

RESOLVING CONFLICT in the workplace



All workplaces have conflict from time to time. Ours is no different. Sometimes quite minor issues can become big issues before we know it. As an employer Catholic Education expects its staff and those in its school communities to seek to resolve conflicts consistent with our obligations under the staff and parent/volunteer codes of conduct and the shared expectation of communities that are grounded in Christ-centred faith.

The following principles should be kept in mind when seeking to resolve workplace conflicts

- 1. Think first – step back, take time to consider the options.** Sometimes the first response, in the heat of the moment, can escalate a conflict.
- 2. Location, location, location.** Seek a good space to have a conflict discussion. A place where all parties can feel comfortable. As a guide – quiet, comfortable, private.
- 3. Respect confidences.** Conflicts that become workplace gossip rarely end well. Parties to a conflict resolution process should agree to keep it confidential.
- 4. Listen actively.** If we do not hear what the other person is communicating (words and actions) we cannot resolve a conflict. Active listening is enhanced when you say to the other person 'What I heard you say was...'
- 5. Attack the problem – not each other.** When we get emotional we tend to get personal and forget the problem that might be underlying the emotion. Emotionally you might be addressing the symptom rather than the cause.
- 6. Accept responsibility.** There's more than enough responsibility for everyone. If we avoid the blame game and accept our share of the responsibility we actively assist resolution.
- 7. Use direct communication.** When we use 'I messages' we own what we say, when we use 'You messages' we are projecting our feelings on the other person. For example 'I felt hurt by your actions' owns the emotion whereas 'You made me feel hurt' carries blame or criticism.

- 8. Look for common interests.** Don't assume we know what all parties want as an outcome. Identify what is important and why, and steer towards the outcomes that are the important ones.
- 9. Mutual gain.** Effective resolution is never about winners and losers. Any gain at the expense of someone else is not likely to resolve the conflict.
- 10. Look to the future.** It's likely we will still share the same workplace tomorrow so have we identified a resolution that allows us to move on in a positive way? How are we going to do things differently?

Remember that if you cannot resolve workplace conflicts this way, your employer, Catholic Education, has formal grievance processes in place for all members of the Catholic Education community. Contact your Principal or line manager to discuss your options to initiate a formal process. As a rule we will not embark on a formal process unless the parties have done everything possible to resolve the conflict via an informal process.

As an employer we are committed to the positive resolution of workplace conflicts.

Policy statement:

Catholic Education in the Diocese of Cairns is committed to developing an educational and organizational culture based on mutual trust and respect. We are committed to providing a safe and supportive work and learning environment for all employees and students.

We acknowledge that employees, students and parents may sometimes have a complaint about a decision, behaviour, act or omission that they feel is unacceptable. While most issues can be resolved through direct discussion between the parties concerned, there may be instances in which this is not possible. This is one of a series of four posters to provide guidance on a process for grievance resolution.



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