



Maintaining Effective Relations with coworkers, colleagues, and supervisors



Part 1 – Assessing Impact

Welcome. This module, *Maintaining Effective Relations – Part 1*, is the first in a series of short recordings designed to help you to better understand conflict and build practical skills for responding effectively when tension arises in work or academic settings. Our goal is to give you strategies to resolve situations quickly and with confidence.

Conflict Management Office – How We Can Help

- Supports faculty, staff, and students
- Guidance for individuals or groups
- Conflict coaching and mediation
- Help preparing for difficult conversations
- Guidance on harassment or discrimination concerns

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These short modules can help you become familiar with conflict resolution tools and strategies, but even more importantly they can help you know where to go to seek help when you need it. These recordings are provided by the Conflict Management Office, so I will begin by introducing you to this office and their role on campus.

The Conflict Management Office supports all members of the University of Waterloo community—faculty, staff, and students. They offer guidance to individuals or groups experiencing strained relationships or conflict. Services include conflict coaching for individuals, mediation for small groups, and help preparing for difficult conversations with a colleague or supervisor. They can also provide guidance if you have concerns related to harassment or discrimination.

In addition, they'll help you understand what options are available and work with you to choose the approach that best supports your goals.

If you have questions or want to learn more, you can contact Lynn Long or Jeremy de Boer.



Photo by Alex Green

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Photo by Alex Green: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/thoughtful-ethnic-woman-thinking-on-solution-of-problem-5699854/>

The staff in our office have extensive experience supporting individuals who are concerned about strained relationships with colleagues or supervisors. We understand the diverse power dynamics that exist in academic settings and how these can sometimes create barriers to resolving conflict. Our goal is to help you navigate these challenges and find constructive ways forward.



Photo by DS stories

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Photo by DS stories: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/human-shape-blocks-on-wooden-seesaw-6990404/>

We understand that power imbalances can make communication difficult. When a relationship is strong, a power imbalance may not seem to have much influence over that relationship but when difficulties arise the person with less power often starts to weigh the risks of speaking up. These perceived risks, such as fear of consequences or reprisal, can become real barriers to resolving conflict quickly and effectively.

Barriers to Effective Early Resolution Attempts



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These barriers can make it hard to take the initiative and respond when difficulties arise. They don't just delay your response—they can also reduce its effectiveness.

They can make the idea of responding so uncomfortable and frightening that you may be tempted to put off a response off in hopes that “things will get better” on their own. Unfortunately, failing to address these tension will more often lead to relationships breakdown which can have serious consequences.

Barriers to Effective Early Resolution Attempts

ASSUMPTIONS

HIGH EMOTIONS

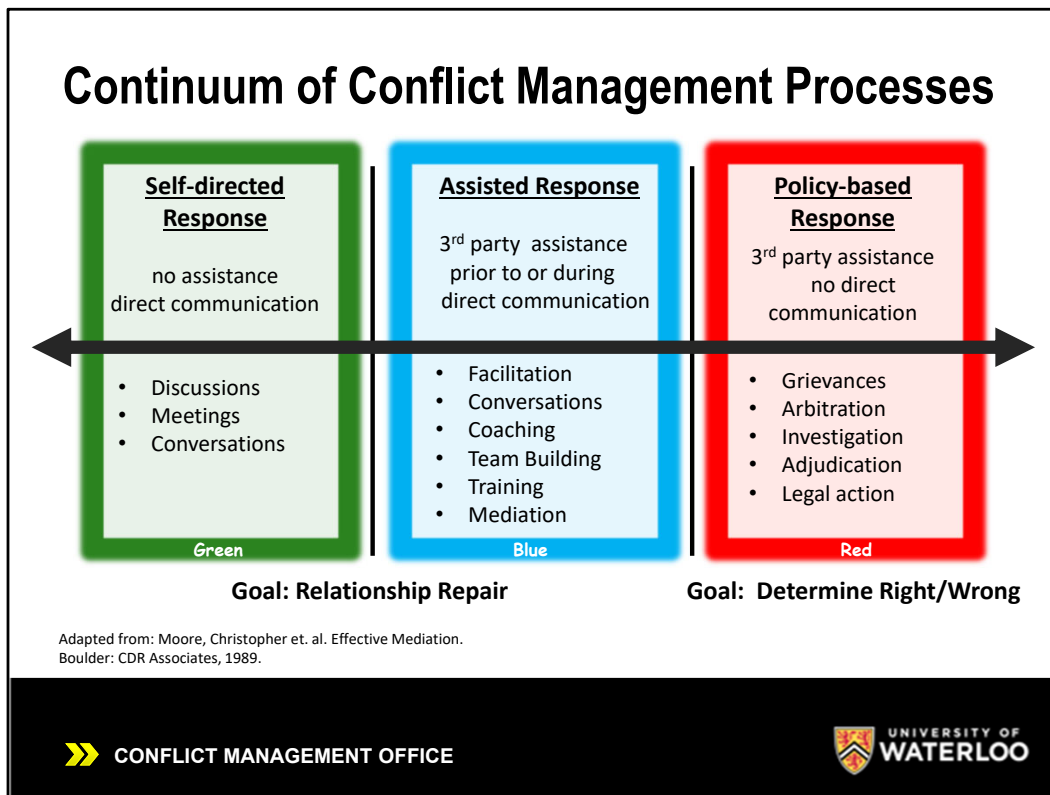
NEGATIVE FILTERS

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In later modules, we'll look at barriers like assumptions, high emotions, and negative filters. We'll share tools and strategies designed to help you overcome these barriers, open lines of communication, and strengthen relationships.

Before we do that, I'll introduce you to an important tool that will help contextualize every strategy we explore.



The Continuum of Conflict Management Processes. This continuum is designed to help you assess how a conflict is impacting you and others so that you can choose an appropriate path forward.

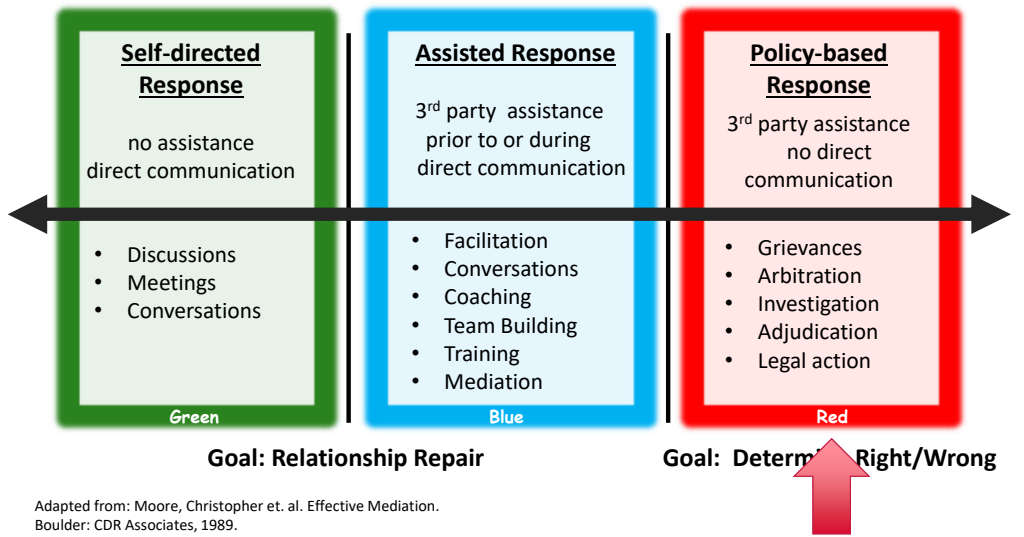
This continuum has three zones: a Green Zone, a Blue Zone and a Red Zone. Let's begin by discussing the Green Zone.

The Green Zone involves conflict that has a mild impact on you. You feel comfortable responding on your own and talking directly to the other person.

The Blue Zone involves conflict that has a greater negative impact on you or the other party. You are not comfortable responding on your own and feel that it would be beneficial to invite a third person into the process. This could involve conflict coaching, a facilitated conversation, or mediation. It could also include training or relationship-building activities. The goal in both Green and Blue Zone responses is **repairing the relationship**.

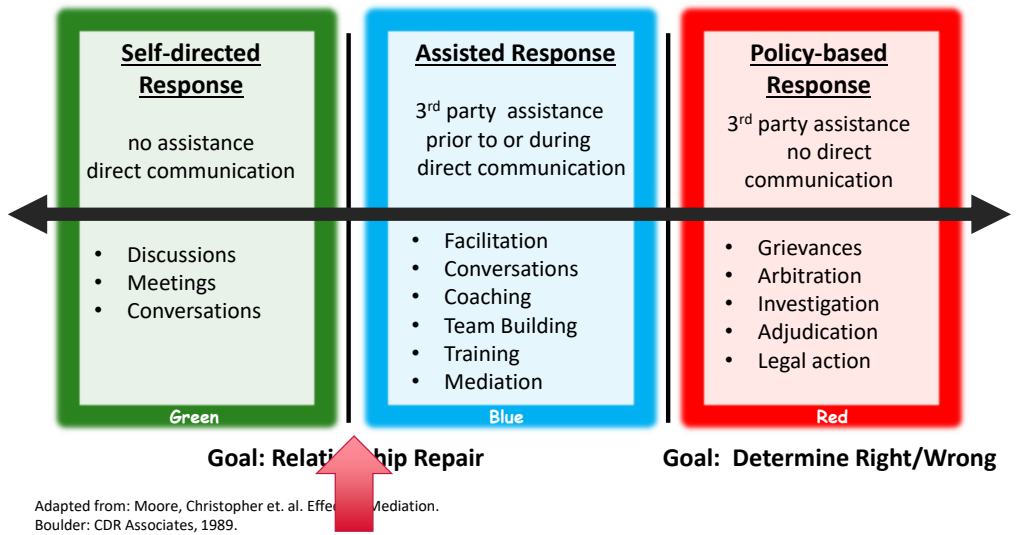
The Red Zone is different. Conflicts that fall within the Red Zone are conflicts that have a severe emotional impact, and these require policy-based responses, like a Policy 33 complaint and may lead to an investigation. The goal of Red Zone responses is to determine right and wrong.

Continuum of Conflict Management Processes



In many cases, individuals do not consult our office or seek services until the conflict has reached the Red Zone—when relationships have broken down and the impacts are serious. This is why early action is so important.

Continuum of Conflict Management Processes



Responding to conflict early—in the Green Zone or Blue Zone—opens the door to solutions that not only address the problem but also preserve the relationship and build skills for handling future challenges.

Future modules will cover tools and resources for the Green Zone, strategies for the Blue Zone, and how to recognize and respond when a situation crosses into the Red Zone.

Before we wrap up, I'd like to leave you with a few points to reflect on.

Reflect:

Consider a difficult situation that you have experienced recently:

- **Would you place it in the Green Zone, Blue Zone or Red Zone? Why?**
- If it is in the Green or Blue Zones, what could happen that might push it into the Red Zone?
- Is there a power imbalance present in the relationship? If so, how does that impact where you have placed it on the continuum?
- Have you been able to respond to the situation? How effective was your response?
- Could you have responded earlier? What kept you from doing so?

Consider the following questions, which are also included in the Module 1 worksheet that you can download and print. You may want to pause this video to jot down your answers as we go. Let's begin.

Consider a difficult situation that you have experienced recently:

- Would you place it in the Green Zone, Blue Zone or Red Zone? Is it a situation that you feel comfortable responding to on your own or would you feel more comfortable seeking some advice or coaching first? Has the emotional impact been mild, moderate or severe?

Reflect:

Consider a conflict situation that you have experienced recently:

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- **If it is in the Green or Blue Zones, what could happen that might push it into the Red Zone?**
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- Have you been able to respond to the situation? How effective was your response?
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- If you placed the situation in the Green or Blue Zones, what type of response or events might push it into the Red Zone?
- Is there a power imbalance present in the relationship? If so, how did that impact where you have placed it on the continuum? If you were having a similar conflict with a colleague, would you have placed it differently?
- Have you been able to respond to the situation? How effective was your response? What factors played a role in making your response more or less effective?
- Could you have responded earlier? What barriers kept you from doing so?

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Photo by Olya Kobruseva: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/question-marks-on-paper-crafts-5428836/>

Remember if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like to access any of the services offered by our office, contact Jeremy de Boer or Lynn Long.

In our next module we will be discussing strategies and tools for responding to Green Zone conflict.