

Resolving conflict in your pharmacy

You can't avoid or eliminate conflict in the workplace but you can learn how to respond and resolve it.



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Different people have different opinions, beliefs and values. We all see the world from our own viewpoints and sometimes these viewpoints clash. Conflict occurs when individuals feel like their needs are not being met and is necessary for individuals to learn and grow through raising issues that need to be addressed.

Conflict that is not addressed or managed will result in decreased productivity, low morale and inappropriate behaviour among staff. Sweeping these issues under the carpet will result in further conflict and have a snowball effect on your business.

How you choose to deal with conflict will depend on what it is and the type of people you are working with. Before you decide what approach to take, consider these tips:

Identify the problem ASAP

Make sure everyone involved understands the issue so they can contribute to finding a collaborative solution. A recent client had issues with a staff manager refusing to take direction and leadership from a new manager. Through identifying the issues they were able to find a solution that benefited both parties rather than simply assuming things will fall into place.

Timing is of the essence

Choose the right time to discuss conflict. Avoid leaving it until the end of the day when staff can be tired and irritable. Similarly avoid the end of the week, where staff can often carry the conflict home where it affects their personal lives. Time off can also impact on the conflict as it is built up over time with increasing frustration levels.

One issue at a time

This reassures everyone involved that their needs are being addressed individually rather than as a group. Focus on each issue giving it the attention it requires – it's best to find a quiet place where there are no interruptions.

Don't ignore past issues

If there has been another lingering problem it needs to be addressed as a separate issue as soon as possible.

Take turns in talking

It is important that everyone

gets an equal say and equal time to talk. It is natural for staff to get angry in moments like this – try and limit it to one angry individual at a time before it turns into a screaming match!

Avoiding blaming

Blaming a third party will only accelerate anger levels and detract from the actual issue. It's best for those involved to describe their point of view in terms of how they feel and think, eg, it's more productive to use phrases like "I feel" or "I think" than "you did this".

Validation

Everyone wants to be validated and understood. Every few minutes the listener should reiterate what the speaker has said, showing them they have heard and understood their point of view. This can be done without agreeing with the person – showing you understand how they feel does not necessarily mean you feel the same way.

Take a break

If things get too heated, take a break and arrange a time to pick up where you left off. This diffuses anger levels and shows you are serious about resolving the issue as soon as possible. Make sure that the discussion is continued as soon as possible.

Face obstacles head on

If your staff are hesitant to discuss issues, try and probe them as to why. They may fear rejection or increased hostility in the workplace. Reassure them that this isn't the case and you're dedicated to resolving issues.

It's okay to agree to disagree – in some cases, it's the only option. If there is no common ground or room for collaboration this may be the best option to keep all parties happy.

An effective conflict management strategy will reflect significant improvements in the team morale, fostering open communication channels for a more innovative and productive pharmacy. **R[®]**



How do people deal with conflict?

There are five main ways to deal with conflict, though the success of each depends on the individuals and the problem.

Avoidance – this is a very common approach. The conflict is ignored in the hope it will go away. This can be done by either cautiously tiptoeing around an issue, delaying the opportunity to discuss the conflict or simply retreating from the situation all together. Ignoring the conflict can be beneficial with minor issues, however it can magnify conflict that is built up over time.

Competitive players – this is when an individual competes against another to get things their way rather than addressing the source of conflict. This power struggle sees one individual's needs put at the forefront, costing the needs of another based on their position, negotiating and arguing ability or their relationship with other colleagues.

Accommodating players – this is the opposite of competing players, where one individual gives in to another, at their own expense. This self-sacrificing approach is often used to keep the peace in the short-term however can create more problems long-term.

Finding the middle ground – this approach is to find a mutually favourable solution to both parties. Compromising is the half way approach to competing and accommodating. In this situation the conflict has been addressed but on a surface level. Deep investigation as to why the conflict exists is avoided.

Collaboration to win-win – this is where both parties focus on working together – the opposite of avoiding. This is the most in-depth approach as it involves brainstorming and uncovering issues and concerns to find a solution that satisfies both parties. Ideally, this is the most effective way to manage conflict as it's a win-win situation for both parties and also fosters mutual respect and satisfaction.