



Massachusetts
Municipal
Association



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Effective Conflict Management: De-escalation Strategies

November 2, 2022



Presentation Topics

1. What is conflict and why does it happen

2. Examples of conflict in municipal settings

3. Conflict de-escalation techniques

4. Conflict management skills

5. Strategies to prevent conflict

Healthy vs. unhealthy conflict

Healthy	Unhealthy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parties respect other's viewpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of respect for different view
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calm, non-defensive approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anger, yelling, defensiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindset: solution/compromise focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindset: wanting it my way
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not taking it personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is personal!
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict with positive focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict for the sake of conflict

Why does conflict happen?

Differences in personalities

Competitive nature

Inadequate communication

Difference in values, experiences

Perceived performance issues



Examples of conflict

- 1. Contentious public meetings**
- 2. Public vs. employees**
- 3. Employee vs. employee**

A row of five yellow pawns, resembling chess pieces, are lined up on a dark wooden surface. The pawns are slightly out of focus, with the one in the foreground being sharper. They are arranged in a slightly staggered line, receding into the background.

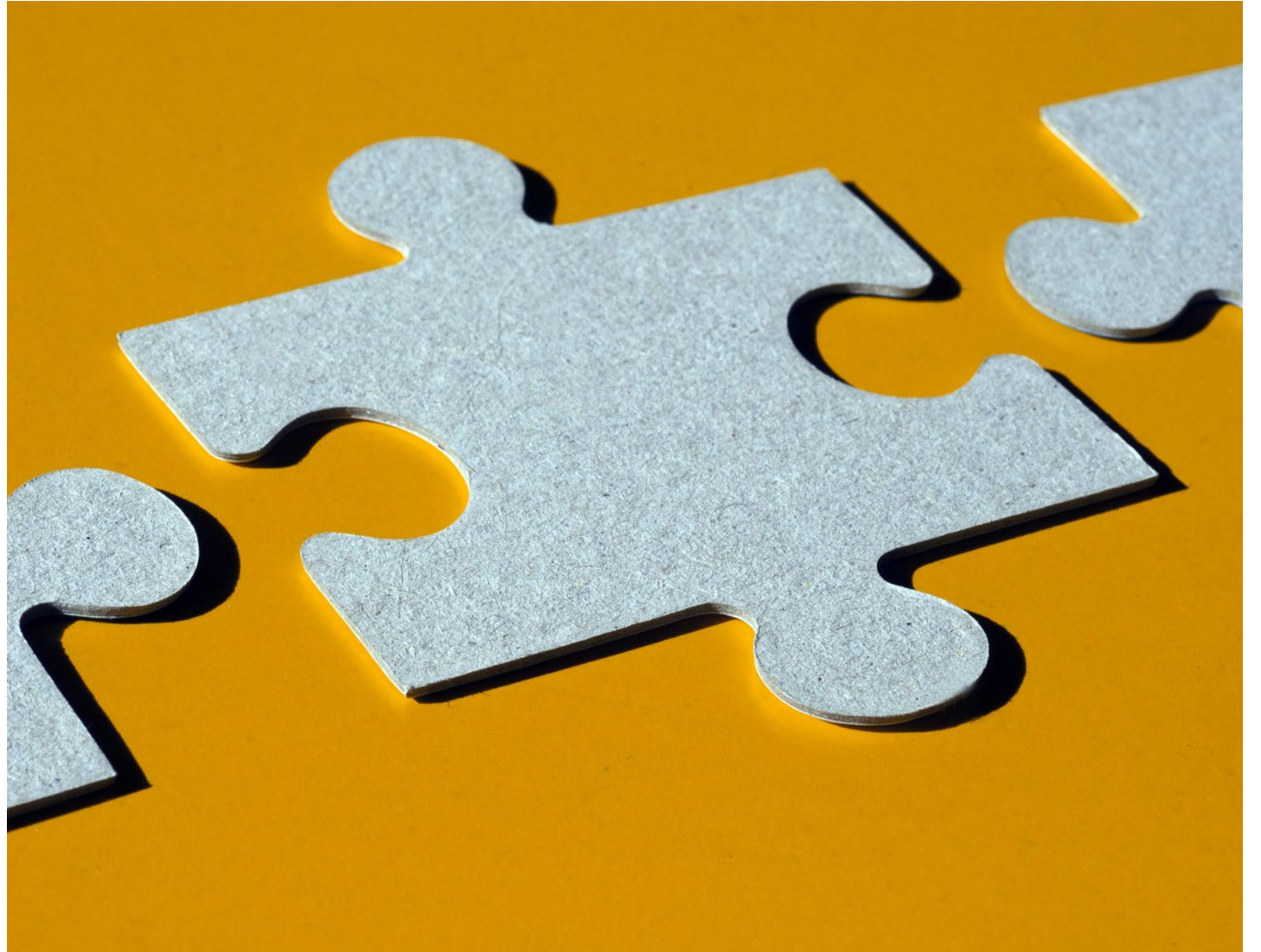
De-escalation Considerations

1. Think about **SAFETY**
2. Involving another person if appropriate
3. Walking away (when appropriate)
4. Controlling your emotions
5. Focus on the goal: (de-escalation)

Remember

What drives peoples' behavior is often not obvious

While the behavior turns us off (or makes us angry ourselves), all of us can relate to the universal emotions



When the amygdala gets in our way

It's just a little part of our brain that processes fearful and threatening stimuli.

Once it's activated, the reasoning side of the brain shuts down.

At that point, no one is listening to logic



What you do next can make a real difference

- Constituents can be angry or frustrated by the situation.
- Some constituents are hostile and are intent on belittling or demeaning you. It's no longer about the issue, it's personal.
- Your job is to prevent an angry person from becoming hostile **by responding instead of reacting.**



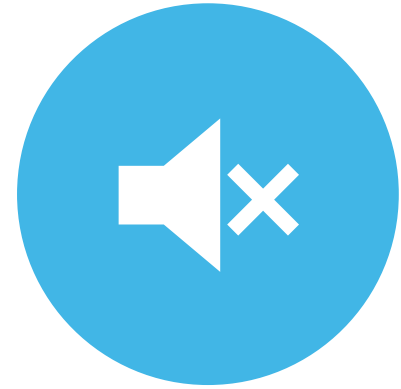
Helpful hints



**NEVER ATTEMPT TO
ADDRESS AN
EMOTIONALLY CHARGED
PERSON WITH LOGIC.**



**GIVE THE PERSON A TIME
OUT TO COLLECT
THEMSELVES (AND
YOURSELF TOO).**



**ONLY WHEN THE PERSON
IS CALMER, WILL THEY
BE ABLE TO TAKE IN
INFORMATION.**

Anger v. Abuse

Where's the line?

Voice level
Harassment
Demeaning tone
Physically, psychologically
threatening

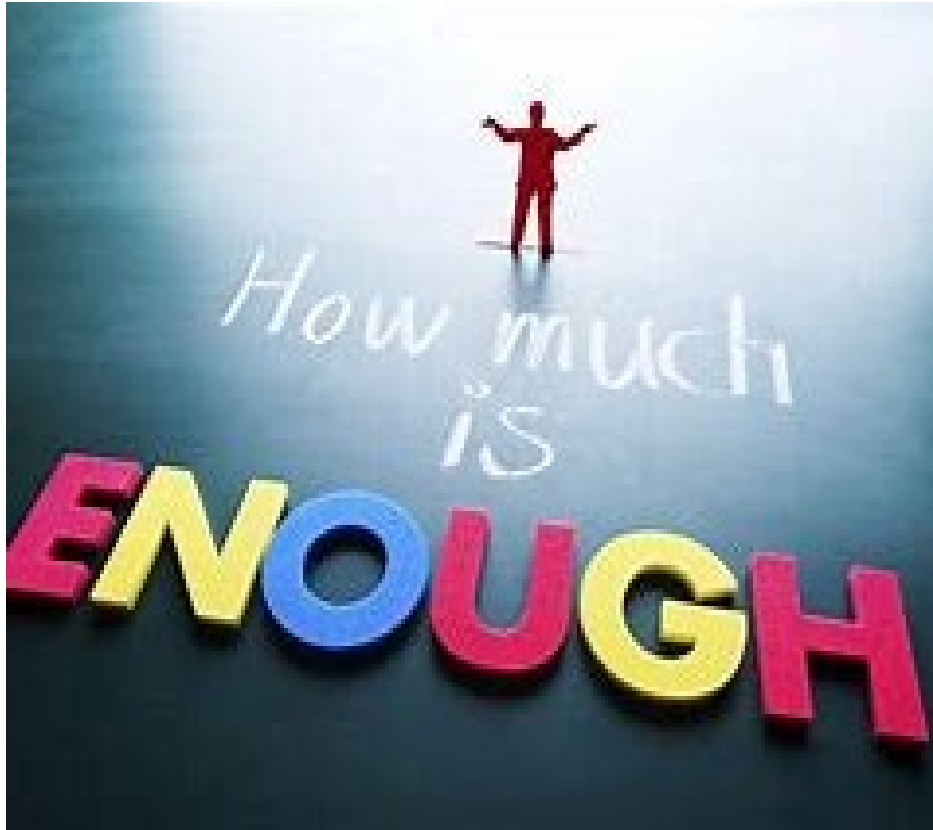
SHIFT FROM *THE PROBLEM* TO
AN INDICTMENT OF YOU AS A
PERSON



Ending an Abusive Conversation

How much is an elected or appointed official be expected to tolerate in the name of service?





What to say when the going gets tough

- ❑ "I'm not comfortable with how this conversation is going. Can we hit reset?"
- ❑ "I'd like to see if we can make this conversation work. If not, I'm going to suggest we take it up another time."
- ❑ "If you continue (offensive behavior) I will leave the room/house/ ask you to leave."

When you have to say *No*

- ☐ Avoid saying, “It’s the policy.”
- ☐ Offer options: “I wish I could do that. This is what we can do.”
- ☐ Use self-disclosure: “I’ve felt that way too.”
- ☐ Ask open ended questions: “How will that work for you?”
- ☐ The Broken Record Technique
- ☐ Forward to Manager
- ☐ Suggest they Write a Letter

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey cardigan over a white top, is holding a black smartphone in her right hand. The screen of the phone displays the word "No." in large, white, bold, sans-serif font. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage. The image is partially obscured by a light green wavy shape on the left side of the slide.

No.

Enhancing Our Interpersonal Skills

1. Sharpening Emotional Intelligence (self-awareness)
 2. Understanding and managing conflict
 3. Soliciting feedback
 4. Exuding positivity
 5. COMMUNICATION
- 
- A row of white chess pawns is visible in the background, slightly out of focus. In the foreground, a single red pawn stands prominently, facing forward. The pawns are arranged in a line that recedes into the distance.

Being Proactive

- 1. Talk about conflict**
- 2. Understand your conflict style**
- 3. Engage early when there is appearance of conflict**
- 4. Don't take it personal (QTIP)**

What helps
you?

Empowerment tips

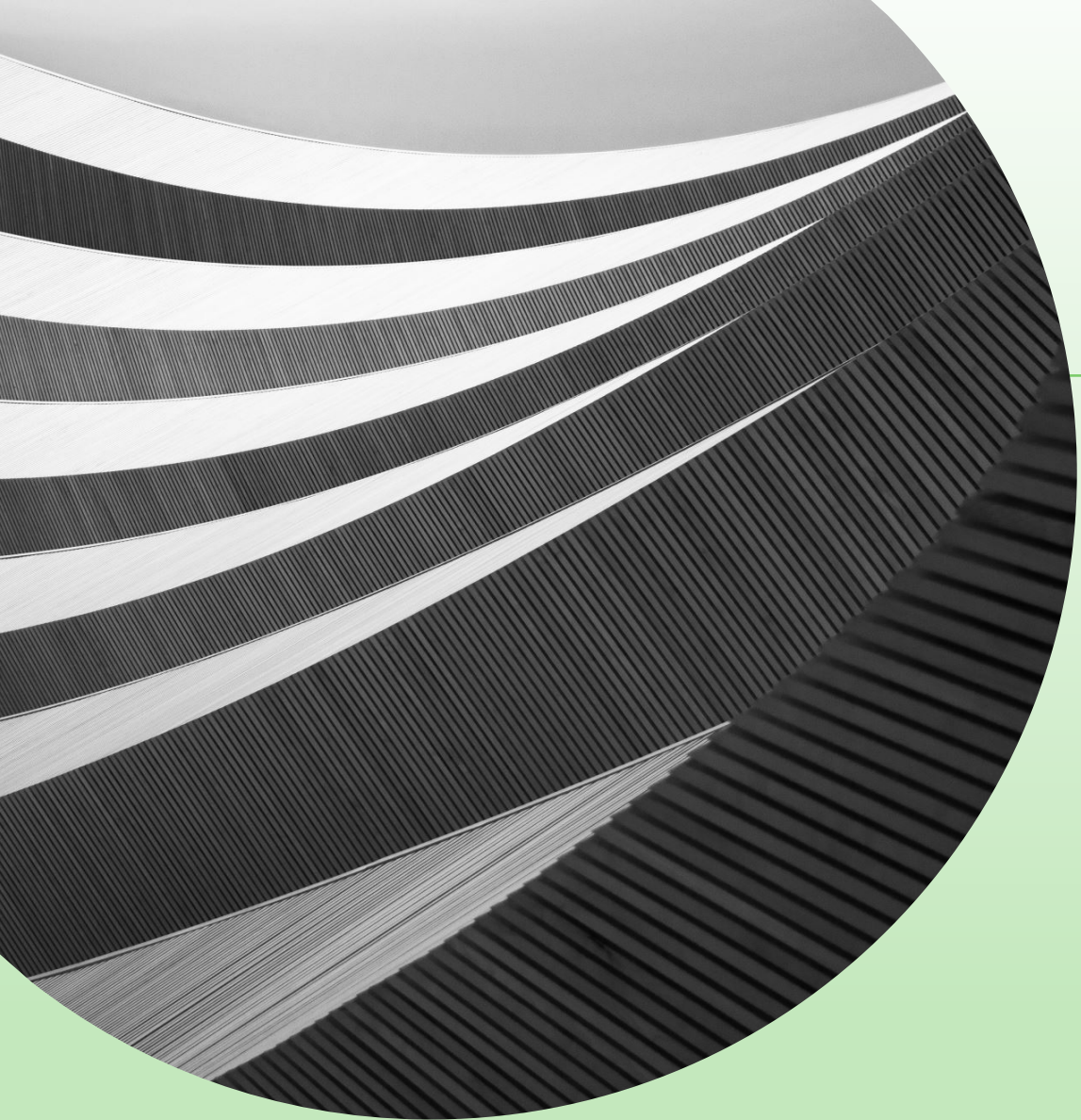
Team support/Talk with your boss/ Call 911

Leadership/organizational backup; 'Open Door' policy

Mental health break

Communicating your needs

Being resilient and remembering the Big Picture



Closing principals to keep in mind

It's normal to
feel defensive,
annoyed
sometimes.

We can't change
people. We can
only control
ourselves.

We never really
know what's
going on with
people.

Take Care Of
You

Wrap Up



What's one strategy you can put into action when dealing with challenging situations/people?

How the MIIA EAP can help

1. Training
2. Management Consultation
3. Conflict Resolution Services
4. Counseling and Coaching

