

Welcome to Part 2 of Maintaining Effective Relations with your Supervisor for Graduate Students. This is the second module in a series of short recordings designed to provide you with tools and resources to help you respond effectively when tension arises in work or academic relationships. If you have not yet viewed Part 1, please take the time to do so as the content of this module builds on what was learned in Part 1. Remember that these short modules are meant to help you become familiar with tools and strategies for responding to difficult situations, but even more importantly, help you know where to go to seek help when you need it.



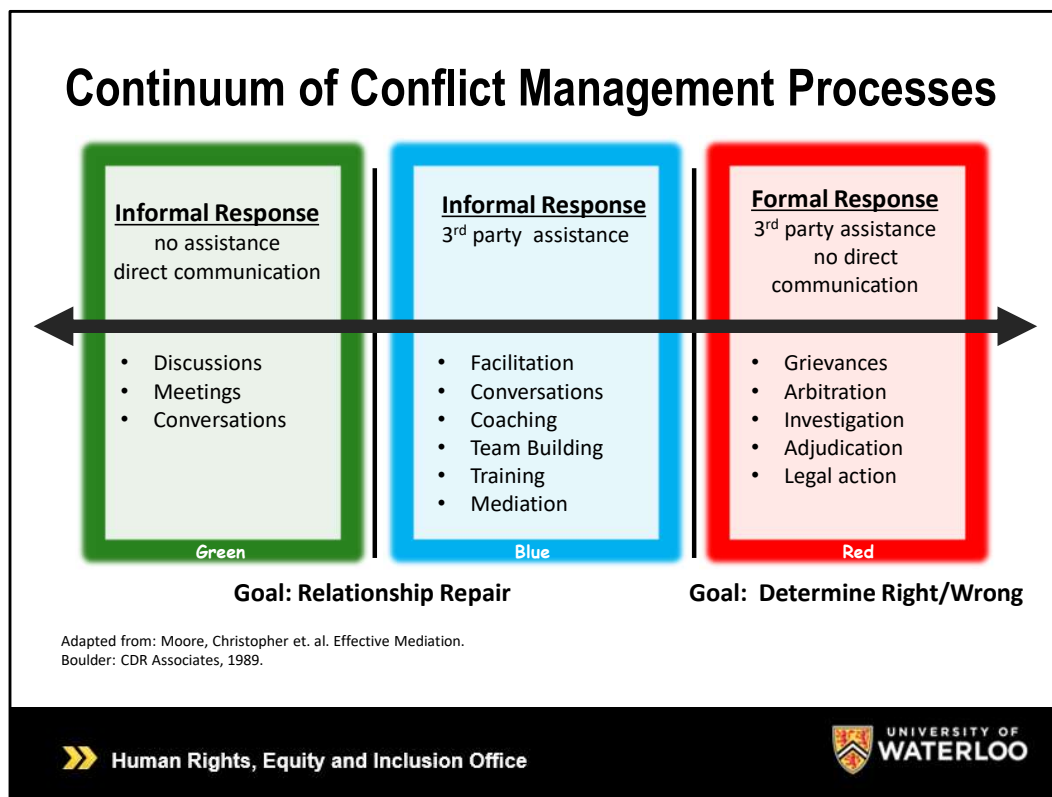
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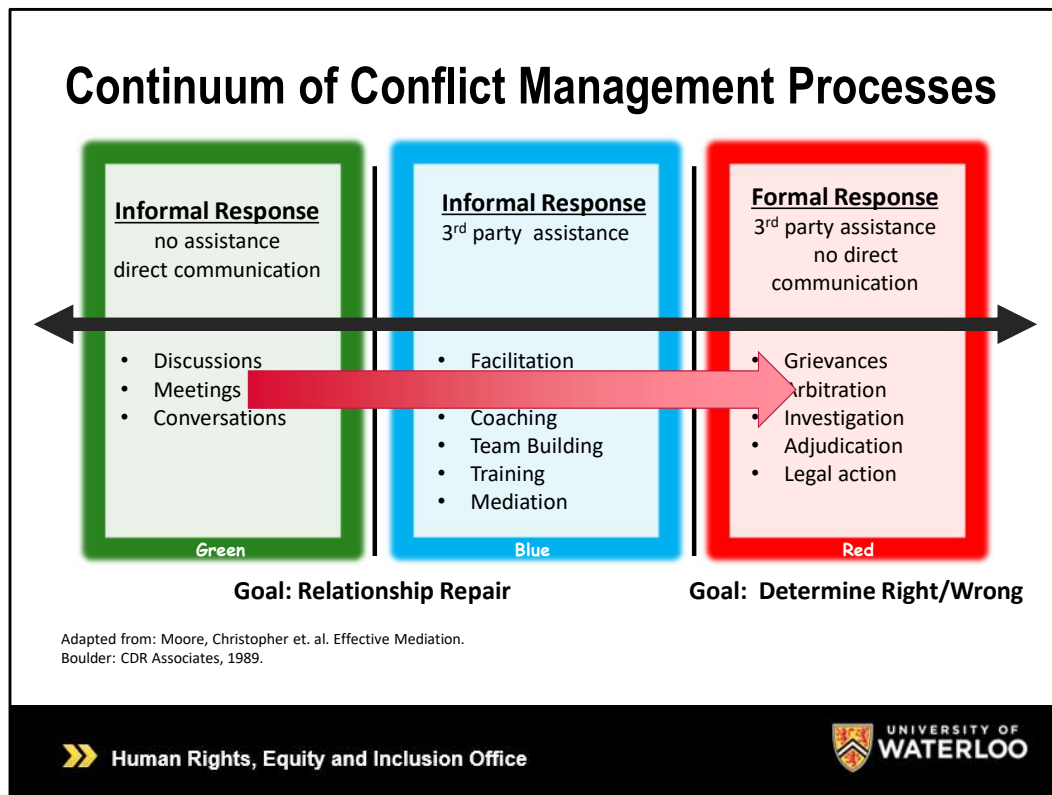
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In this module we will be discussing tools and strategies that can help you respond effectively when you find yourself facing a Green Zone situation.



Let's revisit the Continuum of Conflict Management processes from Module 1. Remember that this continuum provides a framework that you can use to assess difficult situations and help you determine what kind of a response is merited.

Situations that fall within the Green Zone have a mild impact on you, you are comfortable responding on your own and talking directly to the other person. Whereas Blue Zone situations have greater negative impact on you or the other party, so much so that you are not comfortable responding on your own and feel that it would be beneficial to invite a third person into the process. When responding to situation in the Green and Blue Zones our goal is relationship repair. Red Zone situations, if you recall, have a severe emotional impact and require more of a formal response like an investigation or a formal complaint. The goal of a response to these situations is to determine right and wrong.

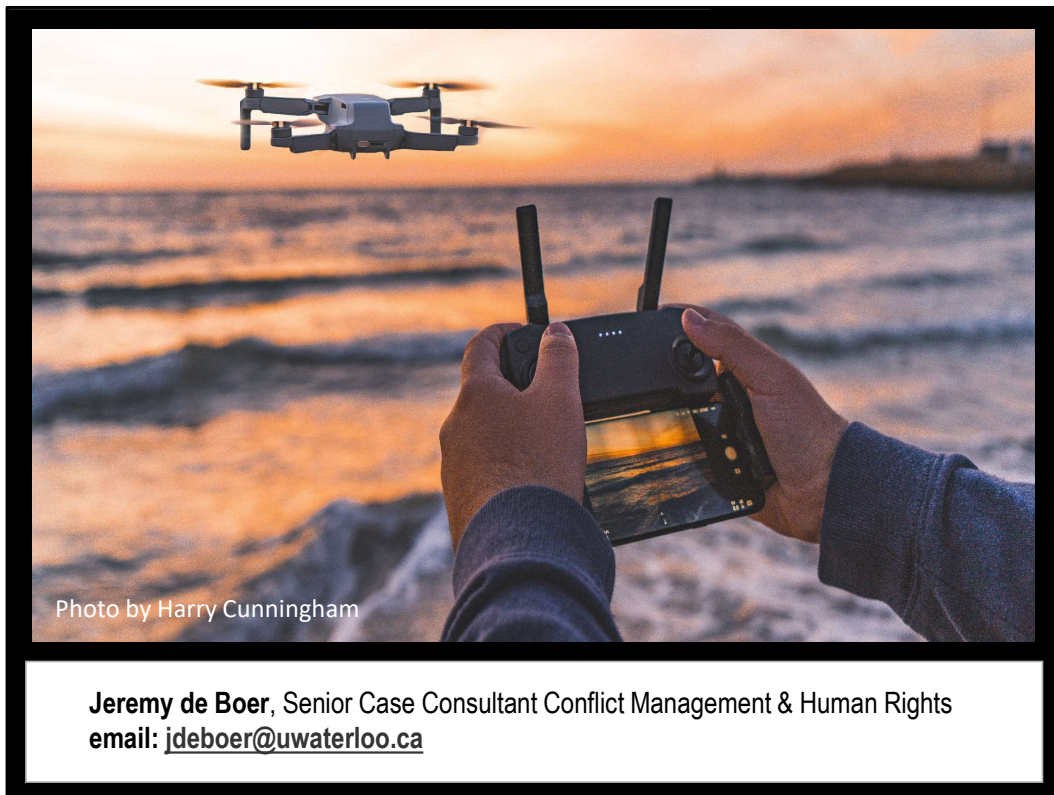


If you have considered a situation and determined that it would fall within the Green Zone, that means that you have determined that it has had a mild emotional impact on you and that you are comfortable responding on your own. These are the situations that we are going to consider in this module but before we do, I want to remind you of two very important considerations.

First, remember that what feels like a Green Zone situation to you may not feel like a Green Zone situation to me. How a specific situation impacts a person can depend on many factors, including past experiences, your relationship with the other person, and the presence or absence of a power imbalance. For this reason, it is important that you consider for yourself how the situation has impacted you as an individual and whether it might be beneficial to seek help. Don't let others convince you that you are over-reacting or making too big of a deal of a situation, just because it would impact them differently.

Secondly, remember that a situation may change over time. Just because you have determined that a situation belongs in the Green Zone now does not mean that it will stay there. Certain events or developments or can push a situation down the continuum from the Green Zone to the Blue Zone and even into the Red Zone. That's why it is important to remember as you move forward that reassessment of a situation may be required. It can be helpful to consider early on what type of events might cause you to reassess the situation so that you are prepared to do so if your situation changes.

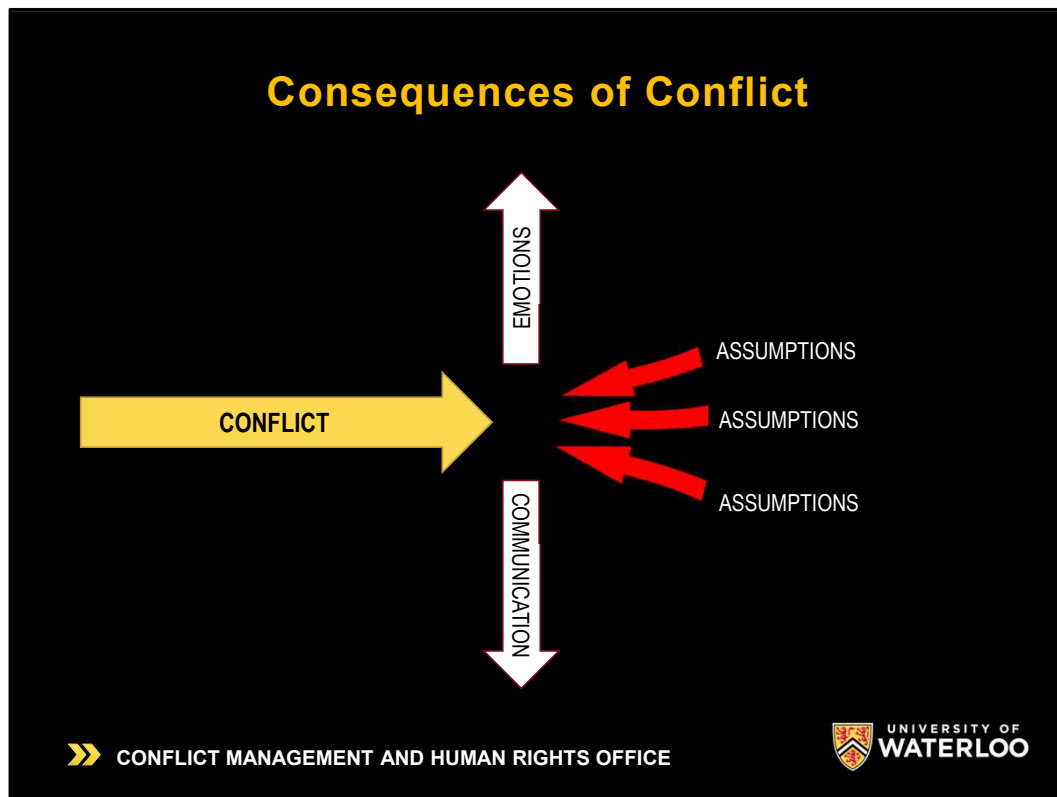
Finally, remember that if you are at all uncertain about where the situation would fall on the Continuum of Conflict Management processes, do not hesitate to reach out to staff that the Conflict Management and Human Rights Office



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Sometimes people assume that if they reach out to the Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, their small situation will turn into a great big deal and that they will lose control of and what happens next. Neither of these things are true. If you reach out to Jeremy at the Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, the first thing he will do is listen. After listening to your concerns, he will share information about policy and resources that are available to address your concerns either formally or informally. He will present you with your options, but you get to decide what happens next. Once you have assessed the situation and confirmed where it falls on the continuum, it is important to then take time to assess yourself and consider where you are at.



You see, when someone says or does something that feels uncomfortable or disrespectful, very often, emotions go up, communication drops, and assumptions flood in to fill the gap. If you recall from Module 1, barriers like assumptions and negative emotions can get in the way of responding effectively to difficult situations, so it is important to take some time to reflect on how to best identify and overcome these barriers before moving forward.



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Although emotions themselves are not necessarily a problem, the tone of voice and body language that often accompany high emotions can get in the way of effective communication. In addition, when we are overwhelmed by emotions like anger and frustration we are not at our best. These emotions can prevent us from communicating effectively and can distract us from hearing what the other person has to say.

## Strategies for moderating emotions



1. Take a break
2. Take a breath
3. Try to understand what's happening
4. Get active
5. Put it in perspective

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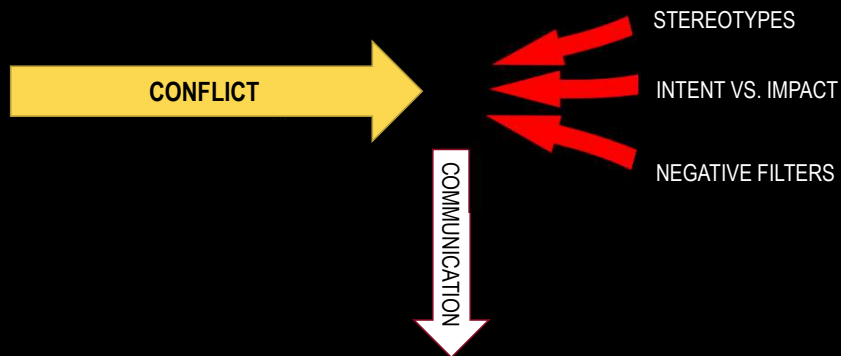
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There are a number of things that we can do to calm our high emotions and prevent them from acting as a barrier:

- Consider stepping step away from the situation and taking a deep breath. Taking time to calm down can keep you from saying something you will regret later.
- Figure what is going on for you. What are you actually feeling - fear, frustration, hurt, anxiety? Is it even this situation that is the root of the problem or is there something else weighing on your mind that is triggering this emotion?
- If you can take the time, go for a walk. Exercise can help moderate emotions.
- Finally, put it all into perspective – consider the big picture – and identify your goals? This can help you see past the emotions and focus on understanding the situation.

If you are struggling to move past these emotions, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. The Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, the GSA, Homewood Health, and Campus Wellness are all resources that are available to you if you are feeling overwhelmed.

## Consequences of Conflict



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After acknowledging and processing the emotions that are present, it is important to consider the assumptions you may be making about the situation. Although there are many kinds of assumptions, some examples include assumptions based on stereotypes, assumptions about intent and impact, and negative filters.

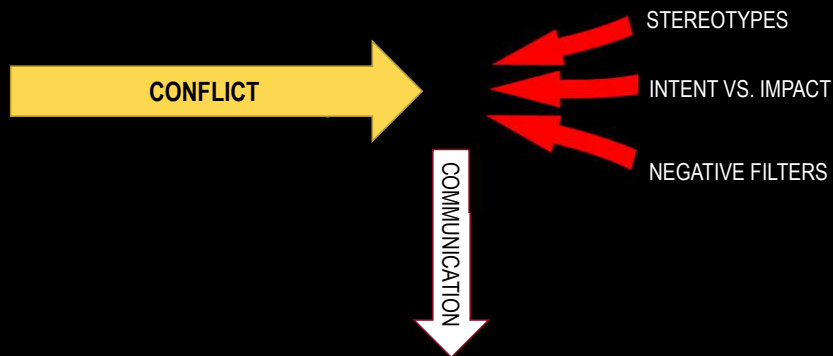


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Assumptions based on stereotypes lead us to categorize people into groups based on characteristics like age, sex, gender, race, and ability. We then make predictions about how they will respond to a certain situation based on the group or groups that we have assigned them to. It is very easy to make these kinds of assumptions because we are surrounded by this kind of thinking all the time. Stereotypes bombard us constantly on tv, in movies, on social media, and in the jokes and comments that we hear everyday. When we are constantly surrounded by these ideas, they can seep into our minds and begin to influence how we think, what we say and how we interact with others.

Whether stereotypes seem negative or not, they always negatively impact communication because they limit our thinking. Our preconceived ideas about who a person is and how they will respond to a situation can keep us from actually hearing what they have to say and may even keep us from approaching them when difficulties arise.

## Consequences of Conflict



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Some assumptions may center around impact and intent. Often, if someone says or does something that impacts us negatively, we assume that their behavior was intended to be hurtful, annoying or disrespectful when that may not be the case at all. It is important to acknowledge and put aside this assumption, before moving forward so we will be better prepared to listen.



Photo by Jonathan Oliveira

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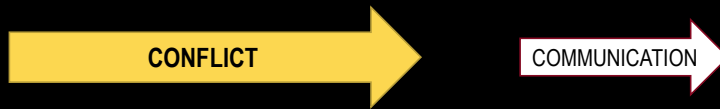


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Finally, past interactions with a person can lead us to make assumptions about their motives. Why? Because those past interactions have created what we refer to as negative filters. Negative filters lead us to focus on negative things and discount positive things. They impact how we interpret what the other person is saying or doing and get in the way of resolving the issue. Remember, as well, that negative filters can be contagious. We can be affected by negative assumptions that others are making about a person and our negative assumptions can also influence those around us.

The key to identifying assumptions is awareness. Think carefully about your words and behavior when you interact with others especially if they seem to be having a negative impact or contributing to conflict and ask yourself, “What assumptions am I making?”

## Consequences of Conflict



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Once we have removed emotional barriers, and addressed assumptions, we are better able to communicate effectively.

## Seek Understanding

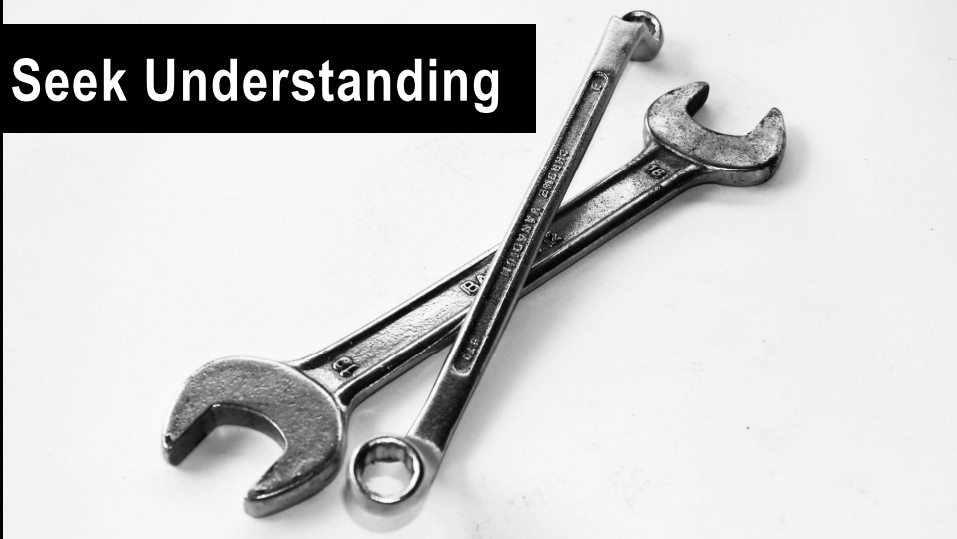


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There are two tools that can help us do that well. You may think at first that these tools seem overly simple, but there is a reason for that - we need to be able to pull these tools out of our pocket on short notice and apply them easily because we may need to use them when we are dealing with emotions and assumptions. They need to be tools that we can practice and become comfortable with so that they eventually become our default mode.

The first of our two Green Zone tools is designed to help us overcome assumptions by providing us with more information. That tool is seeking understanding.

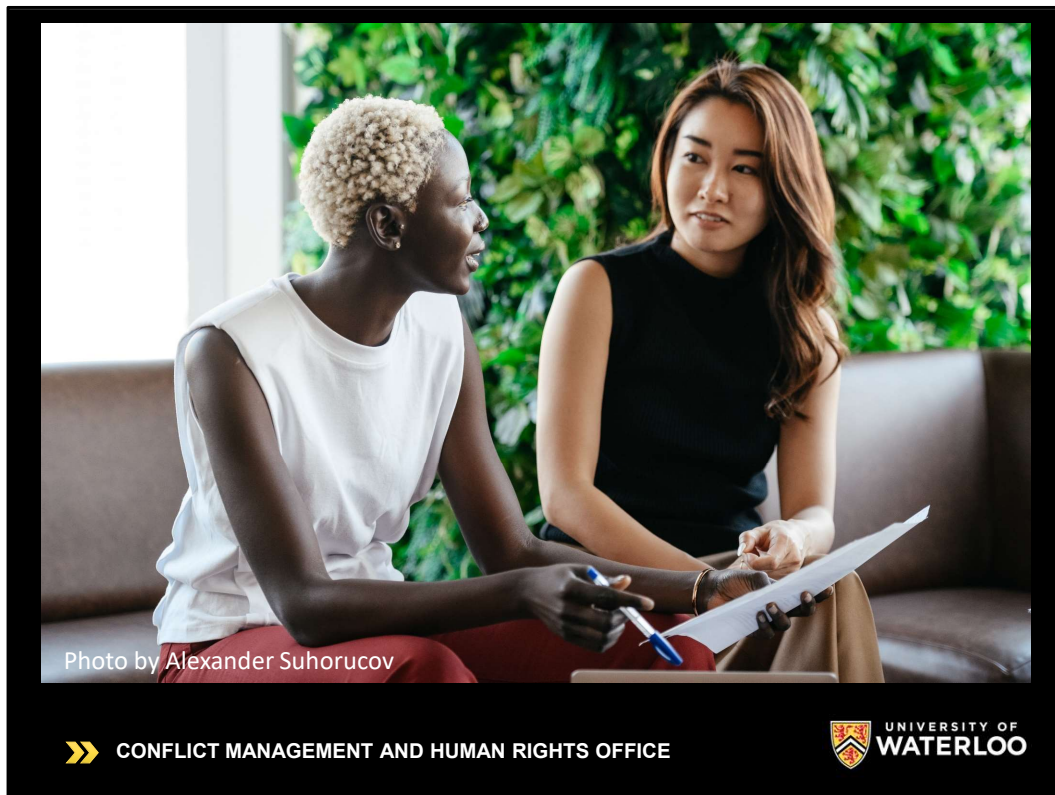


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Seeking understanding involves asking good questions so that we can understand the other person's perspective. When we ask questions rather than making statements, we also send the message that we care about the other person and want to resolve the situation in a way that meets everyone's needs. It is important that if we are asking questions, we are really listening to what the other person is saying and not allowing ourselves to be distracted by our assumptions or by thoughts of how we will respond. One good practice is to periodically summarize what the other person has said and ask them if you have understood correctly.

What does it sound like to seek understanding? I could sound like this,

- Can you help me understand what you meant when you said ABC?
- I'm not sure why you chose to do XYZ, can help me understand what was happening?

## Communicate Impact



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The second tool, communicating impact is a tool that allows you to tell the person how their behavior impacted you without labelling them or labelling their behavior. You are simply explaining how you have been impacted.

# Communicate Impact

When you ....

I felt ....

Could you ...

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In order to ensure that you focus on the impact the behavior has had on you rather than labelling the other person or their behavior, use this model to communicate impact.

You can modify the model to fit your needs but always double check that your focus is on communicating impact.



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How might it sound to communication impact? It could sound like this ...

- When you said XYZ in the meeting, I felt uncomfortable. Next time could we talk privately?
- When you refer to me by that nickname, it makes me uncomfortable, could you please call me Lynn in the future?

# Seek Understanding & Communicate Impact



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Seeking understanding & communicating impact can be used separately or they can be used together as a communication power duo, like this ...

- Can you help me understand what you meant when you said .....?
- May I share how your comment affected me?

These tools can be used to clarify when someone says or does something that negatively impacts you, but they can also be used in situations when you may have negatively impacted by someone else, like this...

- I am concerned that what I said may have upset you.
- Can you help me understand how my words impacted you?

If you would like to explore more examples of how these tools can be applied, check out our supplemental module called "Green Zone Scenarios".

## Reflect:

Consider the situation that you have placed in the Green Zone:

- What type of events might cause you to reassess the situation? How will you respond in that case?
- What emotions are you bringing to this situation? Are they apt to keep you from communicating effectively? What steps can you take to prevent them from doing so? Do you need to discuss these emotions with someone before proceeding?
- What assumption have you made about the situation or the other person? Have you made assumptions based on stereotypes or assumptions about their intent? Are you viewing the situation through a negative filter? How can you put these assumptions aside? Do you need to discuss these assumptions with someone before proceeding?

Let's consider now how you might apply the strategies outlined in this module to your Green Zone situation. Feel free to download and print off the Module 2 worksheet. Consider pausing this video to jot down your answers as we go through the questions.

Let's begin. Consider the situation that you have placed in the Green Zone:

- What type of events might cause you to reassess the situation? How will you respond in that case?
- What emotions are you bringing to this situation? Are they apt to keep you from communicating effectively? What steps can you take to prevent them from doing so? Do you need to discuss these emotions with someone before proceeding?
- What assumption have you made about the situation or the person? Have you made assumptions based on stereotypes or assumptions about their intent? Are you viewing the situation through a negative filter? How can you put these assumptions aside? Do you need to discuss these assumptions with someone else before proceeding?

## Reflect:

Consider the two communications tools discussed: Seeking Understanding and Communication Impact. Could either of them be useful in this situation? Could they both?

- What information do you not yet have about the situation? What questions can you ask to gain a better understanding of the other person's perspective?
- How have you been impacted by the situation? How could you communicate that to the other person?
- Could you use these tools to assess how the other person has been impacted by your words or actions?

Consider the two communications tools discussed: seeking understanding and communicating impact. Could either of them be useful in this situation? Could they both?

- What information do you not yet have about the situation? What questions can you ask to gain a better understanding of the other person's perspective? Take some time to write these questions down now..
- How have you been impacted by the situation? How could you communicate that to the other person? Use the model provided earlier to draft what you might say.
- Could you use these tools to assess how the other person has been impacted by your words or actions? Write down your thoughts for future consideration.



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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 Blue Zone strategies.