

# Wellbeing for the Bush

## WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Workplace conflict can occur when there is a personality clash, a misunderstanding, or a misalignment of values. Conflict will always be present in a workplace. However, it's important to seek a resolution and not just bottle things up and let them fester away. Learning to effectively handle conflicts in a productive and healthy way is essential - especially in rural and remote health workplaces.

### Types of workplace conflict



#### Relationship conflict

Arises from differences in personality, style, matters of taste, and even conflict styles. In remote health workplaces, people who would not ordinarily meet in real life are often thrown together in a close environment and must try to get along. It's no surprise, then, that relationship conflict can be common.



#### Value conflict

Can arise from fundamental differences in identities and values, which can include differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs. Although discussion of politics and religion is often taboo in workplaces, disputes about values can arise in the context of work decisions and policies, for example, providing birth control to underage youth.



#### Interest conflict

Can occur when a person's desired outcome conflicts with another person or group's interest. This can be challenging in small remote workplaces as there are often overlapping relationships. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality of information, reporting a concern about a staff member who is also a friend, or working with someone who has close family or relationships within the organisation can present challenges.

*This advice is provided as general information regarding day to day workplace conflict. It is not meant to address issues relating to bullying and harassment or impacts on psychological safety. If you are experiencing these issues seek support through your organisation, professional body or appropriate employee assistance provider. Support is also available 24 hours a day via the Bush Support Line on 1800 805 391.*

## So, what should I do?



### Don't ignore it.

Workplace conflict is unlikely to go away on its own, and, in most cases, ignoring it can make things worse.



### Hold others accountable for their behaviours or actions.

Without coming across as aggressive, name what happened that upset you. For example, "In the team meeting, when you said my idea was a waste of time and would never work and proceeded to list several other 'ideas' I've suggested that you didn't like, I felt (and name the feeling, for example, hurt, upset, ashamed) ..."



### Check in with your own behaviour.

We need to reflect on our own behaviours and hold ourselves accountable for disruptive ones, such as taking sides, splitting or character assassination.



### Invite open and honest conversation.

Approach the other person from a calm and non-judgemental but assertive place.



### Solve the problem that started the conflict.

Find a resolution. This may mean both parties taking some time out to think and ponder, before coming back together to discuss it further.



### Focus on the problem

#### at hand, not past issues.

Stay on track with the issue at hand. It is very easy to get bogged down in historical problems and conflict, which tend to make the current conflict worse.



### Agree on a way forward.

Identify what you expect from each other going forward.

## Prevent and manage workplace conflict<sup>1</sup>

- **Be a good communicator** - Respectful and professional communication of information in the right forum can help ease the number and severity of conflicts that occur.
- **Be the change you want to see** - Set the proper workplace standards. Never underestimate the role you can play in setting examples for professional, respectful practice. It starts with you!
- **Document the conflict and get help** - If it's above-the-line behaviour and serious and unacceptable conflict, ensure you document the conflict, report it and seek support sooner rather than later.
- **Call out bad behaviour** - We're responsible and accountable for our practice so we cannot be bystanders when it happens. We need to make it clearly known that it won't be tolerated.

1. 5 ways to deal with workplace conflict [https://www.anmfsa.org.au/Web/News/2020/5\\_ways\\_to\\_deal\\_with\\_workplace\\_conflict.aspx](https://www.anmfsa.org.au/Web/News/2020/5_ways_to_deal_with_workplace_conflict.aspx)

