

**Conflict Intensity Chart**  
**A Resource for Committees on Ministry**  
**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

**Introduction**

The Conflict Intensity Chart is intended to provide members of Committees on Ministry and others with a diagnostic instrument to assist in determining the intensity of a given conflict, to outline an ongoing training process and to provide relevant resources. Please note the following features of this chart:

**A. Purpose is to De-escalate a Conflict:**

The purpose of the chart is to provide the skills needed to de-escalate a conflict, and to lower each level above the first to a more manageable level if possible.

**B. Levels are not Discrete:**

There usually are not clear distinctions between conflict levels, and there is often overlap of characteristics. Intensity levels will vary from individual to individual and from group to group, requiring a consultant to examine a broad database before deciding the conflict level.

**C. Characteristics are Inclusive:**

As a corollary to the above note, the diagnosis of a particular conflict level of intensity ought to be derived from looking at all characteristics, rather than one or two that seem to dominate.

**D. Team Approach should be Considered:**

The suggested leadership skills acknowledge that no one person may have all the skills needed to manage a higher-level conflict. Other team members are needed to share insight and, especially at higher levels of intensity, to share the emotional stress of conflict intervention.

**E. Training Required for all Intensity Levels:**

It is recommended that all members of a Committee on Ministry be trained to handle level one conflict. For those persons identified to act at levels two and three, additional training is required. Level four and five usually require professional outside consultants in conflict management.

## LEVEL ONE - PROBLEM TO SOLVE

<b>Characteristics:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue</li> <li>2. Emotions</li> <li>3. Orientation</li> <li>4. Information</li> <li>5. Language</li> <li>6. Objective</li> <li>7. Outcome</li> </ol> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Real disagreement; conflicting goals, values and needs etc.</li> <li>2. Short-lived anger quickly controlled; parties begin to be uncomfortable in presence of other.</li> <li>3. Tends to be problem oriented rather than person-oriented.</li> <li>4. Open sharing of information.</li> <li>5. Clear and specific.</li> <li>6. Solving the problem. Move toward unanimous agreement. Utilize collaborative style.</li> <li>7. Collaborative agreement if possible. Win/win final resolution with acceptable, mutually agreed solution.</li> </ol>
<b>Skills Needed</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trust/rapport building skills.</li> <li>2. Ability to think theologically.</li> <li>3. Good listening skills.</li> <li>4. Working knowledge of the <u>Book of Order</u> and of the church</li> <li>5. Problem-solving and decision-making skills.</li> <li>6. Consulting skills</li> <li>7. Knowledge of available resources</li> </ol>
<b><u>Training Strategies</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skills to be taught all members of Committee on Ministry on a continuing basis.</li> <li>2. Develop resources using audio, visual and printed materials (including VCR)</li> <li>3. Use of case studies and role playing for skills training</li> </ol>

## LEVEL TWO: DISAGREEMENT

<b>Characteristics:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue</li> <li>2. Emotions</li> <li>3. Orientation</li> <li>4. Information</li> <li>5. Language</li> <li>6. Objective</li> <li>7. Outcome</li> </ol> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Real disagreement; mixing of personalities and issues; problem cannot be clearly defined.</li> <li>2. Distrust beginning. Caution in association; less mixing with the "other side."</li> <li>3. Begin personifying problem; shrewdness and calculation begin.</li> <li>4. Selective holdback of information occurs on both sides.</li> <li>5. More vague and general; "some people..." "they..." hostile humor, barbed comments and put-downs</li> <li>6. Face-saving; come out looking good. Tend to move toward consensus. Not yet win/lose conflict.</li> <li>7. Attempt collaborative solution; or negotiate acceptable agreement; win/win with real effort.</li> </ol>
<b>Skills Needed</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All skills under level one; in addition;</li> <li>2. Analytical skills.</li> <li>3. Understanding of power dynamics and issues.</li> <li>4. Mediation skills.</li> <li>5. Self-awareness skills.</li> </ol>
<b><u>Training Strategies</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selected persons from Committee on Ministry with additional specialized training/leadership.</li> <li>2. Regionally-based year-long training in 5-6 segments or,</li> <li>3. Attendance at weeklong workshop.</li> <li>4. Use of simulation for training.</li> </ol>

### LEVEL THREE - CONTEST

<b>Characteristics:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue</li> <li>2. Emotions</li> <li>3. Orientation</li> <li>4. Information</li> <li>5. Language</li> <li>6. Objective</li> <li>7. Outcome</li> </ol> <p>1. Begin the dynamics of win/lose. Resistance to peace overtures. Focus on persons representing the enemy.</p> <p>2. Not able to operate in presence of "enemy"; however, admire worthy opponent. Not willing/able to share emotions/feelings constructively.</p> <p>3. Personal attacks. Formation of factions/sides Threat of members leaving. Need third party consultant from Committee on Ministry or outside.</p> <p>4. Distortion is major problem. Information shared only within factions.</p> <p>5. Overgeneralizations: "You always..." "We never..." Attribute diabolical motives to others.</p> <p>6. Shifts from self-protection to winning. Objectives are more complex and diffuse; clustering of issues.</p> <p>7. Decision-making=mediation, compromising, voting. Possible that some will leave the church.</p>
<b>Skills Needed</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All skills under level one and two; in addition;</li> <li>2. Designing and negotiating contracts.</li> <li>3. Clear recognition of one's own limits.</li> <li>4. Understand interaction of personality types.</li> <li>5. Facilitator in-group process.</li> <li>6. Skilled in developing clear process of decision-making.</li> </ol>
<b><u>Training Strategies</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Presbytery-based crisis intervention team screened by Committee on Ministry and trained by experiential methods.</li> <li>2. Facilitator's limits have tested in advanced experiential training.</li> <li>3. Long-term, continuing training through national and regional training events.</li> <li>4. Have access to individual trained to administer and interpret instrument for self/other awareness, e.g., Myers/Briggs Type Indicator.</li> </ol>

## LEVEL FOUR: FIGHT/FIGHT

<p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue</li> <li>2. Emotions</li> <li>3. Orientation</li> <li>4. Information</li> <li>5. Language</li> <li>6. Objective</li> <li>7. Outcome</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shifts from winning to getting rid of person(s). No longer believe other can change, or want to change.</li> <li>2. Cold self-righteousness. Will not speak to other side.</li> <li>3. Factions are solidified. Clear lines of demarcation. Last place for constructive intervention by third party consultant.</li> <li>4. Limited only to the cause being advocated; will not accept/listen to contrary information.</li> <li>5. Talk now of "principles," not "issues." Language solidifies into ideology.</li> <li>6. No longer winning; now eliminate other(s) from the environment. Hurt the other person/group.</li> <li>7. High probability of split within the church with significant number of persons leaving church.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Skills Needed</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All skills under level one, two and three; in addition;</li> <li>2. Ability to assess need for additional skill building.</li> <li>3. Proven experience (track record).</li> <li>4. Knowledge of broader more specialized resources.</li> <li>5. More formal networking (i.e., Assoc. for Creative Change); knowledge of those qualified to work in related areas.</li> <li>6. Careful adherence to the <u>Book of Order</u>.</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Training Strategies</u></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ability to determine if a commission is needed.</li> <li>2. Member of an identified cadre.</li> <li>3. Practical training based on skills/needs assessment.</li> <li>4. Acknowledgement at this level, intervention is helpful to "pick up the pieces" and negotiate a settlement, not to resolve the issue.</li> <li>5. Use of specialists in networking. (See skills needed #5-- above.)</li> </ol>

## LEVEL FIVE: INTRACTABLE

<b>Characteristics:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Issue</li> <li>2. Emotions</li> <li>3. Orientation</li> <li>4. Information</li> <li>5. Language</li> <li>6. Objective</li> <li>7. Outcome</li> </ol> <p>1. No longer clear understanding of issue; personalities have become issue. Conflict now unmanageable.</p> <p>2. Relentless obsession in accomplishing the objective(s) at all costs. Vindictive. No objective control of emotion.</p> <p>3. Sees person as harmful to society, not just to the offended group or person.</p> <p>4. Information skewed to accomplish the objective at any cost.</p> <p>5. Focuses on words that imply the destruction and/or elimination of the other.</p> <p>6. To destroy the offending party/persons; i.e., to see that the fired pastor does not get a job elsewhere.</p> <p>7. Highly destructive. Use of compulsion to maintain peace. May be necessary to remove members from church. Possible formation of administrative/judicial commission.</p>
<b>Skills Needed</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All skills under level one through four; in addition;</li> <li>2. Adequate personal support system and strong inner resources. Able to practice personal stress management techniques.</li> <li>3. Careful adherence to the Book of Order, especially the "Rules of Discipline."</li> </ol> <p>It is acknowledged that at this level no reconciliation is possible. Consultant's purpose is to minimize damage of conflict and enable person/institution/group to be able to function again.</p>
<b><u>Training Strategies</u></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop plan for the rebuilding of relationships.</li> <li>2. Support for all members of the church.</li> </ol>

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

Argyris, Chris, and Schon, Donald A. *Intervention Theory and Method: A Behavioral Science View*, Addison- Wesley Publishing Co. 1970.

"Dealing With Conflict in the Congregation", Published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, 100 Witherspoon St. Louisville, KY. 40202. PDS# 919-85-767.

Gardenswartz, Lee and Anita Rowe, *Managing Diversity*, Business One Irwin/Pfeiffer and Company, Homewood, IL/San Diego, CA, 1993.

Halverstadt, Hugh F. *Managing Church Conflict*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1991.

Guthrie, Shirley, *Diversity in Faith-Unity in Christ*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1986.

Johnson, Barry, *Polarity Management*, HRD Press, Amherst, MA 1992.

Kliewer, Stephen, *How to Live With Diversity in the Local Church*, Alban Institute, 1987.

Kochman, Thomas, *Black and White Styles in Conflict*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1990.

Leas, Speed, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict*, Alban Institute, Bethesda, MD, 1985.

-----, *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*, Alban Institute, Bethesda, MD, 1984.

-----, *A Lay Person's Guide to Conflict Management*, Alban Institute, Bethesda, MD.

Parsons, George, *Intervening in a Church Fight*, Alban Institute, Bethesda, MD. 1992.

Steinke, Peter, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, Alban 1993.

Watts, Richard G. *How Should Congregations Talk About Tough Issues?* Published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, PDS # 919-88-709.

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This Conflict Intensity Chart is a resource of the Committee on Ministry office, a ministry of the General Assembly Council, National Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The original resource was produced by a 1986 General Assembly Task Force on Conflict consisting of the following persons: Ms. Margaret Bruehl, Mr. Roy W. Preuman, Rev. Jill Hudson, Rev. Allan Swan, Ms. Mary V Atkinson, Rev. Alan G. Gripe. The writer/editor of this piece was Rev. Allan Swan. Permission to use the general categories and the descriptions of the Levels of Conflict has been granted by the Rev. Speed Leas of the Alban Institute, Bethesda Maryland. The material was edited slightly by the taskforce. List of Conflict Resources was updated in August 2002.