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Addiction Messenger

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Ideas for Treatment Improvement

Conflict Management

Part 2 - What's Your Style?

There are many ways to respond to conflict situations. Some styles require great courage while other styles require great consideration for the other party. Some styles are cooperative, others competitive, and still others are quite passive. Each of us has probably developed a style that we're most comfortable with. Defining these styles, exploring their strengths and weaknesses and understanding when each might be most appropriate will be the focus of this issue.

The reasons conflict arise are numerous, varied and may include:

Pseudo Conflict - misunderstandings in which we perceive that there is a conflict when there is none and can occur when we interpret another's message as being counter to our own.

Ego Conflict - occurs when we are emotionally invested in a decision. We believe that if others disagree with us, they are rejecting us.

Simple Conflict - differences of opinion that both parties recognize, acknowledge and accept.

Relationship Conflicts - emerge when we experience strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviors.

Data Conflicts - arise when we lack information necessary to make wise decisions, are misinformed, disagree on which data is relevant, interpret information differently, or engage in unclear communication.

Interest Conflicts - happen when we believe that in order to satisfy another's needs, our needs and interests must be sacrificed.

Structural Conflicts - result from limited physical resources, geographic constraints (distance), time availability (too little or too much), or organizational, family or relationship changes.

Value Conflicts - caused when we perceive belief systems to be incompatible.

Five Conflict Response Styles

Thomas and Killman (1972) describe five ways of dealing with conflict. They include Competing, Avoiding, Compromising, Accommodating, and Collaborating.

Competing Style

(I'm going to win; you're going to lose.) - We stress our position without considering opposing points of view. This style is highly assertive with minimal

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict - alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence."

~ Dorothy Thompson (1894 - 1961) ~

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**Healthy
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cooperativeness; the goal is to win. The competing style is used when a person has to take quick action, make unpopular decisions, or handle vital situations or issues. Overuse of this style can result in a lack of feedback from others, reduced learning, and being surrounded by “Yes” people.

When you use a competitive style you tend to seek control over discussions and fear that loss of it will result in solutions that don't meet your needs. While use of a competing style can be perceived as threatening, when you under use this style it could lead to a lowering of your influence, indecisiveness, slow action, and a withholding of your contributions to a conversation or relationship.

Avoiding Style

(We are both going to lose, so I'll leave.) - Here neither your concerns nor the concerns of the other person are met. You may use avoiding to protect yourself from struggles that cannot be won. This style is low in assertiveness and cooperativeness. It can be used appropriately when issues are of low importance, to reduce tensions, or to buy time to make the best decision. The skills needed to use this style appropriately include developing foresight in knowing when to withdraw, learning to sidestep sensitive areas through diplomacy, understanding the benefits of employing a sense of timing, and developing a level of comfort with leaving things unresolved.

Overuse of avoidance can result in a low level of input, decision-making by default, and adopting the role of a detached observer. You may begin to feel you cannot speak frankly without fear of repercussions, possibly as a result of childhood experiences or negative experiences with conflict resolution.

Compromising Style

(We both lose a little and find a compromise) - When you compromise you find a middle ground or forgo some of your concerns. This style is moderately assertive and cooperative, with a goal of finding a mutually satisfying resolution to conflict. Compromising is used with issues of moderate importance, and when all those involved are equally powerful and committed. Compromising skills include the ability to communicate openly, to find a resolution that is as fair as possible to all involved, to recognize the value of all aspects of the issues involved, and to give up part of what you may want.

Overuse of compromising can lead to the loss of long-term goals, a cynical environment, the appearance of having no firm values, and being viewed as making concessions to keep others happy without effectively resolving the original conflict. Under use can lead to unnecessary confrontations, frequent power struggles, and ineffective negotiating.

Accommodating Style

(I'll just let you win) - When you forego your concerns in order to satisfy the concerns of another you are accommodating. It is marked by low assertiveness and high cooperativeness with a goal of yielding to another out of concern for the effects of conflict on the well-being and durability of the relationship. If you believe a relationship to be *fragile* and unable to endure the process of working through conflict and differences then you might be tempted to accommodate.

Accommodating is appropriate to use in situations when you want to demonstrate that you are reasonable, create good will and peace, retreat, or when the issue is of low importance. Developing accommodating skills requires you to learn to sacrifice, become more selfless, obey orders, and recognize the benefits of yielding in some situations.

Overuse of accommodation can result in a loss of influence and contribution. You may appear to lack a desire to change, to demonstrate anxiety over future issues, to give up personal space, and to be overly helpful. Under using the accommodating style can result in a lack of rapport with others, an inability to yield, or display an appearance of apathy as a way of not addressing the feelings of others.

Collaborating Style

(We can both win) - The goal here is to satisfy the concerns of all involved. Collaborating is highly assertive and highly cooperative in an effort to find a “win/win” solution. Appropriate uses of this style include integrating solutions, learning, merging perspectives, gaining commitment, and improving relationships. Using it can support the open discussion of issues and creative problem solving. Collaboration skills include using active listening, confronting situations in a non-threatening way, and identifying underlying concerns.

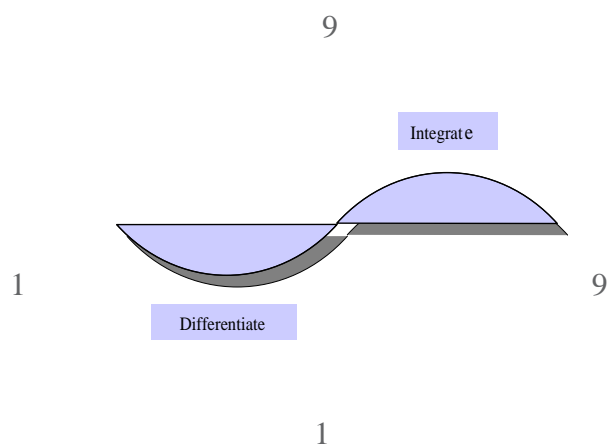
Overuse of the collaborating style can lead to spending too much time on issues of low importance, can foster a diffusion of responsibility,

and result in being taken advantage of by others who are more self-oriented. Under use can result in a reliance on quick fix solutions, a lack of commitment by others to the proposed resolution, and the loss of creative problem solving and innovation that emerges when a number of people are involved in resolving a problem.

A collaborator is tolerant, accepting of differences, and acknowledges that others have a right to their feelings. When you collaborate you send the message, "let's *differentiate* (get out of our feelings) and then *integrate* (create more closeness through problem solving)."

Style of Communication Grid

The Style of Communication Grid illustrated below provides another avenue for understanding the concept of differentiating and integrating.



The x-axis or horizontal line indicates concern for personal goals. Minimal concern is 1 on the left; maximum concern is 9 on the right. The y-axis or vertical line indicates concern for the relationship. Minimal concern is 1 at the bottom; maximum concern is 9 at the top.

- Avoiders have minimal concern for personal goals as well as minimal concern for the relationship (1,1).
- Competitors have maximum concern for personal goals and minimal concern for the relationship (9, 1).
- Accommodators have minimal concern for personal goals and maximum concern for the relationship (1,9).

- Compromisers fall into the middle of the quadrants. They want to preserve personal goals and the relationship and are willing to give up some of each to do so.
- Collaborators have maximum concern for personal goals as well as maximum concern for the relationships. They want everyone to win! (9,9)

In closing, take a moment to consider the degree to which you utilize these styles of conflict management. Which do you use most frequently? Which do you need to learn more about? In which would you like to become more skillful? In which situations would you like to modify or improve your conflict management style?

Conflict is a common event in addiction treatment settings. We cannot avoid it. In fact, it may be an essential precursor to change and early recovery. The real question is, "How well do you manage conflict and how skillful are you in helping your clients to more effectively resolve the conflicts they experience?"

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Sources

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Conflict Resolution in Recovery - Trainer's Manual Downloaded from the World Wide Web on May 5, 2009 at http://www.naadac.org/index.php?option=com_oscommerce&Itemid=79

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