

The Collaborative Problem-Solving Process

Collaborative problem-solving is a great tool to address potential or existing conflict. It separates the person from the problem and encourages open dialogue between conflicting groups. Through the collaborative problem-solving process, conflicting groups can create a solution in which both sides “win” and relationships are protected.



Air All Viewpoints

1. Listen actively and intentionally as the other person speaks. Then summarize the main ideas shared and acknowledge any emotions expressed in your own words.
2. Share how the current conflict affects you through an I-message: “I feel frustrated when you don’t respond to my email because what I have to say is important.”



Clarify the Problem

3. Ask questions to identify and clarify each side’s underlying interests and needs.
4. Combine both side’s needs into a joint issue in neutral terms, such as “Break-down in Communication.”



Brainstorm Solutions

5. Generate a list of all possible solutions to the problem.
6. Eliminate weak solutions.
7. Test out remaining solutions. Ask: Is it realistic? Does it satisfy our underlying needs?



Develop an Agreement

8. Reach agreement on the best solution(s) from list.
9. Specify the details of the solution and clarify each person’s responsibilities.

About the Conflict Resolution Program

The Conflict Resolution Program (CRP), part of the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware (UD), is a resource dedicated to supporting transformational and organizational change in nonprofit, public, government, and educational settings.

For more resources, visit <https://www.bidenschool.udel.edu/ipa/serving-delaware/crp>