

Welcome. This module, Maintaining Effective Relations with your Supervisor for Graduate Students – Part 1, is the first in a series of short recordings designed to help you to better understand conflict, and provide you with tools and resources to help you respond effectively when tension arises in work or academic relationships, in order to resolve the situation as quickly and easily as possible.

These short modules cannot provide you with all the information that you need to address every situation. They are meant to help you become familiar with helpful tools and strategies, but even more importantly, help you know where to go to seek help when you need it. These recordings are provided by the Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, so I will begin by introducing you to this office and their role on campus.

Conflict Management and Human Rights Office

- guidance and support
- conflict coaching for individuals
- mediation for small groups
- help you prepare to have a difficult conversation
- information and guidance regarding concerns related to human rights concerns, harassment or discrimination

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The Conflict Management and Human Rights Office is available to assist all members of the University Waterloo community: faculty, staff, students. They are able provide guidance to individuals or groups experiencing strained relations or conflict. They can provide conflict coaching to individuals, or mediation for small groups. They can help you prepare to have a difficult conversation with a colleague or supervisor. They can also provide guidance if you have concerns related to harassment or discrimination. If you have questions or concerns related to human rights, they can help you understand what your rights are and how they apply to your specific situation.

They can also provide you with information about what options are available to you and guide you through the process of responding informally or formally to a human rights issue

If you have questions or want to learn more you can email Jeremy de Boer, Senior Case Consultant Conflict Management & Human Rights.

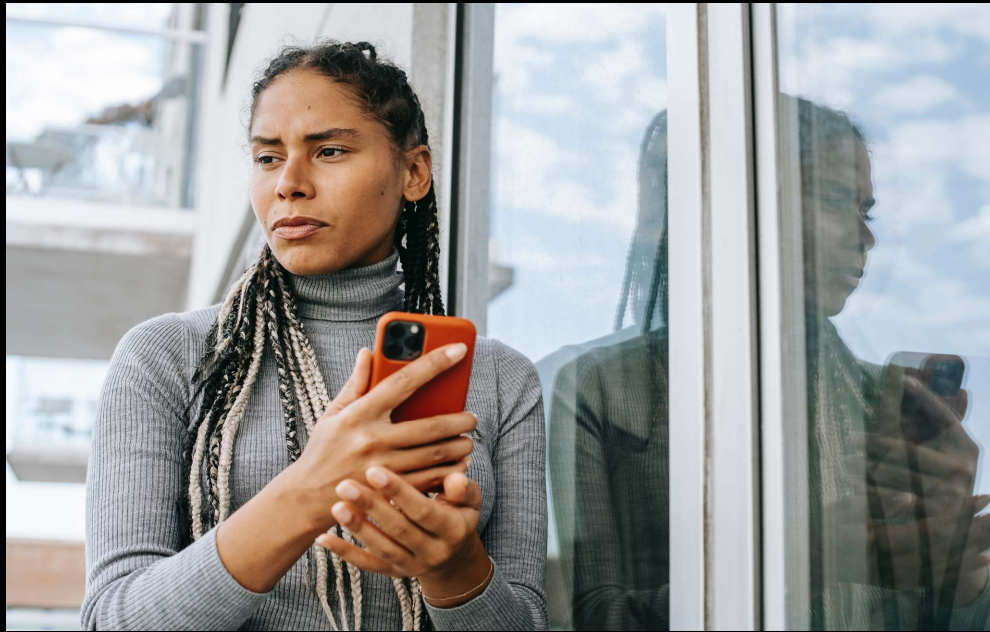


Photo by Alex Green

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Photo by Alex Green: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/thoughtful-ethnic-woman-thinking-on-solution-of-problem-5699854/>

The staff in our office have a great deal of experience working with graduate students who have concerns related to a wide variety of situations, such as allegations of harassment and discrimination, disputes over authorship or funding, requests for more frequent feedback, TA/RA allocations and a wide variety of misunderstandings and broken promises.



Photo by DS stories: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/human-shape-blocks-on-wooden-seesaw-6990404/>

We understand that the power imbalance between graduate students and their supervisors can often make it difficult to communicate effectively. Whether it is a graduate supervisor or a workplace supervisor, the presence of a power imbalance can make it difficult to speak up when concerns arise. When a relationship is solid, a power imbalance may not seem to have much influence over that relationship but when difficulties arise the person with less power begins to consider the perceived risks involved in addressing concerns. These perceived risks can act as a barrier to a quick and effective resolution.

Barriers to Effective Early Resolution Attempts

ASSUMPTIONS

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

NEGATIVE FILTERS

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Barriers like assumptions, negative emotions, and negative filters can not only prevent you from initiating a response when difficulties arise, but also impede the quality or effectiveness of your response. In later modules we will be discussion these and other barriers in more detail, along with tools and strategies for preventing and overcoming barriers in order to resolve conflict as early as possible.

Barriers like these, if left unaddressed can make the idea of responding so uncomfortable and frightening that you may be tempted to put off a response off in hopes that “things will get better” on their own. This, of course, is not what happens. Where conflict is concerned, things do not generally get better on their own and the result is ... broken relationships.

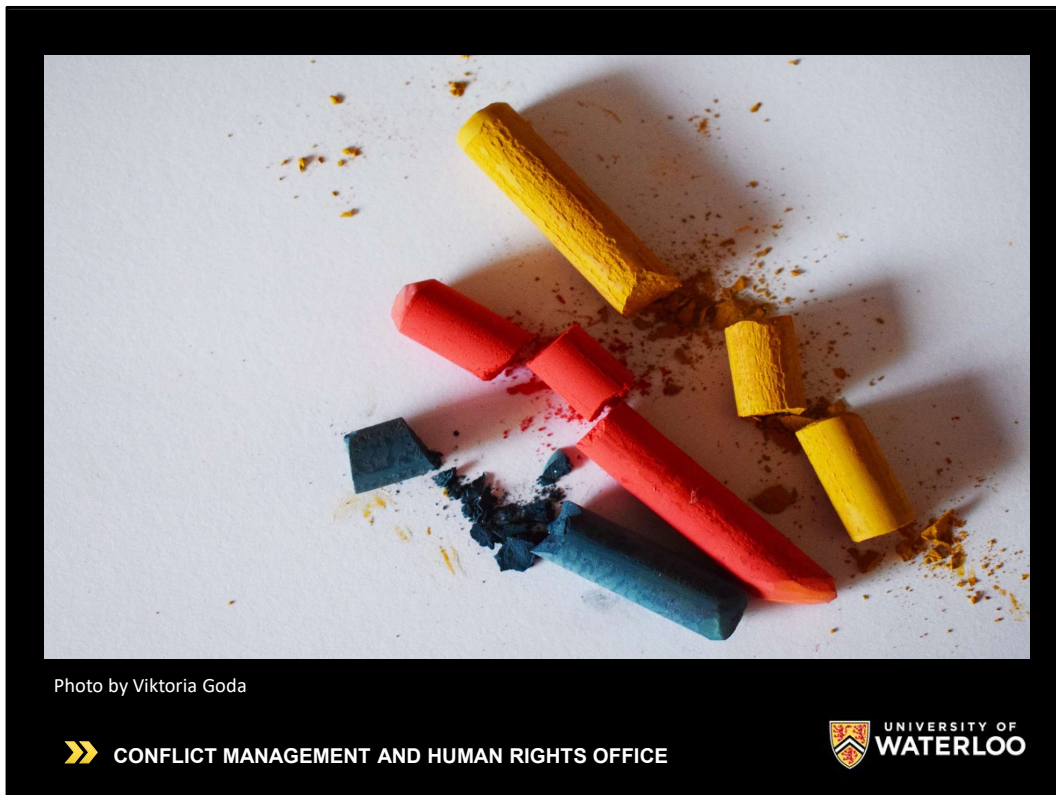
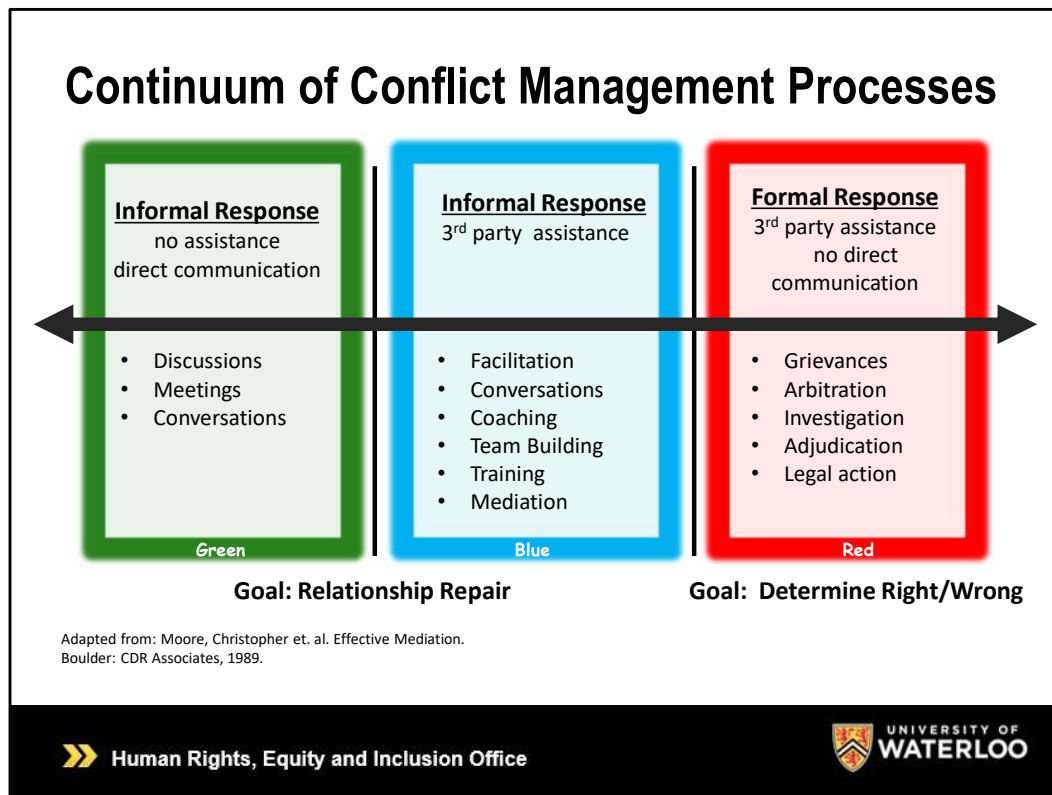


Photo by Viktoria Goda: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/Blue-Red-and-yellow-chalk-1107495/>

I think we would all agree that it is in everyone's best interest to avoid relationship breakdown, where possible. In order to do that we need to take some time to better understand conflict. A tool that can be use for this purpose is the Continuum of Conflict Management Processes.

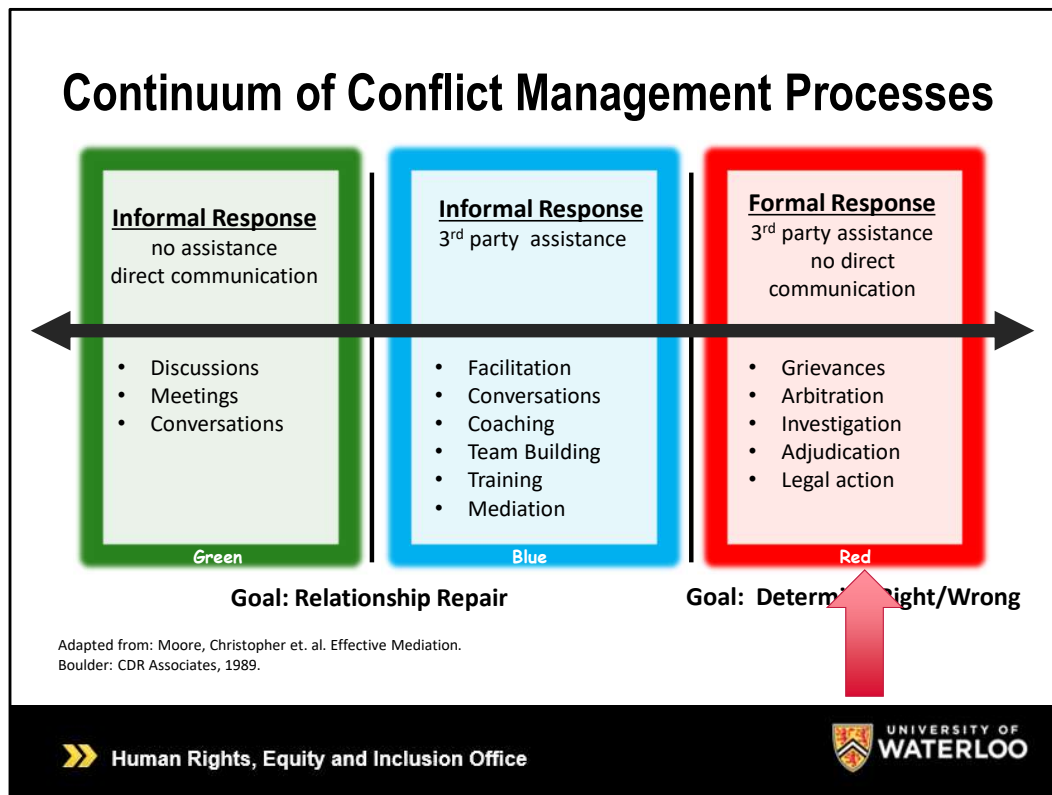


This continuum has three zones: a Green Zone, a Blue Zone and a Red Zone. Let's begin by discussing the Green Zone.

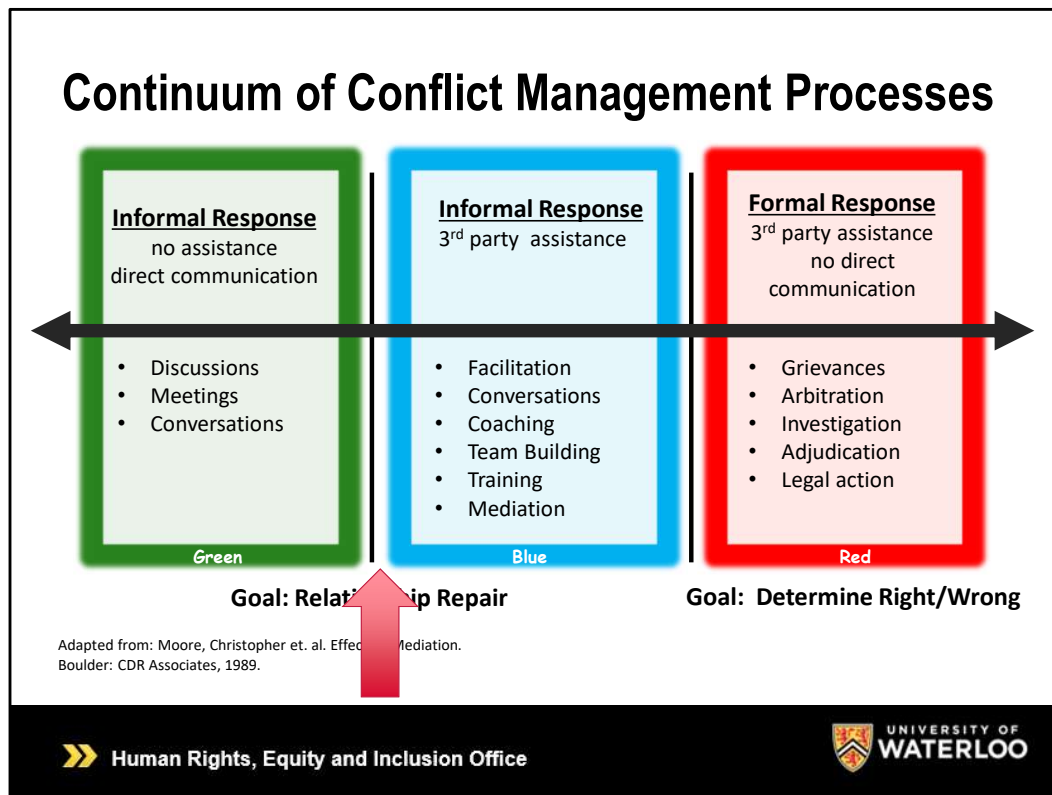
The Green Zone represents conflict which has a mild impact on you, you are comfortable responding on your own and talking directly to the other person.

The Blue Zone represents conflict that has a greater negative impact on you or the other party. You are not comfortable responding on your own and feel that it would be beneficial to invite a third person into the process. This might involve seeking conflict coaching, inviting someone in to facilitate a conversation, or seeking mediation services. It also could mean engaging in education and training or other relationship building processes. The goal of response in both the Green and Blue Zones is relationship repair.

The Red Zone is different. Conflicts that fall within the Red Zone are conflicts that have a severe emotional impact, and these require more of a formal response like an investigation or a formal complaint. The goal of these responses is to determine right and wrong.



Unfortunately, in many cases, our office does not become aware of a conflict until it has reached the Red Zone where relations have broken down completely and negative impacts are severe.



By responding to a conflict in its earlier stages, in the Green Zone or the Blue Zone, you open the door to the possibility of a response that not only fixes the problem but also preserves the relationship and prepares the parties to effectively deal with future difficulties. Future modules will discuss tools and resources that can help you respond more effectively to conflict when it arises. We will be discussing Green Zone tools and resources, Blue Zone strategies, and how to recognize and respond to situation that have crossed into the Red Zone. In the meantime, I want to leave you with some points to reflect upon.

Reflect:

Consider a conflict situation that you have experienced recently:

- Would you place it in the Green Zone, Blue Zone or Red Zone? Why is that?
- If it is in the Green or Blue Zones, what could happen that might push it into the Red Zone?
- Is there a power imbalance present in the relationship? If so, how does that impact where you have placed it on the continuum?
- Have you been able to respond to the situation? How effective was your response?
- Could you have responded earlier? Why didn't you?

Before reflecting on these questions, feel free to download and print off the associated worksheet. Consider pausing this video to jot down your answers as we go through the questions. Let's begin:

Consider a difficult situation that you have experienced recently:

- Would you place it in the Green Zone, Blue Zone or Red Zone? Is it a situation that you feel comfortable responding to on your own or would you feel more comfortable seeking some advice or coaching first? Has the emotional impact been mild, moderate or severe?
- If you placed the situation in the Green or Blue Zones, what type of response or events might push it into the Red Zone?
- Is there a power imbalance present in the relationship? If so, how did that impact where you have placed it on the continuum? If you were having a similar conflict with a colleague, would you have placed it differently?
- Have you been able to respond to the situation? How effective was your response? What factors played a role in making your response more or less effective?
- Could you have responded earlier? What kept you from doing so?

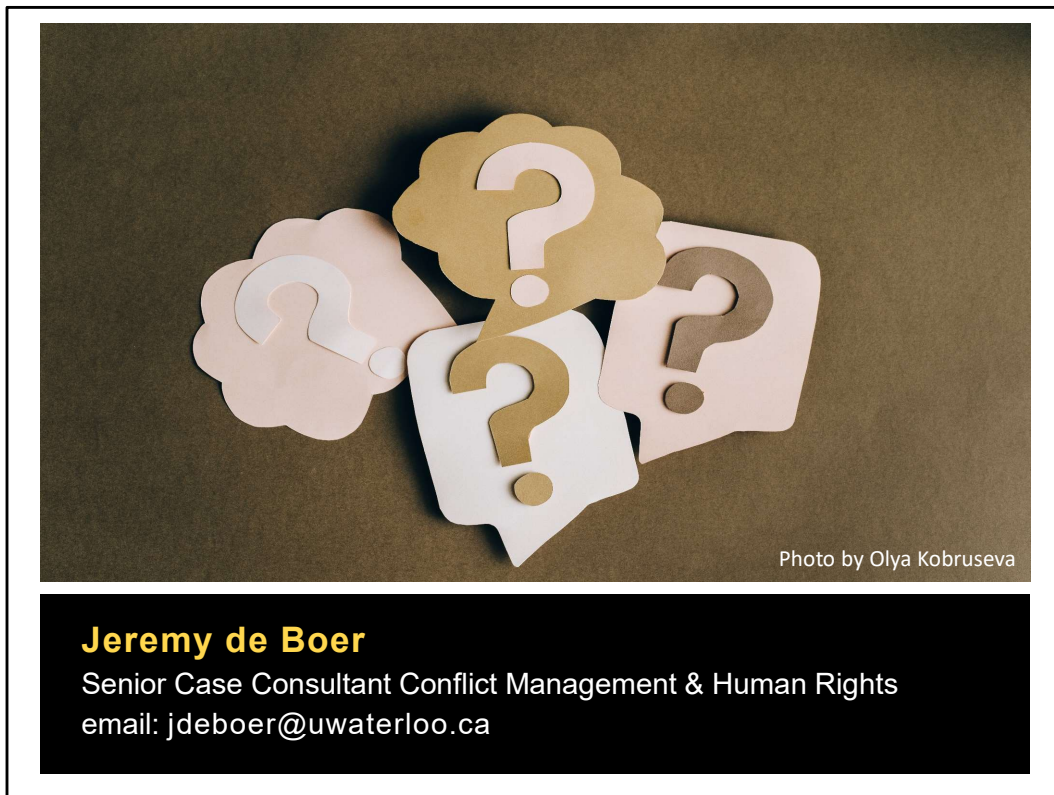


Photo by Olya Kobruseva: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/question-marks-on-paper-crafts-5428836/>

Remember if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like to access any of the services offered by our office, contact Jeremy de Boer. In our next module we will be discussing strategies and tools for responding to Green Zone conflict.