Understanding and Resolving Conflict for the Older Adult
Presentation Focus

- Understanding the factors that affect the way older adults approach and work through conflict.

- Using empathy and facilitative questioning techniques resolve conflict and concerns early.

- Practising de-escalation techniques as part of early intervention.
Factors that affect the way older adults approach conflict
Particular issues to be aware of

- Physical requirements
- Cognitive requirements
- Personality/emotion
- Power imbalance
Physical requirements

- How physical health and changes can play a part in conflict.
  - Where is the focus?

- How physical health and changes need to be accommodated in conflict resolution.
  - Time barriers
  - Physical barriers
Cognitive ability and situational conflict

- The most consistent change is cognitive slowing. Not cognitive loss or dysfunction
  - Changes in ability to quickly perform attentional tasks, such as trying to grasp a telephone number when someone rattles it off quickly.
  - Multitasking is more difficult. Processing information rapidly and dividing attention effectively are cognitive skills that peak in young adulthood.
  - Decline in ability to keep multiple pieces of information in mind at the same time.
  - Recall and short-term memory decline.
  - Older adults consider fewer bits of information and use less effective decision-making strategies when they are in unfamiliar situations.
Ability to conceptualise a problem

“Executive functioning refers to higher-level skills, such as conceptualizing a problem, making appropriate decisions, and planning and carrying out effective actions. Older adults tend to be slower in conceptualizing problems and less ready to change strategies when circumstances shift. In one well-known study involving decision making, approximately one-third of older adults did poorly compared to younger adults.”
Social cognition

- Social cognition is the ability to detect what others are feeling or thinking and respond appropriately.

- Considerations:
  - physical appearance
  - voice quality
  - facial expressions, and
  - ways the person is behaving

- An older adult takes longer to form social impressions, but they are usually correct.
  - Negative emotions can be harder to understand
The complexity of self

**Monochronic**
- Linear
  - Sequential
    - Time is quantifiable
      - Absorber

**Polychronic**
- Multi/global
  - Cross-talkers
    - Time is flexible
      - Reflector

*Consider how all these aspects inform who we are.*
Understanding sources of power

- **Information-based power**: Having an information advantage.

- **Position-based power**: Power from having a key position in an organisation. Closely related to resource control.

- **Relationship-based power**: People view others as sharing their goals due to a common history.
The Process

Things to keep in mind

✓ Try to meet in the same place every time
✓ Give the resident the option about where and how you meet
✓ Limit discussions to no more than three areas at a time; be prepared to repeat
✓ Ensure there is adequate time for the resident to absorb, consider, and understand what you’ve said
✓ Ask the resident to reflect back to you what you’ve said/what options you’ve offered/your understanding of the problem
Empathy and facilitation: What you can do
Empathy creates connection. The more connection we have, the more we trust.

The more we trust, the more able we are to be vulnerable, open, and honest.

Then we see things as they are.
Creating empathy

How does empathy differ from sympathy?

Relating VS Comforting

Empathy: Ability to mutually experience the thoughts/emotions of others. Can put yourself in their shoes because you’ve experienced the same.

Sympathy: Feelings of care and understanding for suffering of others. Acknowledging hardship and providing comfort.
Empathy translated as facilitation

➤ We all want to be acknowledged. Interest-based enquiry shows the other person that they are important.

➤ Examples:
  – Help me understand why this is important to you.
  – What about the incident has upset you the most?
  – What needs have not been met?
  – How do you think the other person has been affected?
  – How might the other person describe what happened?
  – What are the consequences for you of…….? 
  – What is the most important thing for you in solving this problem?
  – What would you like to see happen now?
Why use facilitative questions?

- They build trust through attention and respect.
- They allow you to understand what is really at issue for someone (what they need, versus what they say their position is).
- They allow you work through your own defences.
- And they ensure that both of you understand each other’s perspective.
Iceberg of Conflict

- Issues
- Personalities
- Emotions
- Interests, Needs, Desires
- Self-Perceptions and Self-Esteem
- Hidden Expectations
- Unresolved Issues from the Past

Cloke & Goldsmith (2000, p. 114)
De-escalating conflict
Understanding your defences is the first step in de-escalating conflict and collaboration.

You must know yourself, your defences, and your reactions.

Also understand that we respond emotionally first to everything. Logic and rationality are distant seconds.
What our defences are telling us

- We want to feel:
  - Significant
  - Competent
  - Likeable

- We do not want to feel:
  - Ignored
  - Humiliated
  - Rejected
The process: check your RATES

RECONGISE: Know your defensive triggers and be able to identify them in the moment.

ACKNOWLEDGE: The goal isn’t to remove them; it’s to understand your triggers.

TIME-OUT: Slow down, pause. Take a breath, a drink of water, stand up, give yourself time to process.

EVALUATE: consider your next option. Where are you trying to go? What is the goal?

START AGAIN: refresh the conversation from an empathetic perspective.
Time for an exercise: understanding your own defenses
Mistaken assessment of danger

Mistaken Assessment of Danger

Negative Feedback

Behaviour that’s Aggressive & Defensive

MAD

BAD
Don’t give people negative feedback, but do give them...

E A R

- Empathy
- Attention
- Respect
Time for an exercise: practicing giving the EAR
Questions?