

## APPENDIX B

# HANDLING CONFLICT

## DIFFUSING CONFLICT

### Twelve Tips for Conflict Resolution

1. Identify and articulate the conflict without pointing fingers. Don't try to find out who "started it." Instead, work together to find a solution.
2. Don't ignore the problem. Clubs sometimes ignore conflicts or assume – or hope – that they will miraculously disappear. While the latter is a possibility, conflict generally takes effort to bring about resolution.
3. Separate issues. Often when people are troubled by one thing, they confuse it with something else. Getting to the root of the problem will not only save time and hurt feelings, but will make solving the conflict that much easier.
4. Follow up with a positive and constructive suggestion on how to solve the problem.
5. Attack problems, not people. There should be no winners and no losers, just a solution.
6. Listen to the other person and try to understand his or her concerns without judging. Remember: other people's needs may be valid – even when they are different from your own.
7. Tell the other person about your concerns. Start your sentences with "I," not "You." Especially avoid, "You always," followed by a re-cap of past disputes. Focus on the future.
8. Be respectful. Avoid name-calling and inflammatory words. Use language that leads to a solution of the problem rather than escalate the level of anger.
9. Be aware when you are too emotionally involved. When you are, delegate your authority to someone who isn't. Just as no parent or child would perform surgery on a family member, appoint surrogates when emotions run too high.
10. Know your objective. What do you want the other person to do? How do you want him or her to change behavior? What are your own needs? What are the needs of the club? Be specific. Be ready to listen and to work on meeting needs of both sides.
11. Empower all parties in the conflict. For people to "buy into" a decision, they need to be a part of the decision-making process. If they feel that they have been left out, that others didn't understand the facts of the situation or fully listen to "their side" of the story, there will be resistance to whatever decision is made.
12. Don't be afraid to seek mediation or outside advice. Your RS or other outside volunteers may be able to offer just the impartiality needed to resolve a thorny problem.

## **DISSENSION PRACTICE**

As DCs we want to enjoy a relationship with parents where all problems are minor, handled quickly and with good will. But we don't always do a good job of preparing for problems. Many times, parents' instinctive reaction is to defend their child's behavior, and under the stress of confrontation, the relationship with the DC or instructor may become blurred and strained. Both sides would be better served with established guidelines. Draw up and discuss a document such as the one below at a meeting early in the year. Then ask that your parents refer to it as needed.

### **When a problem arises, should I call the DC or go to my child's meeting in person?**

Minor issues can generally be addressed successfully over the phone, but talking directly with the DC is probably better when a major problem arises. If you feel a face-to-face visit is necessary, be sure to schedule the meeting. Appearing unannounced means that you may have to wait until the DC is available.

### **I'm afraid using my name when I report a problem might lead to retribution directed toward my child.**

Parents often express concern that their child will suffer retribution if his or her name is associated with a complaint. On the contrary, DCs and other volunteers appreciate it when you present your concerns in a way that shows you are willing to solve problems, and they can assure you that retribution is not tolerated. Talking directly to the DC, rather than first discussing the problem with other parents or volunteers, lends credibility to your complaint and allows for quick follow-up to ensure that the problem has been investigated thoroughly and resolved properly.

### **When a problem comes up, how should I deal with it?**

The best place to begin is with the DC, who is likely to have the most information about the problem. Starting with the DC also demonstrates your respect. If you cannot find satisfaction at this level, you should speak with the Regional Supervisor. Try to keep an open mind, get the facts, and write them down. You will then be in a better position to clearly discuss what you see as the issue to be resolved.

### **Who should I believe when told about an incident that happened at Pony Club?**

Often, the conflict and emotions that arise from an incident cloud the retelling. You should try to look for the facts and suspend judgment until you have heard and considered all sides of the story.

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### **What's the best way to contact my DC about a problem?**

Let the DC know by phone or in person that you have a problem you wish to discuss. It's a good idea to have prepared notes, including questions, clarifications, and specific points. Please try to listen without interruption to the DC's response, while taking additional notes if necessary. It's important to avoid confusion and maintain civil contact with the DC about your child. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the discussion, tell the DC that you plan to bring the matter to the attention of the Regional Supervisor.

### **What's the best strategy for contacting the RS about a problem?**

Generally, you should either call or write to the RS. Whichever you choose, be sure to let the RS know that you have spoken with the DC. If there was a discussion or letters written, use your notes and other documentation to describe the outcome. If for some reason there was no discussion (and this should virtually never be the case), be prepared to explain why the DC was bypassed. In either case, understand that the RS will not address your problem until he or she has spoken with the DC, who may be invited to sit in on future conversations with you.