



Mental Health  
Commission  
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# CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*“I know there’s tension on my team, but it’s hard to get to the root of the problem when everyone has the option to simply turn their camera off and disengage, and I only hear about conflict second-hand.”*

## 1

### Consider underlying causes of aggressive behaviour

If an employee appears disgruntled or even aggressive, consider what other contributing factors might be at play. Whether it’s pandemic-related stress, an especially hectic period at work, or another hardship (which the employee may choose not to share), it’s important to be mindful that you are not likely seeing the full picture.

When it’s time to approach them, **show compassion by asking whether there is something else going on that they might like to talk about.** If this type of interaction feels unnatural, consider how you might build your communication or conflict resolution skills.

## 2

### Discourage gossip and rumours

Every office is bound to have some form of gossip, but its damaging impact on team dynamics can be difficult to reverse. While it’s impossible to eliminate entirely, whenever possible, discourage hallway meetings (or in virtual settings, mean-spirited side chats), whispered conjectures, or other private discussions about colleagues.

**Prioritize transparency to help cut down on the need for speculation, and encourage employees to come to you directly if they have any questions or concerns they’d like to discuss.**

## 3

### Rethink workplace conflict in a virtual setting

Spotting conflict and harassment takes effort, especially in a virtual environment. While you may not see employees yelling at each other in a video call, that doesn’t mean harassment (or cyberbullying) isn’t taking place. Pay attention to subtle cues that something is amiss (e.g., a hostile tone in an email exchange), and remind your team that professional behaviour and communication are just as important – if not more so – in the absence of face-to-face interactions.



## 4 Encourage solutions-based discussions

When employees are given the opportunity to voice their concerns, whether one-on-one or in a larger group, encourage solutions-based thinking. While some venting can be cathartic, it can also lead to a pattern of unhealthy and unproductive rumination.

**So if a team member, for example, shares a negative experience about another colleague, ask them what they think might improve the situation and what they'd be willing to do.**

## 5 Check in regularly with all team members

It can be easy for managers to get bogged down in a “squeaky wheel gets all the grease” mentality. But **it's important to set aside time** (and grease) for **all** team members. While some employees are vocal about their issues with other colleagues, others will stay quiet unless prompted.

**Remember that cultural norms, personality differences, personal preferences, or past experiences can affect the balance of communication and the perception of inclusion within a team.**

Regular check-ins will let you to hear from staff who may otherwise stay mum and give you a fuller picture of the team dynamics you should be aware of.

## 6 Bring in a mediator if necessary

Sometimes, resolving internal conflict can require the expertise and objectivity of a third-party mediator. Whether it's a resource inside or outside your organization, an expert in conflict resolution, change management, or communications may help you get to the bottom of any issues being overlooked.



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