

Conflict in the workplace

Differing viewpoints often arise in small businesses and it is imperative to address any concerns immediately as they are likely to escalate and become more difficult to navigate. Once a conflict escalates beyond a certain level, a professional mediator who is impartial and not associated with the dispute may be required. LifeConnect can provide mediation or counselling to effected parties before it escalates. The points below may help you to understand how far along your conflict in the workplace has progressed.

There are usually three levels evident in conflict dynamics:

1. Joint problem solving - parties have shared aims and achieve what they both want
2. Negotiation - parties have different aims and strive towards a win-win result
3. Conflict - parties have no shared aims and there is a winner and a loser.

Where both parties have shared aims it is easier to negotiate, however, once you reach the point where no one agrees on anything, a mediator will be required to sift through the points in question. The following stages will help you understand where a conflict is heading.

Stage One: Negotiation

- Discussion
- Debate
- Actions to work through

Stage Two: Consider a mediator or arbitrator

- Serious - parties rigid and have a fixed image of the result they require
- Element of pride - weaker party/loss of face
- Strategy of threat - us or them argument

Stage three: Conflict: heading to court

- No sense of humanity - subversive, rebellious
- Undermining nerve - stop work, reduce hours
- Fight to the death - heading to court