



Ground rules for healthy conflict

Conflict is bound to show up in any group. Within workplace safety and health committees, it likely is structural too. Management and worker representatives come from different positions in the organization. Their health and safety experiences and goals are often different.

about..." or "Who are you to be suggesting..." are strong indicators of conflict between people rather than between issues. Conflict also may occur at meetings when contentious items get onto the agenda without notice and members are not properly prepared to discuss the topic.

Conflict becomes a problem when people personalize it. Personal attacks and statements such as "You don't know what you are talking

Although it's difficult to deal with, studies tell us that conflict produces better decisions because all perspectives must be considered.

Healthy conflict is possible. Workplace safety and healthy committee members should:

- criticize ideas, not individuals
- treat people's concerns seriously
- listen to what is said, not what you think is said (active listening)
- allow everyone to have a say
- clarify facts and agree about getting more information if needed
- find out what you can agree on
- clarify any disagreement before trying to develop a solution
- try to understand the reasons for the differences
- see if people will agree to try something before actually disagreeing about its use
- summarize where you're at, after everyone's had a say, and avoid repeating the same argument
- take a break and caucus where necessary, returning with one suggestion about how to proceed

For more ideas, see a reference such as:

"Skills, strategies and tools, Some specific activities" (Kit 3) in *The Kit: A guide to the advocacy we choose to do. A resource kit for consumers of mental health services and family carers.* Prepared by SPICE Consulting for the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. Available on the web at: <http://www.mhca.org.au/Resources/CommunityDevelopment/index.html#TheKit>.

