When We Don't Agree:

Facing the conflicts that happen when people are planning and working together for a better life.

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WHEN WE DON'T AGREE

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Introduction

In 2009 Preston Learning Disability Partnership Board met up to think about issues affecting people with learning disabilities in Preston, and what the partnership board could do about them.

One issue that was raised was the fact that people with learning disabilities often have different ideas about what they want to do and how they want to live from their parents.

"How can we help people work through these conflicts between people with learning disabilities and their parents?" was the question. Max Neill, a person centred planning coordinator, Safiyyah Patel, a carer's worker and Catherine Dobson met up to discuss the question.

We quickly realised that the picture was far more complicated than that old cliché about parents holding their learning disabled children back through over-protectiveness. We realised that this was a view which ignores the role of services whose traditions, attitudes and expectations are often what are still trapping people in lives that don't make sense, as well as the role of professionals who can sometimes impose programmes and supports that don't match up with what would make sense for the person.

We've found in our practice that it is when people, their families, support staff and professionals work together in a different way, with mutually respectful listening relationships, that people begin to make the best lives for themselves.

Dealing with conflict therefore relies on learning to listen well to the person, and a commitment to create new attitudes and expectations based on new kinds of relationships.

Person centred thinking and planning is a set of skills and techniques designed to help us listen well to what the person is telling us, to explore and expand new possibilities, and to build new kinds of relationships.

This pack aims to provide a few tools to help people understand their conflicts, to build their resilience that will help them cope with conflict better, and to ensure that conflict is handled in a respectful way for all parties, so that the energies created by conflict are directed toward achieving positive change in the person's life.

1. What Is Conflict?

Conflict is part of everyday life. People are different; we see things in different ways. we want different things, we have different cultures and values. We have different interests.

In life, people rely on each other. We are interdependent. We live and work together. We have human relationships, and as Facebook puts it: "It's complicated".

Conflict happens when people do not agree on things. They may be dissatisfied with how things are now. They may be dissatisfied with how things are changing; this brings them into conflict with people who are playing a part in how things are now, or how they are changing.

Relationships

Conflict happens between people who have some kind of relationship with each other. They might have a family relationship. They might be friends or neighbours. They might work or socialise with each other. One person might employ another person, or receive a service from them.

People with disabilities can often rely on other people more because of the extra support they need with their disability.

When people rely on families, friends, professionals and services for support, there are many relationships, and many opportunities for conflict to happen, especially as people grow and how they live their lives changes. Relationships are a source of conflict, but they are also a source of strength.

Power

Our relationships become even more complicated by issues of power.

When it is felt that the person does not have capacity to make all their decisions for themselves, the people around the person can sometimes have very different ideas about how that person might live, and about how much say that person can have in their own life. Even when it is clear that the person can make decisions about their own lives, people with power do not always listen to them.
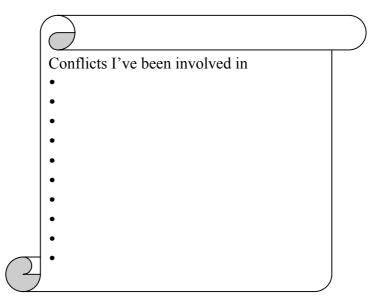
Sources of power:
- Control of money and resources
- Legal power
- Family relationships
- Professional qualifications
- Position in an organisation
- Tradition
- Knowledge of the system
- Knowledge about the person

Winning inclusion in the community, winning more choice and control, winning interesting productive lives for people who traditionally have been excluded from these rights will not happen without change, without conflicts of interest, without shifts in power, without conflict.

A world without conflict would be a world that could never change or progress. Our lives are like that too.

Positive and Negative Conflict

Make a list of conflicts and disagreements you have been involved in.

Conflicts I've been involved in

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Which were negative? Which were positive?

What were the key differences between negative conflicts and the ones that were ultimately more positive? Are there ways that you have turned conflicts that seemed negative into conflicts that were ultimately positive?

Negative conflicts	Positive conflicts

Ways that we could change negative conflicts into more positive ones.

Most people see conflict as something negative that must be avoided or 'resolved'. They are half right. There is a lot of conflict that is negative. When conflict becomes personal, when it unleashes deep emotions, when it results in communication breaking down conflict can stop progress, result in deadlock, make people feel trapped, frustrated, disempowered.

Conflict however also has such a tremendously positive side that it has been described as the 'gadfly of thought'. For many successful people and organisations, conflict can be a source of tremendous energy, a motivator, an engine for their creativity. When we approach conflict, we need to ask ourselves not 'how can we resolve conflict and get everyone to agree' (as this is a very rare outcome indeed!), but:

- What are the gifts and strengths of the different parties in this conflict (especially those on the other side from me?)
- What is important to the different parties in this conflict?'
- What will keep people safe in this conflict?
- What will ensure everyone's voice gets heard and respected?
- Which points of view are not being heard in the conflict?
- What are the points of agreement which can be acted on straight away?
- What can we learn from this discussion that will help the person move toward a better life?
- Can we create a shared vision that will encourage everyone to think and act together cooperatively?
- What do we need to do to prevent conflict becoming negative and blocking, or to turn negative conflict into something more positive?

Signs of Negative Conflict

- Loss of motivation
- Sarcasm
- 'Challenging Behaviours'
- Dissatisfaction
- 'Broken record conversations'
- Communication breakdowns
- Retreating behind titles and roles
- Illness
- More 'bad days' fewer 'good days'
- Becoming discouraged by obstacles
- Loss of respect for other parties
- A feeling of 'victor and vanquished'
- A feeling of deadlock and frustration
- No listening, no action, or actions that make no sense

Signs of Positive Conflict

- Disagreement motivates the group to learn more
- A focus on the strengths and gifts in the group
- Cooperative behaviours
- Listening for what is important to all parties
- Everyone is given time to think, and to express themselves
- Recording all points of view
- Openness
- People interact as human beings, rather than as job roles
- Embracing the groups diversity and seeing it as a strength
- A focus on overall purpose and goals
- A commitment to take action on shared objectives
- Surprising outcomes that result from a co-creative process rather than purely reflecting the agenda of one 'side' or another
- People feel interested, listened to, accepted for their contribution

Feelings

From the perspectives of carers and people with learning disabilities
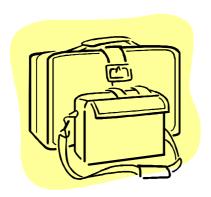
If conflict exists between two individuals or groups of people, whether they are family members or people that provide and receive services, it is likely that someone may be upset, annoyed or frustrated with the suggestions or decisions that are made.

Conflict may exist at different levels and the feelings associated with such conflict may also be different.

For example:

When conflict exists between the individual and their family carer…
- Either or both of them may feel as though their views are not being taken in to consideration
- The individual may feel that their independence is being restricted
- The family carer may feel as though the individual is overestimating their own capabilities
- Service providers/paid carers and the individual themselves may view the carer as being overprotective
- Feelings of bitterness may arise between the individual and their carer which may impact on their relationship
- It may appear that the carer wants one thing for the individual and the individual wants something else for themselves
- Sometimes family members feel that the person with disabilities **should** be at home with them; or they have made a promise to a mother or father that they would always care for a brother or sister with disabilities. This can place a lot of strain on the family and sometimes prevent the person from becoming 'themselves'.

When conflict exists between the individual/family and the paid carer...

- The family may feel that the paid carer is not listening to what they want
- If this continues on a longer-term basis, the family may feel like what they want does not matter and may therefore give-up asking and be dissatisfied with the support they are receiving
- The paid carer may feel that it is not within their capacity or remit to meet the family's requests
- Family may feel that the paid carer is not meeting the needs of the individual in the same way that they do, so again feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration will arise

When conflict exists between the individual/family and a service provider...

- Due to the power associated with being a service provider, the family may feel that they are not able to dispute or disagree with services that they are in receipt of or that they are going to receive
- Alternatively, the family may feel that they are not being listened to and their views not being taken in to consideration in the provision of services for the cared for individual. This may make them feel as though their views do not matter. However, it is apparent that the individual and their family are to be central in service delivery and this needs to be emphasised time and time again
- Family may feel that services are not working hard enough with the individual to meet their full potential. In contrast, service providers may feel that the family are expecting too much from the individual in relation to their disabilities
- The individual may be unhappy with the activities they are engaging in, and service providers may fail to pick-up on this, which, in turn will affect the mood and wellbeing of the individual
- Family members can feel guilty if they find that they can no longer care for the person; the guilt may be shown by the family 'blaming' the service provider for anything that happens to the person. This can lead to complaints and allegations which the service provider has to investigate and spend a lot of time trying to resolve. Meanwhile the family, rather than the person with disabilities becomes the focus of attention. This situation can be resolved over time, by acknowledging the family's concerns, then involving them in planning for the person's future and helping them work towards experiencing a different and new relationship with the person.
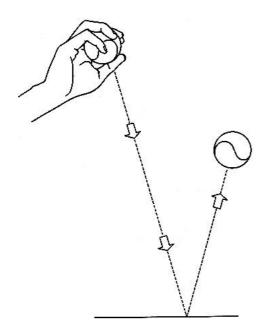
Resilience

"There is an inner dimension of personalisation, which we might think of as resilience, or the human spirit. Even in the toughest and most difficult of situations, that spirit can burn bright, but even in the best and most positive environment, that spirit can become weak and we can fall into despair or lose our way. It is important to remember this, and to remember that the purpose of personalisation is not just social, it is highly personal – it is about building a society where everyone can find a way of being that makes sense".
Duffy and Fulton (2010)

People handle conflict and other adversities better when they have the personal, material and social resources to be resilient.

There are many resilience factors. Using person centred thinking tools, we can consider methods of creating the conditions that promote resilience.

On the next page is a chart showing some of the factors that help us be resilient in difficulty, and some of the tools and skills that might help us increase or nurture these.

What enables some people to 'bounce back' under pressure more than others? What can we learn from these people?

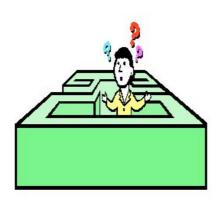| Resilience Factor	Person Centred Thinking Skills	How these Help
Independence	- Decision Making Agreements - Person Centred Approaches to Risk	Establishing how I can be supported to make my own decisions and how those who support me can be enabled to approach risk in a positive way.
Relationships	- Relationship Circles - Matching Staff - Using gifts to build connections - Presence to Contribution	Thinking about relationships involving people around the person in their planning circle, filling gaps in the circle. Finding staff with the right personality characteristics and shared common interests so that they can support the person well. Using the person's gifts to link them with people and places where those gifts are welcomed, and enabling participation and contribution
Routines and Rituals	- Daily/Weekly Routine - Good Day/Bad Day	Valuing the routines that reflect what is important to me, and help me find comfort.
Financial resources	- Support plan and personal budget	The money I have, and how I will spend it so that I am supported well.
Insight	- Working/Not Working - 4+1 Questions - Important to and For - What makes good Support	Looking honestly at the person's life and supports, and at what is working and not working. Looking together at what matters to the person and what good support for them looks like.
Initiative	- Action Planning - Person Centred Risk - Achievement Tool	Doing something – creating a sense that things can change and life can go forward. Learning from personal and team achievements.
Morality/Spirituality	- Important to - Underpinning Values - Like and Admire	The things and values that matter to the person. The personal qualities that people like and admire about them
Creativity	- Blue Sky Thinking - Dreams - Hopes/Fears - What success will look like	Envisioning a positive future and considering ways to move toward it.
Humour/Expression	- Communication Chart - Positive and Productive meetings	Understanding how a person communicates and what they mean Giving every participant the opportunity to express their view in a safe way.

Try another way…

One reason why conflict can become entrenched and bitter is that we have traditionally thought about supporting people with disabilities in a two-dimensional way: Services that 'provide' and people who 'use'. Real life is much more complex. People are not just 'users', but can contribute, cooperate and lead, if we think a little bit differently.

Self-directed support means that we can think beyond those traditional service options. People are now beginning to be able to look to peers, families, friends, the community and service providers that are now realising the need to become much more flexible to meet people's wishes and needs.

If in the difficult discussions that can arise around supporting someone well to live a decent life, we find we are running up against barriers in one direction, using options like an individual budget, and exploring some of the possibilities that this opens up can help us find ways round those barriers.

Which questions are most likely to stimulate thinking that helps us to focus on our ultimate goals and find ways round obstacles and sticking points?

Person Centred Thinking

The 4 keys to dealing with conflict in a positive and productive way are **listening**, **thinking together**, **action and learning**. Without any one of these elements, it's likely that a process will fail to bring about outcomes and relationships that can stand the test of time.

Person Centred Thinking skills and techniques give us tools that help us to listen well to the person with their allies, to think together, agree actions and then record and share our learning.

By focussing on the person, and gathering knowledge and evidence, they create a shared foundation for ideas and actions. By bringing decision making closer to the person, they help the person and their allies find ways forward that make sense in that individual's life.

Sorting Important To and Important For:

Important To the Person (what makes the person feel happy? What helps the person find comfort?)	**Important For The Person** (What helps keep the person and others healthy and safe)

What else do we need to learn?

Working/Not Working from different points of view

What's Working	What's Not Working
Person's point of view	
Family point of view	
Others point of view	

By giving a place for all parties to record their point of view, this tool allows everyone's views to be listened to and recorded. It enables open discussion about the places where people agree, and where they disagree.

4+1 Questions

What have we tried?	What have we learned?

What are we pleased about?	What are we concerned about

So what do we do next?

A reflective tool to be used individually by participants in disagreement (based on the 1 page profile)

What are the gifts and strengths of the person I disagree with?	What is important to that person that is motivating their disagreement?

What support does the person need to express their view well, and to keep them safe while they express their views?

What are my gifts and strengths	What is important me that is motivating my disagreement?

What support do I need to express my view well, and to keep me safe while I express my views?

Thinking Together about Our disagreement	
What are our group's/families/organisation's gifts and strengths	**What is important to us that is motivating our disagreement?**
What support do we all need to express our views well, and to keep us safe while we express our views?	

5 Conflict Questions:

What do we agree on?

What do we disagree on?

What can we live with?	**What remains unresolved?**

What do we need to do next?

My Decision Making Profile

Name		Who helped with this profile	
Date		When we will review this profile	

How I like my information	How to present choice to me	How you can help me understand	When are the best times to ask me make a decision	When is not a good time to ask me to make a decision

List of decisions and how I make them

Decisions in my life	How I must be involved	Who makes the final decision

Conflict Doughnut

Our Duties when facilitating a person centred planning meeting where there is conflict:

Core Duties

- Establish ground rules that engender mutual respect
- Keep the person at the centre
- Treat family and friends as partners
- Ensure that the focus person's viewpoints are as accurately and effectively expressed as possible
- Ensure everyone has time to think and express their views, and that all viewpoints are recorded
- Ask questions that will help people focus on what is important to the person
- Keep the person and others safe
- Use valuing language
- Encourage creativity, positive action and learning

Where we can use Judgement and Creativity

- Choosing which tools and techniques will address the issue being debated most effectively and enable everyone to think and speak

- How to support the person throughout the conflict

- Directing the energy derived from the conflict toward mutual learning and building a better life

- Deciding if the meeting is not working, trying something different, closing the meeting

Not Our Job

- To impose our own solutions onto others

- That conflicts are always resolved to everyone's satisfaction

- To keep quiet where the person is suffering abuse or exploitation

10 guidelines for handling conflict during Person Centred Thinking and Planning.

•Recognise that a conflict exists, and be aware of your own reaction to this.

•Pause to consider how to ensure that the focus person's views can be expressed and heard.

•Name the conflict and check that everyone is aware of the ground rules for the discussion, particularly the need to listen with respect.

•Listen for what is important to each party in the conflict

•Record what is working and not working for all the different parties in the conflict

•Find common ground, and agree actions on those areas where there is mutual agreement

•Think together about the best ways to address areas where disagreement still exists

•Be creative – try another way

•Agree how future learning can be gathered and shared

•Accept that life is complicated, that we may well not always be able to agree, and seek a mutual commitment in the group to continue to think and work together honestly and respectfully, in a way that supports the person to enhance their life.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced".
James A. Baldwin

Further Reading:

•Department of Health (2010): *Personalisation through Person Centred Planning.* Available from:
http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/media/11242/personalisation-through-person-centred-planning.pdf

•Simon Duffy and Kate Fulton (2010*) Architecture for Personalisation*. Centre for Welfare Reform. Available from:
http://web.me.com/nicolaprotopapadakis//Centre_for_Welfare_Reform/Architecture_for_Personalisation_-_Report_files/Architecture%20for%20Personalisation%20Report.pdf

•John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien. *The politics of person centred planning*. Available from: http://thechp.syr.edu/politics.pdf

•Ungar (et al) *Unique pathways to resilience across cultures*. Available from:
http://www.resilienceproject.org/files/unique_pathways_to_resiliecne_across_cultures_adolescence.pdf

•Reivich, Karen, and Shatte, Andrew (2002) *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles.* Broadway.

Websites:

•Central Lancashire's Person Centred Planning website: www.csrpcp.net

•Helen Sanderson Associates: http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

•Learning Community for Person Centred Practices: http://www.elpnet.net

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