

## Defusing Conflict in School

Facilitator Notes: Two Short CPD Workshops for Teachers



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Produced by: Matt Overd, Peter White, Rebecca Martin and John Kelleher. Specialist Advisors: Martin Graves & Chris White  
Thanks to: Andrew Newton and Teaching Leaders

# Introduction

This Workshop Kit provides everything you need to run two sessions on defusing conflict for teachers and other staff in your school. No prior knowledge or experience is needed as the materials give you all the background information you need.

If you are considering facilitating these sessions for colleagues, thank you. The rewards are great. The modules explain techniques and approaches that will give lasting benefits, both within the school environment and outside.

There's no doubt that teaching can be one of the most rewarding professions – but like any job, it comes with its pitfalls. One of those faced by educators today is challenging aggression, intimidation or conflict – from pupils or their parents. In England in 2012-13 there were 17,190 fixed term exclusions for physical assault on an adult, and a further 50,630 for threatening behaviour (1,531 and 920 respectively for Scotland in the same period.)

No wonder then that we often hear headlines reporting incidents between teaching staff and pupils. Many teachers feel under prepared to confront the issue and are not provided with the skills they need to defuse situations and tackle them confidently before they escalate or get out of hand.

The stats and stories we read in the press aren't necessarily a true reflection of daily life as a teacher – but the chances are that during your career, no matter your level of experience, you have encountered aggression in school, be it from a pupil – or parents. Did you know how to respond? Did you feel comfortable handling the situation? Were you able to defuse it? Do you wish you had more 'tools' at your disposal?

A survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers found that almost three fifths of staff have faced aggression from pupils in the past year. Of these, 45% experienced physical violence, 84% had been verbally insulted and 70% had been intimidated or threatened.

The most common complaints, in a report by The Times (June 2015), was that teachers were being pushed or shoved, hit with objects including furniture, and being kicked or punched. Slightly more than half of those questioned believed that behaviour had deteriorated in the past five years, and three fifths said aggression had caused them to lose confidence.

At Dfuse, we provide training, support and resources to skill people from all walks of life to deal with conflict, confrontation, aggression and antisocial behaviour wherever they encounter it: in the street, in the workplace, in school or in their own community. Drawing on our experts that include specialist communicators, hostage negotiators, safety and self-defence trainers, teachers and youth and community workers, we have created a series of programmes and courses designed to help you, and your colleagues, to defuse conflict and pass the skills on to students.

This Workshop Kit is tailored specifically for teachers, members of school senior leadership teams or experienced pastoral leaders. It provides you with everything you need to deliver two short CPD sessions on defusing skills to teaching colleagues and other school staff.

The feedback from teachers using Dfuse programmes speaks for itself:

- *'It will definitely make a difference at my school.'*
- *'I feel more prepared for possible situations I may come up against.'*
- *'As I am relatively new to the pastoral system, I have very quickly been involved in many more challenging conversations with parents and staff than before – I can now apply these skills to support these conversations.'*
- *'It was useful sharing situations, stories and a range of views from variety of colleagues, how they would tackle conflict and comparing it with my own.'*
- *'Excellent training, I'd happily study this further.'*

Use this Workshop Kit to lead conversations with your colleagues and to explore the approaches to adopt and the responses to avoid. Use the information, activities and discussion threads provided to guide your session and to provide new input to help move things along.

We suggest that you spend a few minutes now familiarising yourself with the material.

You will find it useful to:

- Read and think about the objectives for the two modules. Do these match what you are trying to achieve? Do you feel inspired to help yourself and colleagues towards these goals? Modify any that you think you can improve on and bear them in mind as you plan the delivery of your course.
- Check through the materials, see how the materials are used to trigger discussion and activities in the trainer's notes. You will also be able to see how the two modules complement each other.
- Read the frequently asked questions. These should clear up any doubts about the use of the materials and help you focus on the outcomes you want.
- Look at the suggested timings and decide how much time you need to dedicate to each activity. Each module can be delivered in two and a half hours. However, if you use all of the material to promote more in-depth discussions, each module could take up to four hours. If you expect a lively debate then you'll need to allow more time – or if you have a tight programme, then you may wish to reduce the depth in which you explore the learning points.

# Frequently asked questions

## **Do I need to be an expert to facilitate these sessions?**

No, not at all. They have been designed so that they can be run by any teacher or trainer who is confident with running workshops for adults. All materials and background information are provided. As the facilitator, you will be a learner along with your colleagues.

## **Is the material theoretical, based on made-up examples? Or does it cover situations and that participants have actually had to deal with?**

Most groups really value the chance to explore participants' own real-life experiences. So there is plenty of opportunity for that in the activities. On the other hand, there may be some people who prefer not to discuss personal conflicts in public - so realistic alternatives, devised with teachers, are always provided.

## **What kind of situation is the course designed to help with?**

Participants often think first of situations with difficult students and perhaps also of confrontations with angry parents. The course is ideal for exploring those, but isn't limited to them. The techniques and skills are relevant in any setting, with anyone - even, as teachers sometimes point out, for responding to stressed colleagues. They are particularly useful for helping colleagues who struggle with confrontation to explore new approaches.

## **How many participants is ideal?**

There needs to be enough people in the room to provide fruitful and varied experience to draw on, but not so many that opportunities for personal exploration are restricted. So, perhaps a team of around five is the minimum, with an upper limit of between 15 and 20. You know your colleagues and so should choose a group size and approach to match.

## **Do these modules work?**

They have been developed with teachers and trialled with various groups around the UK. The core skills are those used by hostage negotiators, police officers and psychologists. They have been translated here for use by teachers. Feedback is consistently good. So we're pretty confident that your team will have a productive and positive experience.

## **Do we have to do both modules or can we just do the first one?**

You will learn a lot from module 1 on its own. But if you want to get the full value of the programme you do need to complete module 2 as well. The programme is structured so that module 1 quickly covers the fundamentals. Module 2 goes deeper into communication and influencing skills. If you do not schedule module 2 you'll miss the rich rewards from exploring and practising those key skills.

## **How can we practise the skills we explored in the modules?**

You can practise improving the quality of interactions any day, in any place. Develop your techniques in everyday encounters with students, colleagues, family members, checkout staff at the supermarket... there are no limits. Once familiar, the techniques can be deployed quickly in tense situations.

## **Is there a follow-up?**

It is strongly recommended that staff teams schedule at least a discussion at a future staff meeting to explore how the skills have brought about change in behaviours. Follow-up staff meetings are also a good opportunity to commit to action planning and suggestions for systems change.

Also, once the basics have been established through these two modules the team may want to push their skills further. Dfuse offers face to face training which involves simulated skills practice delivered by communication experts including experienced police hostage negotiators.

## **How can we get further information on Dfuse activities and materials?**

Go to the website <http://dfuse.org.uk/teachers> where there is much useful information. You should have received login details after purchasing this pack. You can use this to access the materials, share your experiences with other teachers and get updates. The teachers' section of the site has resources for use in the classroom. Participants can access these by registering on the website.

# Module one: defusing conflict

Module one looks at conflict: what it is, how it escalates, an approach for defusing and techniques that will help.

The learning outcomes for the module are for participants to:

- Understand the causes and characteristics of escalated conflict
- Explore their own personal responses to conflict situations
- Explore an approach for defusing conflict
- Rehearse effective and safe responses to conflict
- Identify techniques that will help them to better manage conflict

This module can be delivered in two and a half to four hours, depending on how much of each activity you deliver and the amount of discussion you encourage. To deliver this module you will need:

- A computer, projector, screen and the PowerPoint slides or a copy of Slides 1 to 23 printed for each participant
- A copy of handouts 1 and 2 for each participant
- A flip chart and pens
- Sticky notes and pens for each person
- An outline of a person drawn on a large piece of paper

The slides and handouts can be downloaded by logging in to <http://dfuse.org.uk/mydfuse/>

# Introduction to module one

15 to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the group

## Introduce the session

- Confirm the timings for the session including any breaks and the finish time.
- Introduce the purpose of this workshop as: to provide techniques for defusing volatile situations so that potential conflicts do not grow out of proportion and exert destructive forces on relationships.
- Explain that Dfuse, the conflict defusing charity, has developed two modules of training to help teachers defuse conflict, confrontation and aggressive behaviour and that this session will follow these modules.
- Introduce the learning objectives for this module using Slide 2.
- Highlight to the group the need for confidentiality. During the session individuals may disclose information which is personal to them – this should not be shared outside of this workshop.

Participants on defusing skills courses report that they value learning from the experiences of their colleagues.

- Start this process by asking each person in turn to introduce themselves, if necessary, and to share a little about their personal experience of conflict in schools. Are there particular incidents they wish they'd handled differently? Can they think of types of situations that they would like help with?
- If participants are comfortable, ask follow up questions to find out more about the situations. Record key points on a flip chart for referring to later.

You might need to give people a while to warm up before they feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Tread lightly as this module explores personal responses to conflict and some participants may be reluctant to admit what could be considered failings in front of colleagues.

# Activity 1: Clenched fist

10 minutes

## What to do

- Organise participants into pairs. Ask one person in each pair to make a fist. Tell the second person that their task is to get the fist open.
- After a couple of minutes ask each pair to explain to the group what happened. What set the tone of the negotiation? For instance, was the fist clenched tighter because the approach was initially forceful?

## Explore

- Invite observations on our natural tendency to initiate conflict by creating opposing goals. In the exercise some people may have simply complied with a polite request to open to the fist (i.e. no conflict is present.) Many others would have proceeded on the basis of inbuilt opposition - I want it open and I assume that you don't, or you want it open, so I'm keeping it closed.
- Conflict can be created in situations where there is none by making assumptions and responding to the behaviours of others - creating unnecessary conflict. Are participants familiar with this tendency?
- Note the different techniques used to achieve the task - negotiated deals, bribes, force, persuasion or threats. How many people felt it was important to "win"?
- Leave participants with the following thoughts:
  - Often conflict is created where there is none.
  - Conflict is a normal and natural part of most relationships.
  - Only when conflict is allowed to escalate does it become damaging to you, your relationships and your goals.



# Activity 2: What is conflict

15 to 25 minutes

## What to do

- Show participants the photo on Slide 3. Splitting into small groups if appropriate, ask participants to answer the following questions:
  - Do they think the picture shows a conflict?
  - What could make the situation worse?
  - What, if anything, would you do or say if you were on the scene?
- Bring the groups together and share views. Is there consensus?
- If you have time, repeat the exercise with one of the photos on Slides 4 and 5.

Conflict occurs when two or more people disagree, want different things or misunderstand each other or when one person does something which aggravates the other. Some conflicts are based on perception, where two people have a different understanding of the same situation. For example, one person may think they are telling a funny joke, but another may find it insulting. Conflict could be created where there is none by assuming the other person intentionally meant to cause offence.

## Explore

- Back in the smaller groups ask each group to identify, and record on sticky notes, common causes of conflict between:
  - Teachers and students
  - Teachers and parents
  - Teachers and teachers or other school staff
- In the whole group display and discuss the common causes of conflict on the sticky notes. Show Slide 6 - Causes of conflict, and ask the group to use these causes as headings to group the examples on the sticky notes.
- Focus for a while on the last sentence '**All of the above can be perceived or actual and intended or unintended**' and ask for reflections on this.
- End by stressing a first rule of defusing conflict - **do not make instant assumptions and always maintain an open mind. If you lose "neutrality" your ability to understand and defuse any situation will be significantly reduced.**

# Activity 3: Knowing yourself

15 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Explain to participants that they are going to look at what kind of defuser they think they are. What natural skills do they have which help to defuse? What do they tend to do that might get in the way of defusing?
- Organise the group to stand in the middle of the room. Designate one end of the room as "agree" and the other "disagree".
- Explain that you are going to read out a statement, after which you would like participants to move to the end of the room which corresponds with their opinion. The stronger their opinion, the nearer they should be to either the agree or disagree ends of the room.
- Read out each of the following statements in turn:
  1. When other people get angry I speak calmly.
  2. I am sometimes aware that I am beginning to lose my temper.
  3. I feel angry when someone does something unjust or unfair.
  4. I worry that I'll say something I regret.
  5. I find it hard not to take hurtful things people say personally.

## Explore

- Invite discussion, especially between people who are at different ends of the room. Don't forget to include yourself in this activity and to share your views too.
- Ask participants to think about their response. Are they happy or unhappy? Do their responses usually defuse or escalate situations? Were there any surprises? Record on a flip chart any issues that seem worth raising later. If people have examples, then ask how their tendencies influenced the development of the situation and if they are happy with the outcome.
- End by explaining: **the statements describe natural and instinctive responses to conflict. Even though they are natural, they may escalate situations or leave those involved with a bad feeling, and so may be better avoided.**

Some of the behaviours that will come up during this activity will be explored later in the modules.

# Activity 4: Don't be spontaneous

15 to 25 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that, in this activity, the group will explore why being spontaneous (saying or doing what seems natural) may escalate a conflict.
- Ask two participants to act out a scene for the rest of the group, using the script on handout 1 "I want a word with you."
- The scene is that a parent has come to school in a high energy state to confront their daughter's teacher. The assumption in this role play is that the teacher is a woman and the parent a man - but it doesn't have to be that way.
- Participants can elaborate on this script according their dramatic skills and inclinations. But do not change the essential structure. It has the elements of an accusation, rudeness, insult, order, threat and counter-threat that are typical of how conflicts can escalate.
- Or, instead of role play use Slide 7 to introduce the dialogue.
- Ask the group to critique the conversation. What went well, what went badly? The supposed central point of the conflict, the daughter's detention, was hardly covered. Can participants identify the other conflicts that were going on, and what stimulated or perpetuated them?
- Explain that spontaneous reactions are driven by anger, fear or embarrassment (or fear of losing face) and show how a conflict escalates using the diagram on Slide 8. Talk through it, seeing how the responses, insults, threats and counter-threats fuel the conflict.

## Explore

- Ask the group to suggest how spontaneous reactions can be reduced, then show Slide 9, reducing spontaneous reactions, and compare these ideas with those from the group.
- Ask the group, individually, to identify spontaneous reactions that they have a natural tendency towards and how they already manage it, or could reduce it, using the ideas here. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.
- Use Slide 10 to leave participants with the thought that: **everything you do (or don't do) sends a message to other people. The words you choose to use, the way you put those words across, the position of your body and your gestures all communicate messages. Failure to manage spontaneous responses will send unhelpful messages that you would perhaps rather weren't sent.**

# Activity 5: A defusing state of mind

15 to 30 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that, in order to maintain composure when dealing with conflict, it is important to adopt a defusing state of mind. This is a deliberate and sustained position that focuses you on defusing the situation – no matter what the other person does. A mantra might help such as “My actions will not escalate this situation”, “I will defuse no matter what they do” or “I take responsibility for this situation ending peacefully.”
- Split into smaller groups, if appropriate, and ask each to work on what they think the skills of a good defuser are. To do this, they will need a flipchart sheet with an outline of a person. Prepare this in advance or ask participants to draw their own.
- Ask the groups to think of a tense or fraught situation. An actual example from earlier in the session would be good. Then they have to imagine their ideal defuser (the outline person) coming in and taking the heat out of the situation.
- Their task is to label the outline person with what they think the characteristics of a good defuser are. Invite them to be inventive and feel free to indicate aspects of the whole body. That is, do not just link to the kinds of things they say (what comes out of the mouth), but also the heart, the mind and the total body language.
- You may wish to add creativity by providing arts and crafts materials and old magazines (although this will increase the time required to deliver the activity).

## Explore

- Share and discuss the groups' results. Is there consensus? Are there areas of disagreement? What, if anything, did participants find surprising?
- Then show Slide 11: The Ideal Defuser? Discuss whether such a paragon exists. How far short of the ideal do most of us fall most of the time. How is our ability to maintain these characteristics affected by our mood? Invite participants to make a personal note of their own strengths and weaknesses. Which would they like to improve?
- End by using Slide 12 to highlight that: **the mind shift required before entering into a conflict situation is of paramount importance. It encourages you to put aside your current mood and emotions about a situation, to adopt defusing characteristics and to take responsibility for the situation not escalating, no matter what other people say or do.**

# Activity 6: Assess the conflict

15 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that this exercise focuses on the skills of assessing conflict situations. Use Slide 13 to highlight that: there is often a lot more information available than first thought. What you see is not always what is going on. No single analysis is likely to be correct and comprehensive. It is vital to assess what is happening on different levels and not to make assumptions.
- Explain that, in any given conflict situation, your response is guided by your assessment of the risk of harm to yourself or others, the anxiety of those involved and the complexity of the conflict/s (RAC.)
- Split into three smaller groups, if possible, and ask each to work on one of the following questions:
  - Group 1: What are the characteristics of a high risk situation?
  - Group 2: What are the characteristics of a highly anxious situation?
  - Group 3: What are the characteristics of a highly complex situation?
- Ask each group in turn to feedback their thoughts and invite comments from the other participants. Note any overlaps, as these may make it more difficult to accurately assess what is going on.
- Compare the groups' thoughts with the ideas on Slides 14, 15 and 16 and invite comments from participants.
- Refer back to the parent and teacher conflict (on Slides 7 and 8) to highlight that in an escalated conflict it is important to understand which of the many possible points of conflict is most important to those involved at that moment. e.g. trying to resolve the original practical issue, when someone is now angry about the way they have been spoken, to is unlikely to be welcomed.

The theme from this activity continues in the next.

# Activity 7: Choose the outcome

15 to 25 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that what you do in response to a conflict must depend on a conscious choice of what you want to get out of the situation. Ask yourself: what would be a good enough (not necessarily perfect) outcome? Keep this outcome in mind and moderate your behaviours to only do things that will help to get to this end point. However, you may need to delay trying to get the outcome you want based on your RAC assessment of the situation.
- Show Slide 17, which explains how to prioritise the outcome using the RAC assessment. If the situation is high risk, then dealing with that is your priority. The next priority is to reduce the anxiety as, until logic is restored, you will have little hope or resolving the situation. The third priority is to understand the complexity, avoid making assumptions, don't put your own perception on the situation and don't problem solve too early. You may have to deal with all of these in one situation and gradually work through the priorities until you can impose your own outcome on the situation.
- Show Slide 18 and/or 19 and ask participants to suggest what outcome/s they would want from each of the example conflict situations. Discuss these outcomes with the group and record them on a flip chart for later. Keep in mind that desired outcomes may differ depending on the individuals considering the scenarios and their role.

## Explore

- Explain that desired outcomes should be both necessary and achievable. If not then rethink the chosen outcome. Run through the following:
  - **Necessary** can be difficult to judge. It is best to think of it as "necessary to defuse the conflict" rather than necessary for some larger goal or ambition. For instance, in an altercation in the dining hall, it is necessary for calm to be restored. It is not necessary for you to teach a bully a lesson in manners, however much you might like to do that.
  - **Achievable** means that the outcome can be reached in the time available. For instance, trying to show a person the error of their ways and change their belief system with a pithy remark as you walk past them in the hallway is not actually going to happen. And if you are honest, it probably isn't designed to do that - just to embarrass. Can you achieve it now, or do you need to find another time?
- Finish by revisiting the chosen outcomes from the discussion earlier and the flipchart notes and ask the group to check they are both necessary and achievable.

# Activity 8: Choose a safe response

20 to 35 minutes

## What to do

- Split into three smaller groups, if possible, and show the scenario on Slide 20. Ask each group to:
  - Assess the situation using the RAC approach
  - Suggest possible outcomes they might want to achieve (up to ten)
  - Prioritise these outcomes
  - Suggest what their response might be to achieve these outcomes?
- Ask each group to feedback their thoughts and invite comments from the others. Record the outcomes and suggested responses on a flipchart for use later.
- You could explore these principles further by breaking into small groups and considering the scenario extension exercise on handout 2.
- Show Slide 21 which suggests approaches for responding to generic high risk, highly anxious and highly complex situations. Compare the responses to those recorded on the flip chart for this scenario. Invite participants to comment and discuss.

## Explore

- As violence and aggression is such a serious issue facing teachers, you may wish to spend a little more time on this. You may wish to remind yourself of the school's safety policy and encourage participants to do the same.
- Share with participants the following principle: *If a conflict means there is a risk to your personal safety you should get out immediately, run away if necessary.* Their task is to say whether they agree or disagree. As a group, list reasons why getting away might not be possible or desirable. For instance, you may be trapped, away from the only exit, have responsibility for the safety of the children, or it may not be appropriate to leave a room unattended.
- Show Slide 22 with the four approaches to managing risk: avoid, reduce, share and accept. Look back over the flip chart notes and ask the group to identify which of the actions have avoided, reduced, shared or accepted the risk.
- Finish by asking the group to use the four approaches to identify more ways to mitigate the risks in the two scenarios.

# Reflection

15 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Conclude the session by recapping the ground covered and inviting participants to note their own learning and some goals to achieve between now and the next session.
- Show Slide 23: A Defusing Approach and briefly recap each stage. Then ask participants to use the flowchart as a guide and stimulus to critiquing their own defusing past performance.
- Stress that what they are being asked to do now is for their own use, they need not share it with anyone. Their task is to look back over conflicts, difficult conversations or tense situations that they have been involved in. Using the flowchart as a structure and to jog the memory ask them to identify for themselves:
  - One thing that they think they've handled well, that seemed effective and took the heat out of a situation. Did they, for example, keep a defusing mindset despite provocation?
  - One thing that they wish, with hindsight, that they had handled differently. Perhaps they were wanting an outcome that was never really achievable.
  - One area that they are going to incorporate into their handling of tense situations from now on. This could be a decision to appreciate more fully the emotional side of conflicts rather than zoning in the apparent practical problem. Or it could be a commitment to avoid spontaneous responses wherever possible.
- Conclude the session, thank participants and remind them of arrangements for the second module, which will look at communication in conflict, how to ensure effective communication and a range of approaches for managing conflict situations



## Module two: communicating in conflict

Module two looks at communication in conflict, how to ensure effective communication and a range of approaches for managing conflict situations.

The learning outcomes for the module are for participants to:

- Understand the importance of effective communication in conflict
- Explore different approaches for communicating in conflict
- Rehearse defusing approaches for getting their point across
- Practice active listening
- Identify techniques for motivating people to comply

This module can be delivered in two and a half to four hours, depending on how much of each activity you deliver and the amount of discussion you encourage. To deliver this module you will need:

- A computer, projector, screen and the PowerPoint slides or a copy of Slides 23 to 36 printed for each participant.
- A copy of handouts 3 to 7 for each participant
- A flip chart and pens

The slides and handouts can be downloaded by logging in to <http://dfuse.org.uk/mydfuse/>

# Introduction to module two

10 to 15 minutes

## Introduce the session

- Confirm the timings for the session including any breaks and the finish time.
- Begin the session with the flowchart (Slide 23), recapping briefly on what was covered last time and inviting further thoughts or examples of using the skills since the previous module.
- Explain that the afternoon session focuses on key skills of communication. It will help participants identify oppositional forms of communication, during which conflicts can easily escalate. This often occurs when people let their feelings about a situation guide their behaviour. For example they may show their anger or they may use their belief that another person is in the wrong to justify being rude or disrespectful.
- This session will show that whilst telling someone sternly what to do might feel like the quickest route to influence, often it does not lead to the intended outcome.
- Participants will be shown how to move to more supportive and defusing approaches using skills such as listening and techniques to frame conversations in less threatening ways.
- Talk through the session learning objectives. Share the Objectives using Slide 24.
- Re-iterate to the group the need for confidentiality. During the session individuals may disclose information which is personal to them – this should not be shared outside of this workshop.

# Activity 1: What you say and what they hear

10 to 15 minutes

## What to do

- State that 'what a person says is not necessarily what another person hears.' Invite comments and examples of that from participants' own experience. Discuss briefly what happened. Ask what part misunderstandings play in raising tension levels.
- Explain that it is not just key facts that can be misheard, such as, "I thought you said seven, not eleven!" Though, of course, that can be the cause of tension if parties blame each other for messing up arrangements.
- Subtle differences of tone and emphasis can also contribute dramatically to the build-up of conflict. A skilled defuser needs to be aware of this potential to avoid mistakes and use it to advantage.

## Explore

- Cut up handout 3 so that each statement is on a separate piece of paper and give the first statement to one person and ask them to read the sentence out loud, as neutrally and conversationally as they can. Ask participants to note down what they think the statement means. Is there general agreement? Is there a disconnect?
- Give each of the remaining statements to a different person. Then ask them in turn to read their statement, but with more dramatic intent and putting stress on the words in bold, italics, underlined. Discuss the potentially implied meanings for each.
- Now discuss someone who is tense and upset. Remind participants of the anxiety see-saw in module one showing how logical thinking goes down as anxiety goes up. How might they hear those words, even if the speaker intended no particular slant?
- Finish by using Slide 25 to highlight that: **a good defuser will always take responsibility for effective communication. What matters is how someone else hears what you say, not what you actually do say. To improve the transfer of a message check how it has been received. Ask the other person to reflect back their understanding - especially if the response to what was said is unexpected.** For example: teacher says 'there's nothing more you can do to improve that work' (meaning it's good enough as it is) getting an offended response as the message heard is 'you are not good enough to improve it'.

# Activity 2: From opposition to support

10 to 15 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that this activity illustrates a journey from stressed and oppositional communication to supportive and positive communication. It is the journey that effective defusers must travel. Most of the rest of this module involves detailed exploration of how best to achieve it. First participants must understand its start and finish points.
- Ask participants to close their eyes, relax and listen quietly to your description of two scenes. Their task is to create a visual picture of them in their minds and try to experience the emotion of each as you read them aloud:

You are face-to-face with someone, focused on a powerful disagreement that is causing great upset to you both. You are standing, looking squarely at each other. You are both cross. Both refusing to back down. They are in the wrong and you are going to make them see that. Angry words are exchanged and body language is hostile. Anything that either one says inflames the other. Emotions increase. All you want now is to win the argument.

You are side-by-side with someone who is upset. They have been having a bad time and are far from over it. They are glad that you are there. You listen to what they are saying and empathise with their situation. Their lips quiver as they try to choke back their emotions. They trust you. They allow you to help them to think about their options. They are beginning to see how they can make the best of things. On their face, a smile grows.

## Explore

- Let participants reflect in their own minds on those two scenarios. Then explain that the rest of the module will focus on five different approaches to conflict and how they can affect the outcome.
- Finish by showing the animation on Slide 26 which highlights each of the perspectives. Explain that each approach can be used to influence someone to act, we will explore the merits of each during the rest of this module. The diagram on Slide 26 is also on handout 4, so participants can refer to it as you go through the rest of the session.

# Activity 3: Telling

10 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Ask participants to focus again on that oppositional scene. Read out the following: In a confrontation you are metaphorically standing opposite the other person and the conflict is in-between you. Communication could be characterised as "telling":
  - Telling the other person what they did wrong.
  - Telling them what they should have done to avoid it.
  - Telling them of the terrible consequences.
  - Telling them what they could do now to put things right.
  - Telling them that it's typical of their behaviour and the person they are.
- Spend a few moments discussing this. Does it seem familiar to participants? What is their experience of it? Does this conjure up images of the authoritarian, strict teacher of yesteryear, or do participants recognise this from their own practice?

## Explore

- When in conflict what does telling do to the person being told? Break into three groups, giving each one of the tasks below.
  - Group 1. Consider the feelings of someone receiving a telling. What words would best describe them? Generally is anxiety likely to reduce, or increase? How helpful will that be?
  - Group 2. Consider how someone receiving a telling is likely to respond. Will they be quiet and grateful, or aggressive in return? Will what they say be thoughtful and considered, or impulsive?
  - Group 3. Consider what telling does to a relationship. Will it, for example, help build mutual respect and trust? Or something else?
- Bring the groups back together and share thoughts.
- Choose an example, such as Alan Sugar's boardroom telling mode from The Apprentice TV show. To the viewers he can come across as rude, but contestants rarely take exception as he has the power to keep them in the competition.
- Telling might be essential during an emergency or when giving instructions, but in a conflict can escalate a situation if the teller lacks either actual or perceived authority.
- Finish by discussing that: **whilst teachers have authority, it would be unwise to assume that all pupils and parents accept that, and whilst they may comply with the instruction they may do so begrudgingly – which could affect future relationships.**

# Activity 4: Talking to

20 to 30 minutes

## What to do

- Introduce that when ‘talking to’ you are still in opposition with the other person, with the conflict in-between you, but the approach is more defusing than ‘telling’.
- Show Slide 27 with five statements on it. They all sound like something a person trying to defuse a situation might say, but there is something wrong with all of them. Ask the group to pinpoint what. Perhaps ask them to recall a time when they were angry and to think about what their response to these statements might have been then.
- During the discussion highlight that purpose of the statements is to shut people up and encourage compliance, but are likely to receive a negative response. They fail to acknowledge the other person, their point of view or emotions. They dismiss concerns and demonstrate no willingness for dialogue. They embarrass or criticise and are disrespectful and judgemental.
- Working in pairs, ask participants to rephrase these statements to be more likely to defuse. For example, number 2 could be reworked as "I can see that this has really annoyed you, could you help me to understand why?" Bring the group back together to share the new statements. Perhaps practise them in a role play. Are they natural and easy to say? Are they more likely to defuse?
- Note: The tone used will change how the message is received. Also, speaking calmly, quietly and slowly to someone who is anxious, loud and fast will indicate that you don't recognise the importance of their situation. Match their energy, but not their emotion and then bring their energy levels down slowly.

## Explore

- Show Slide 28 and explain that this technique helps you to give your view about something in a non threatening manner. Present the facts, which are known to you both. Give your opinion about the facts. State what you would like to happen next – and why. Give out handout 5 and ask participants, in pairs, to use the technique to work out what they might say.
- Finish by highlighting the ‘power of because’. An experiment by Harvard social psychologist Ellen Langer examined what happens when someone asks to jump the queue for photocopier. Show the statements on Slide 29. The ‘because’ in the third statement adds nothing new, but the response is almost as positive as ‘because I am in a rush.’ This suggests that it is not the reason that encourages people to comply, but the offering of a reason (however try to give good reasons for better defusing!)

# Activity 5: Talking about

10 to 25 minutes

## What to do

- Explain that in this activity you will look at how to separate yourself and others from a conflict. You are aiming to metaphorically place the conflict 'over there' where you can both look at it together – where neither person has a personal connection to it.
- Refer to handout 4 and show that in the 'talking with' position you act as an observer to conflict and encourage others to do the same. You adopt a position where the conflict is not with you, even if the other person tries to make it about you.
- Show Slide 30 and talk through the techniques to disassociate yourself from the situation using the examples to help you:
  - Separate behaviours from the person (for example not 'you are aggressive' rather 'that behaviour came across as aggressive')
  - Don't make it personal (to you or the other person). For example, don't accuse, don't 'tell', be careful about using 'you' and 'I'.
  - Present problems as separate entities (for example not 'you have not done your homework' rather 'there appears to be a problem with that homework.')
  - Transfer the impact of behaviours to others (for example not 'stop behaving like that' rather 'that behaviour makes it difficult for the rest of the class.')
  - Transfer responsibility (for example not 'stop bullying that boy' rather 'the school has a zero tolerance for that behaviour and I will have no choice but to take it to the Head if you continue.')

## Explore

- Organise participants into small groups and give each a scenario from handout 6.
- Ask the groups to imagine how the dialogue might go and to add in disassociated responses from the teacher (using the principles on Slide 30). Ask the groups to share or role play their suggestions.
- Discuss with the group how difficult they found this. Do the disassociated statements sound natural?
- Finish by asking for a volunteer to describe a situation they have been in where they didn't know what to say. Then ask the rest of the group to suggest a disassociated approach.

# Activity 6: Supporting

25 to 40 minutes

## What to do

- Refer to handout 4 and show that, when supporting, you are aiming to move towards a position where you are metaphorically standing alongside the other person – you are trying to see the conflict or situation from their perspective. To do this you *keep them talking*. Once they reflect back and they believe that you understand, then you have earned the right to help problem solve.
- Show Slide 31 which highlights the role of supporting. Invite observations on this approach. What are the differences between this approach and ‘telling.’
- Remind the group about the RAC (Risk, Anxiety and Complexity) assessment in module one. Explain that ‘keeping them talking’ is a great way to let someone blow off steam when they are angry or to calm down when they are in a high state of anxiety. It can also help to understand the complexity of a situation. It is therefore an essential skill.
- Split the group into pairs. Designate one person from each pair ‘listener’ and the other ‘talker.’ Ask the talkers to start talking about the conflicts they faced in their first role in a school. The listener must keep them talking. After two minutes (or longer) stop the talking and ask the listeners to feedback to their partner what they heard them say.
- Bring the group back together and ask the talkers to feed back to the group how accurate the summary was and what the listeners did to keep them talking. Record these on a flip chart for use later.
- Show Slide 32: How to keep someone talking and ask the group to identify which of these were used and recorded on the flip chart. Talk through the methods on the slide and then repeat the talking/ listening exercise in pairs – switching roles.

## Explore

- Invite participants, working in pairs or small groups, to explore the potential challenges of using this technique in practice. Use the scenarios on Slide 33 to prompt thinking. Ask participants to record the challenges on a flip chart.
- Bring the group back together to identify which of the challenges relate to personal ability or confidence. Perhaps some participants think they may struggle to stay non-judgemental or would rush too quickly to solve the problem. These represent development opportunities. Also identify which of the challenges relate to logistics and practicality.
- Finish by talking through potential solutions to these challenges and record them for future reference.



# Activity 7: Motivating

10 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Refer to handout 4 and show that, when motivating, you are building on your understanding or their perspective (gained through supporting) but you are now aiming to motivate (persuade/ influence/ encourage) them to choose to take action which will improve their situation. Explain that ‘motivating’ requires you to identify when someone may be willing to be persuaded to adopt a course of action that will reduce the impact of the conflict and leave everyone happier and more content than they otherwise would have been. It may be that they say or do something which indicates they are persuadable or it might take some time ‘keeping them talking’ before they are willing to be persuaded.
- Show the dialogue transcript on Slide 34. Ask the group to identify what conflict mode the teacher is in here (telling) and to suggest how the three people might be feeling after this, perhaps the teacher is irritated and annoyed, Shaun has the moral high ground over Tom as the teacher has sided with him, or Tom is pretty angry that his perspective has been ignored and he has been forced to lose face.
- Ask the group to pick out hints from the transcript that Tom may have been motivated to comply. Here the hint is ‘I would have...’ (not ‘why should I?’).
- Ask for suggestions as to what the teacher might have said at this point in order to motivate Tom to comply. Perhaps instead of ‘Well I’m sure he didn’t mean it...’ the teacher could have said ‘So you were prepared to give the pen back?’ The teacher can then build on this to move nearer to a peaceful resolution.
- People take action when they hear themselves giving good reasons to do so, so keep them talking and work towards this.

## Explore

- How did participants find the exercise? Was it hard to identify the hint and a form of words to motivate? Show Slide 35: How to motivate:
- Talk through the tips, asking for comments and suggestions for how the tips could apply to the pen scenario.
- Finish by asking for a volunteer to describe a situation they have been in where they didn’t know what to say. Then ask the rest of the group to suggest a motivating approach.

# Activity 8: Review

30 to 40 minutes

## What to do

- Your group may have absorbed all the material in the two modules and be fairly happy with it by now. Or you might feel that exploring a few detailed scenarios would help to cement the concepts and encourage debate around the trickier areas. If the latter is the case then handout 7 contains four scenarios, which are based on real events, for you to use to review both modules.
- Remind the group of the main concepts covered, these include:
  - Conflict can be created where none need exist
  - Your behaviours and attitudes can escalate or deescalate a situation
  - The defusing approach (Slide 23)
  - Risk, Anxiety, Complexity (Slides 14 to 17 & 21)
  - Avoid, reduce, share or accept the risk (Slide 22)
  - What you say is not always what is heard (Slide 25)
  - Five perspectives on conflict (Slide 26 or handout 4)
- Organise participants in to small groups and ask each to use concepts from the two modules to consider the same scenario (chosen from the four available). Prompt if necessary by asking what reactions would be unhelpful? What mind set is required? What is your assessment of the situation? Is it high risk, high anxiety or high complexity? What outcomes are desirable? Are they necessary and achievable? What is your priority outcome? What can you do – safely – to achieve that? Can you avoid, reduce or share the risk? Which perspective on conflict would you use? Which techniques would you apply? Ask the groups to record their thoughts on a flip chart.
- After 20 minutes or so bring the groups back together and ask one to introduce their approach to the situation. Ask the other groups to highlight where their approach differs - and for considerable differences, explore why. Which concepts and techniques were used to arrive at these conclusions? Would all of the approaches work? Does it matter that they are different?
- Remind the group that everyone approaches conflict differently. People have different tolerances for risk. They bring different experiences to the situation. They read situations differently – based on what they see and what they think is reasonable or unreasonable behaviour. **What really matters is: would the chosen approach to the scenarios be likely to avoid further escalation and leave the situation better than when they found it?**

# Reflection

15 to 20 minutes

## What to do

- Ask individuals to think about the workshop and to spend a few minutes reflecting on how the skills will impact on their roles within the school.
- Use this opportunity to have one more practice at 'keeping people talking' - organise participants into pairs, designate one person in each pair as the listener and the other as the talker. Ask them to start a conversation by saying, "tell me your thoughts for implementing this training in your own practice or your school." Challenge the listeners to keep the conversation going using their listening skills, without using direct questions. Swap the role of listener and talker and repeat the conversation.

## Explore

- Ask each pair to quickly highlight the main themes from their conversations. Compare and contrast approaches. Ask participants to note down anything relevant for their own action plan within their organisation.

## Conclude

- Summarise the highlights of the workshops for you and the issues that have been raised for further exploration or action in the school.
- Ask for final thoughts from the group about the usefulness or otherwise of the various elements of the two modules.
- Remind participants that skills and techniques are helpful for;
  - Defusing conflict, challenging behaviour, aggression and threats.
  - Heading-off conflict, defusing tense and difficult situations long before flashpoints are reached and avoiding (or not creating) conflict altogether.
  - Managing their own responses, especially when under pressure.
- Encourage participants, if they are not confident using a technique or expect (or fear) a particular situation, to pre-prepare responses and rehearse a few 'what if' scenarios with colleagues or family and friends. This will help refine the approach and aid a quick response when under pressure.