variety of stakeholder groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are training opportunities for developing the skills needed to</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resolve conflicts.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have sufficient resources to support the system we have designed.</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are institutionalized incentives to prevent and resolve conflict.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a communication strategy so that everyone in the organization</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>knows what to expect.</td>
<td>Agree: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We evaluate our system and make changes as needed</td>
<td>Disagree: 1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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Discussion Questions

✓ Do we have options for preventing, identifying and resolving problems of all types?

✓ Do the people who are responsible for acting on the policies understand what their roles and responsibilities are?

✓ What other written documents need to be revised to support conflict resolution (e.g., job descriptions, manuals, personnel policies)?
Activity 10.3 - Conflict Styles

Preparation:
- Review Part A, Module 10

Time Required:
- 20-30 minutes

Materials:
- Handout
- Pens

This activity requires the following handouts for participants:
- Personal Conflict Management Styles Handout
- Conflict Styles

Steps:

1. Have participants read through and review the Conflict Styles handout.
2. After, ask them to respond to the following questions about their own conflict management styles:\(^4\)
   - Describe the conflict management style you most frequently use at work.
   - Describe the conflict management style you most frequently use at home.
   - Describe the conflict management style you usually use with friends.
   - Describe a conflict management style that tends to irritate you and explain why.
   - Describe a conflict management style that you admire in others and explain why.

Activity 10.3 - Conflict Styles

Defining Conflict Styles

Please review the following information before completing the five discussion questions provided below.

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Activity 10.3 - Conflict Styles

Personal Conflict Management Styles Handout

After reading the *Defining Conflict Styles* handout, answer the questions below.

1. Describe the conflict management style you most frequently use at work.

2. Describe the conflict management style you most frequently use at home.

3. Describe the conflict management style you usually use with friends.

4. Describe a conflict management style that tends to irritate you and explain why.

5. Describe a conflict management style that you admire in others and explain why.

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Activity 10.4 - Analyzing a Conflict Case Scenario

Preparation:
- Review Part A, Module 10

Time Required:
- 30 minutes per scenario

Materials:
- Handout
- Pens

This activity requires the following handouts for participants:
- Conflict Case Scenarios
- Conflict Analysis Tool-Worksheet

Steps:
1. Have participants read the scenarios in the Conflict Case Scenarios handout. *Note: you may decide to do all or only one of the scenarios during a meeting. Each scenario will require approximately 30 minutes to complete.

2. Start a discussion about the scenarios by asking the questions below. This should function as a brainstorming exercise on the diversity of views that exist about conflict.
   a) List all the factors that are contributing to the conflict.
   b) Who is involved? Directly or indirectly?
   c) What is the effect of the conflict on people? On the work?
   d) What are the interests of each of the parties (concerns, hopes, expectations, fears, beliefs, assumptions, priorities)?

Scenario 1: A social worker was asked to complete a task with a tight deadline for the Anytown Clinic administrator. The work was completed in the time specified. The team leader then returned it with a sticky note attached that said: “Please re-do, there are many pieces missing.” The pieces were, in fact, not missing. The social worker went back and asked the team leader for a few minutes to chat at the team leader’s convenience. The response was: “It’s not a good time but sit down anyways.” He proceeded to tell the social worker how disappointed he was with the work that she had done. When the social worker tried to point out that the missing pieces were on the reverse side of the page, she felt that she went unheard. The team leader proceeded to highlight additional errors. His body language continued to be dismissive and there was no appreciation for the work that had been done in the short timeline.

Scenario 2: Several people were hired for one position at Anytown Clinic over the course of a year. However, all of them left due to difficulties they experienced working with one particular physician (although these issues rarely became public). Staff noticed this turnover and started talking among themselves about whether these individuals were getting fired and what they must have done. There was a sense of foreboding lingering around Anytown Clinic. Gossip started and staff began to talk behind each other’s backs about who was next. People felt threatened and less able to speak their minds.

Scenario 3: The small team at Anytown Clinic is made up of a variety of disciplines. Staff members feel that people are treated equally, except in one particular situation. There is a high
incidence of diabetes in the community and the centre has developed an education program to address this issue. The health promoter, the dietician, the nurse practitioner and the physician all had a role to play in the workshop. But it seemed as if the time of the physician and nurse practitioner was more valuable. The health promoter and dietician were the ones who had to do all the advertising, room set-up, refreshment preparation and clean up after the workshop. The physician and the nurse practitioner came in for a few minutes, presented their part of the workshop and then left. The physician and nurse practitioner do not volunteer to do these routine tasks, nor are they directly asked to help with these tasks.⁷

Activity 10.4 - Analyzing a Conflict Case Scenario

Conflict Case Scenarios

Read the following scenarios and answer the questions below.

Scenario 1

A social worker was asked to complete a task with a tight deadline for the Anytown Clinic administrator. The work was completed in the time specified. The team leader then returned it with a sticky note attached that said: “Please re-do, there are many pieces missing.” The pieces were, in fact, not missing. The social worker went back and asked the team leader for a few minutes to chat at the team leader’s convenience. The response was: “It’s not a good time but sit down anyways.” He proceeded to tell the social worker how disappointed he was with the work that she had done. When the social worker tried to point out that the missing pieces were on the reverse side of the page, she felt that she went unheard. The team leader proceeded to highlight additional errors. His body language continued to be dismissive and there was no appreciation for the work that had been done in the short timeline.

Scenario 2

Several people were hired for one position at Anytown Clinic over the course of a year. However, all of them left due to difficulties they experienced working with one particular physician (although these issues rarely became public). Staff noticed this turnover and started talking among themselves about whether these individuals were getting fired and what they must have done. There was a sense of foreboding lingering around Anytown Clinic. Gossip started and staff began to talk behind each other’s backs about who was next. People felt threatened and less able to speak their minds.

Scenario 3

The small team at Anytown Clinic is made up of a variety of disciplines. Staff members feel that people are treated equally, except in one particular situation. There is a high incidence of diabetes in the community and the centre has developed an education program to address this issue. The health promoter, the dietician, the nurse practitioner and the physician all had a role to play in the workshop. But it seemed as if the time of the physician and nurse practitioner was more valuable. The health promoter and dietician were the ones who had to do all the advertising, room set-up, refreshment preparation and clean up after the workshop. The physician and the nurse practitioner came in for a few minutes, presented their part of the workshop and then left. The physician and nurse practitioner do not volunteer to do these routine tasks, nor are they directly asked to help with these tasks.
Activity 10.4: Analyzing a Conflict Case Scenario

Conflict Analysis Tool - Worksheet

Read each of the scenarios from the Conflict Case Scenarios handout and answer the questions below.

1. List all the factors that contributed to the conflict.

2. Who is involved? Directly or indirectly?

3. What is the effect of the conflict on people? On the work?

4. What are the interests of each of the parties (concerns, hopes, expectations, fears, beliefs, assumptions, priorities)?

5. What conflict styles are being used?

6. What conflict styles might be more appropriate?

7. List all the possible ways that this conflict might be resolved.

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References


