

# Conflict Coaching from CAOS Conflict Management



Client  
Handbook

Promoting  
*Mindful Communication*  
*Growth through Conflict*



Your Conflict Coach is someone who has worked as a Mediator in a range of disputes for at least one year and often much longer.

They have gone on to develop their skills in this area to become a Conflict Coach, providing 1-to-1 support for people experiencing some form of relationship breakdown, destructive conflict or communication difficulty.

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### *Training*

CAOS Conflict Management provides bespoke training for organisations on themes relating to Communication and Conflict Resolution.

### *Mediation*

CAOS Conflict Management also provides mediation for complaints, workplace disputes, neighbour disputes, family disputes including divorce mediation.

Contact us on:

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for more details

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Visit

[www.caos-conflict-management.co.uk](http://www.caos-conflict-management.co.uk)

for more details

## **Thank you** for having Conflict Coaching with a **CAOS Conflict Management coach.**

This booklet is provided to support you in reflecting on your responses to conflict after you have had coaching. *(Alternatively, you may have purchased it as an e-book from the CAOS Conflict Management website.)* If your present responses have not been working for you and your situation is not improving, or you are finding you are feeling very upset, unhappy, stressed ...or whatever word you would use, in relation to your difficulty, this booklet will help you to create different ways of responding and will supplement the work you have done with your conflict coach.

Hopefully the booklet will also clarify the approach taken by your Coach in supporting you with your difficult situation or conflict. The CAOS approach to Conflict Coaching is based on the practises of mediation which support people in creating their own solutions to conflicts and relationship breakdowns.

Because the focus in our coaching and our mediation is on helping you to decide what works best for you, it means we are not analysing your situation and giving you our 'diagnosis' about how we think you should deal with things.

That is to say we don't give you advice or suggestions or our view of your situation.

Our role is to help you see that ultimately only you can resolve your situation for yourself, even if the other person you are having difficulty with does not wish to communicate with you.

In many conflict situations, a feeling of 'powerlessness' or despair arises because the focus is on trying to change someone else. Conflict Coaching helps you focus on your responses and not the other person or people involved in your difficult situation. So, this booklet describes the thinking behind what we do and provides additional support for you in responding more effectively to your situation.

## Section 1: Underlying Philosophies

These underpin our aims as a Conflict

Coach:

- Ownership – of your situation, your responses, your beliefs, your actions etc. remains with you. We will help you consider if they ‘work’ for you and if not then how you would like to change them.
- Empowerment – we will help you to create your own answers to situations. We believe only you can and so will not try to persuade you to act according to ‘our way’.
- Impartiality – our role is not to agree or disagree with your views about your situation or any people you are having difficulty with, or how you are dealing with it. We will not support you ‘against’ others, we will support you ‘for’ you.
- No-blame approach – Conflict Coaching is not looking to find blame or fault in what you have done, nor in those you are having difficulty with. Its aim is to support you in creating a practical, meaningful way of moving forward in your situation, to see it as an opportunity to learn.
- Confidentiality – all of our dealings with you remain confidential. We do not make notes, keep records of coaching discussions or report on what you have come to us about. We have very strict confidentiality practises and all our Coaches are expected to maintain these or we will immediately stop offering them clients.
- Adult-Adult relationship with the client, not Parent-Child - our Coaches do not see you as anything other than another human being who, like all of us, sometimes has a difficulty with others. We don’t see you as ‘needy’ or ‘vulnerable’ or in need of ‘protection’ or ‘saving’. We have an expectation that you will be arriving at a session open to the possibility that you could create better ways of dealing with your situation. We will not be providing a ‘sympathetic ear’, but we will be patient and supportive. Then we will be asking you what you wish to do about your situation, which may simply be how you wish to support yourself within the difficult situation, and how you might be able to achieve that and supporting you in creating ways that work for you.



## Section 2: The Principles of Effective Communication

These Principles illustrate practical ways in which our communication practise can support the resolution of, or prevention of a destructive conflict. Your Coach may ask you about how you communicate with those you are having difficulty with and may explore with you the extent to which you think these Principles apply to your communication.

That we:

1. **Treat each other with respect** – often, in conflicts where responses have become destructive, they are escalated by treating those we are in conflict with without respect. We justify it to ourselves because of ‘what they did’ or something similar. But if we want the situation to improve, that is, if we want less stress and unhappiness in the situation, calling people names, using derogatory comments behind their backs or to their faces or other destructive actions will almost certainly make the situation worse.....and that means the consequences for us are likely to be worse. So we are making the situation worse for ourselves by doing so. We own our contribution to that, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not.
2. **Do not interrupt one another** – Coaches will help you to consider the extent to which you fully listen to others. Uninterrupted listening, even with small periods of silence before someone speaks, ensures that people are fully able to express themselves. This then means we have the full story of what they have to say and have not started to make our own interpretations of them and what they have to say before they have finished speaking. Many misunderstandings occur simply because someone has not been fully listened to and the ‘listener’ has created their own false view of what someone has said before they’ve heard them through. This false view normally arises because of preconceptions or assumptions held by the ‘listener’ that they haven’t questioned and so have affected their ability to genuinely listen to someone.
3. **Have the right to pass** – If we are not willing to acknowledge our own right to pass, our own right to make our own decisions about whether we participate in something or not, we may not be willing to allow it in others. If we are prone to peer pressure, doing what our friends, parents, partners tell us we ‘should’ do then we may have a similar expectation of others to do the same and may use up a lot of physical and emotional energy trying to ‘get’ someone to do something we believe

they 'should'. When we own our own decisions, viewpoints, actions and are also willing to own the consequences, we become less dependent on others to tell us how to act, what to do etc. and we are able to make decisions for ourselves more clearly and easily. If we don't allow ourselves or others the 'right to pass', we are at risk of living our lives in a dependent, almost 'addicted' way, relying on others to tell us what to do. And we can also then expect others to do the same.



4. **Do not volunteer others** – this Principle is similar to the one above and the next one as it relates to 'Ownership' (see Page 3). Many conversations include people 'volunteering' others to do something or act in a certain way. If we have signed up for a job then we have volunteered ourselves to do what the job requires. But if we have bought a new car, found a new partner, taken some other action in our life, and we are told by others 'what we should do' in relation to these, it can often lead to a destructive conflict particularly if the other person is very persistent and we are very resistant.

We often don't acknowledge we have the right to pass and they are just expressing their view, however persistent. This Principle asks us to consider where we are doing the same thing. Where do we persistently volunteer others to do things because we feel we know what's best for them? Importantly, where has this led to a destructive conflict? This is very common between family members but is also true in many other situations. We may be convinced we are right. And we may find all the proof. But we are trying to take ownership from the other person, we are trying to take their power to make their own decisions, we are not treating them with respect, we are not acknowledging their right to pass. It's not surprising if it leads to their resistance, possibly they stop talking to us or argue with us - and a destructive conflict arises.

5. **Speak only for ourselves (speak in the 'I')** – communication will often include statements such as 'Everyone thinks.....' or 'We are all so bad at talking to each other in today's society' or 'We should all protest against nuclear power'. To speak in such a way is to presume to be able to own what others think and feel. I may not feel I am bad at talking to people, I may agree with the use of nuclear power. If someone presumes to speak for me when I haven't agreed to it, I am likely to feel

angry or worried that I am being misrepresented and worried about the consequences that may lead to for me.



So when I speak for others and tell them what they think or feel, there is a risk that I will receive a lot of resistance and people may feel threatened, resentful, angry, fearful as a result of me doing so. I can never know what someone else thinks or feels.....and it is much easier to leave them to speak for themselves than to presume to speak for them.

6. **Speak but not too often or for too long** – You may notice that you are someone who speaks at length about something and sometimes finds that people start to lose interest or want to make excuses and leave. Sometimes we might expect people to be interested in what we have to say but they are not. When we do this we are volunteering them to be interested which, as mentioned above, is likely to lead to difficulties. We may also see someone who **we** think speaks too often or for too long. If we are aware of this in ourselves we can make a conscious effort to allow space for others to speak and try to listen more to what they say. If we see it in others we can consider whether our thoughts and feelings about them speaking for what we think is too often/too long, get in the way of us actually listening to them...in which case they may have to say it all over again!!
7. **Respect CONFIDENTIALITY** – If part of your difficult situation involves people sharing information about you that you would prefer to be private, or if others have a concern about you sharing their private information, the Coach can help you to consider what it is that led you to breach confidentiality about another person to help you find ways of not doing this in the future. They can also help you to consider ways of keeping your own personal information confidential if you feel ‘gossip’ has led to a breach of confidentiality about you.
8. **Challenge the behaviour and not the person** – Often, a dispute or argument can lead to people ‘labelling’ each other as ‘unreasonable’ or ‘a bully’ or, ‘stupid’ or ‘racist’ or ‘sexist’ or ‘a pain’ or other words may be used. This is ‘challenging the person and not the behaviour’. What this fails to do is to describe what happened that led to the problem.

When we talk about the behaviour and not the person such as ‘When you shouted the other day I became quite frightened’ we are starting a constructive discussion about what happened as we can then perhaps ask someone why they shouted or continue to discuss other aspects of what happened. This avoids the need to label people, which often simply leads to defensiveness or another label is said back in return. (You’re a bully – you’re too soft) If this happens, there is, again, no discussion about what actually happened and therefore very little chance of resolving the difficulty. Challenging the behaviour not the person means personal comments can be left out and the actual behaviour that people have felt upset by is discussed.

9. **Acknowledge that it is OK to make mistakes as they are an opportunity for learning** –

If we can accept that something we have done has not worked and may have upset someone then we are more likely to look again at what we did and see if there would be a better way of doing things in the future. If we can’t accept that we make mistakes we may become defensive even if deep down we know something didn’t work, as we think that if we acknowledge we made a mistake something bad will happen. In an environment where mistakes aren’t ok, something bad is usually happening all the time as it is not a nice environment to be in. If we can learn from our own mistakes, which can only occur if we acknowledge that it’s ok to make them, then we are also likely to be able to accept mistakes in others and develop a more creative, trusting relationship with them.



**Some Principles will be harder for us to practise than others and it will be different for each of us which Principles that applies to.**

## Communication skills:

The practise of the following skills is informed by the Principles and the Underlying Philosophies mentioned above. Using them to guide how we communicate can help us to do so more effectively and they also help us to respond to difficult situations and conflicts more constructively.

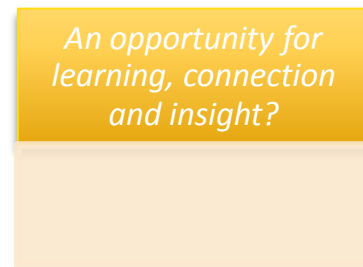
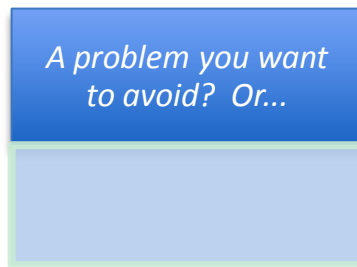
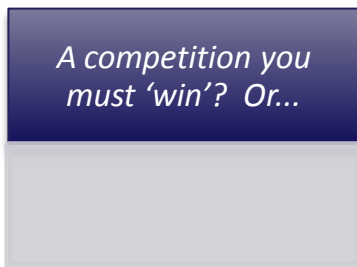
- **Listening** – when talking with someone do we listen without interrupting (Principle 2)? Do we presume we know what someone is thinking or feeling when we are listening to them (Principle 5) rather than ask them?
- **Summarising** – do we summarise back to people what they have said or include what they have said in our responses to people? If we don't do this people cannot be sure we have heard them. Many conversations end with people having completely different understandings of what has been said because summaries have not occurred. Arguments can easily then follow about what 'was / was not said' because a summary was not used to check whether something had been understood or not. It is always better to summarise what people said *using the words they used* rather than make up our own words....as our own words are not a summary of what *they* said.
- **Questioning** – When we ask questions are we really 'asking questions' or are we actually trying to volunteer people to do things that we think they should? 'Why don't you.....?', 'Have you tried....?' 'Don't you think you should.....?' are, strictly, questions but really they are suggestions. If we use these phrases we are volunteering others to do things which often mean they feel they have to 'justify' why they don't want to. Asking open questions (How could you..?, What would you...?) helps people to decide their own way forward and you will find your Conflict Coach using many of these to help you decide your own answers to your difficulties rather than volunteering you to do things that fit with their ideas. In fact your Conflict Coach is likely to say they have no ideas for how you should deal with your situation as they believe the only person who can know is you.





## The 3 main ways in which conflict is responded to:

Try to observe whether you think you are approaching your difficulty as:



### **A competition you must win**

*If you are determined to be proved 'right' in a difficult situation or conflict this may work out for you, but often the determination to 'win' a conflict can lead to many difficulties in other areas of our lives. We may lose sleep, become irritable with our loved ones, feel unsupported if people don't always agree we are 'right', lose friends who don't agree with us, or feel worn out by the 'fight'. This is a very normal way of responding to difficult situations but ultimately it doesn't work in resolving a situation and if it is only responded to in this way a situation can last for a long time and still remain a cause of stress in our lives. Your Conflict Coach won't tell you that you are 'wrong' to do this, they will help you to decide whether you think it is how you are responding, just so that you can stand back and see it. Often we are so caught up in a conflict we lose track of how we are responding. Conflict Coaching helps you to gain self-awareness about this and once that has started to occur you are able to move forward and start using the third approach to your difficulty (see below).*

### **A problem you want to avoid**

*We can often think it is too painful or threatening to deal with a conflict or difficult situation and so we avoid dealing with it. Usually the problem doesn't go away and can get worse. Even if the problem does go away then, because we haven't learned how to deal with it, it is likely to return in a different situation, with a different person in the future. So, just like with trying to 'win' a conflict, avoiding it doesn't lead to a resolution. Sometimes we will be getting more and more angry that the problem is not going away that eventually we 'explode' and may do something more dangerous or regrettable than if we had responded much earlier. Again, your Conflict Coach will not say you are doing anything 'wrong' if you do this. We all respond in this way with different conflicts. In many conflicts we will respond in both of these ways. What the Conflict Coach will help you with, and in time you will help yourself with, is becoming aware that you are responding that way so you can step back from the situation, instead of always trying to turn away from it or hide from it.*

*When you have gained that awareness of how you are responding you can then start to consider the third approach.....*

## **Conflict as an opportunity for learning, connection and insight**

*You will not be able to just 'turn off' your competition or avoidance responses to your difficulty, but once you realise you are responding in these ways, you can start to look at whether you can **also** treat the conflict as an opportunity. Consider the following questions in relation to your difficulty:*



- *Learning: Can I **learn** something from this situation? For example, how to prevent it happening again in the future? How could I change the way I communicated something so that a similar misunderstanding doesn't occur again? Etc.*
- *Could I gain a '**connection**' with the other person over this? Could I, perhaps, understand why this was a problem for them, to empathise with their perspective on it. It doesn't mean I have to agree with their perspective, we all have different views on things. But can I at least be open to understanding how they could see it that way.*
- *What **personal insights** can I gain from this? How am I responding to this? What is going on in me? Do I feel defensive? Do I feel offended? Do I feel foolish? Is my response aggressive? Is it to be a 'victim'? Is this situation similar to other situations I've found myself in before? How did I resolve it then? If I didn't, what could I do differently this time that might help me to resolve it?*

*The third response is entirely focused on you. You are the only person who you can control. The third approach is an empowering perspective from which to approach your difficulty as it sees conflict as an opportunity for growth, learning, development. It may not mean your difficulty actually gets resolved but you will learn a lot about yourself so that you will be less likely to have a similar destructive conflict in the future and you will be able to deal with the present one and future ones more effectively, with less stress and less damage to your relationships and quality of life.*

***Well done for acknowledging that the answers to your difficulties lie within you and thank you for requesting Conflict Coaching to help you find those answers.***



## Evaluation follow up:

**Please note** that we would like to do an evaluation of your experience a few weeks after you have had your coaching session(s). We usually do this by telephone to ensure confidentiality.

There will just be a few scripted questions that we will ask and hope not to take more than about 5 minutes. We would be very grateful for your assistance with this as it helps us to monitor and improve the quality of our service.

Please let us know if you **do not** want us to do this.



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