

Facilitating a Dialogue Between Others: 5 Steps

Step 1: Meet with each party separately to hear them out. Be neutral, objective, and interested.

- Explain your plan to bring them together—and why. State shared goals.
- Actively listen; ask clarifying questions; summarize what they're saying.
- Ask what they would want instead.
- Ask how they think the other party views the conflict—and why.
- Present any guiding principles for resolving the conflict—and any data or facts to be considered. Coach as needed to move forward productively.
- Close with an overall summary and affirmations, especially for recognition of shared goals and common interests

Step 2: Prepare.

- Do a self-check on your readiness--emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally.
- Develop your list of prompts; prepare an agenda if needed.
- Have a plan if things get too heated.
- Schedule sufficient time and meet in a private space.

Step 3: Bring the parties together.

- Begin by thanking them for meeting with you to discuss and work through the conflict. State the unit's mission or shared interests; affirm their value to the team.
- Explain the format of the meeting: turn-taking, each will have time to explain their perspectives/experiences pertaining to the conflict with a goal to engage in collaborative problem-solving.
- Set ground rules if needed: "I ask that you use I-messages instead of blaming; listen for understanding and without interruption; follow my direction as facilitator, etc."
- Begin with the subordinate employee—or if peers—the "moving party." Actively listen and summarize; reframe as needed; reinforce any affirmations.
- Continue taking turns until the stories are completely shared. Do an overall summary and identify any themes.

Step 4: Engage in brainstorming and collaborative problem-solving to seek solutions.

- Acknowledge the different experiences AND the need to resolve the issue and improve the working relationship; identify impact on the team, etc. Restate shared interests.
- Restate (from 1:1) any policies, procedures or practices that apply. Add any relevant factors, e.g., roles and responsibilities, deadlines, funding, etc.
- Building on shared interests, brainstorm multiple options and explore pros and cons of each.
- Work toward agreements. If they're stuck, offer "I'd like to suggest" or "I'd like to ask...". Your suggestions might include compromises. If needed, you can be the final decision-maker.
- As agreements are reached, state each: "So, the two of you agree that..."

Step 5: Closing and follow-up.

- Acknowledge that this was a difficult topic and express appreciation for their good faith participation.
- Summarize the progress and agreements reached, if any.
- Follow-up in writing. If needed, set a meeting for a check-in.
- Going forward, focus them on their work together.
- If problems arise, encourage them to work through them with each other reminding them of their agreements.