

# Conflict Resolution for Community Gardens



Image:  
Ellen  
Wienstein

With FoodShare TO, Greenest City and Toronto Urban Growers  
Winter 2021

# Land Acknowledgment

FoodShare acknowledges that the sacred land in which we operate is situated upon the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-oh-sho-nee), the Anishinabeg (Ah-nish-in-nah-beg), and the Mississaugas of the Credit. This territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Anishinabeg and Haudenosaunee allied nations to peaceably share and care for the lands around the Great Lakes. FoodShare recognizes the many Nations of Indigenous People, who presently live on this land, those who have spent time here and the ancestors who have hunted and gathered on this land known as Turtle Island.

FoodShare recognizes and supports the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and the [Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action](#), applying both to our work.

FoodShare's work is guided by principles of Food Justice, this includes receiving ongoing guidance from an Indigenous Advisory Circle on our work and on collaborations with Indigenous groups working towards Indigenous food sovereignty and increasing Indigenous food access.

FoodShare also acknowledges the many people of African descent who are not settlers, but whose ancestors were forcibly displaced as part of the transatlantic slave trade, brought against their will, and made to work on these lands. We believe that advancing Indigenous sovereignty is deeply and inextricably linked to Black liberation and we remain committed to advancing both.

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# Meet your Facilitators

Natalie- Community Garden + Therapy Garden Coordinator  
at CAMH for FoodShare Toronto

Chimu-Urban Cultivation Coordinator, Greenest City

Angela- ED at Greenest City

Rhonda- Co-coordinator, Toronto Urban Growers

[www.torontourbangrowers.org](http://www.torontourbangrowers.org)

# Grounding Yourself



Place one hand  
on your chest.

the other on  
your belly

Breathe.  
Notice.  
Repeat.

Talking about conflict is loaded.

You may already feel yourself starting to get activated before we've begun.

If you feel any tough feels come up or start projecting too much into the past, remember to try and ground back into your body.

Have both feet planted on the floor.

Notice your breathing. Unclench your jaw.

Shake it off-literally shake or move your body a bit.

Make sure you have water to stay hydrated.

# Why does conflict arise?

## **Structural:**

**Implicit or explicit bias**

**(racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, colourism, classism etc)**

**Imbalance power dynamics: between gardeners and landowners, between established members vs new members**

**Lack of clarity or consensus around structure/ roles/responsibilities**

# Why does conflict arise?

## PERSONAL:

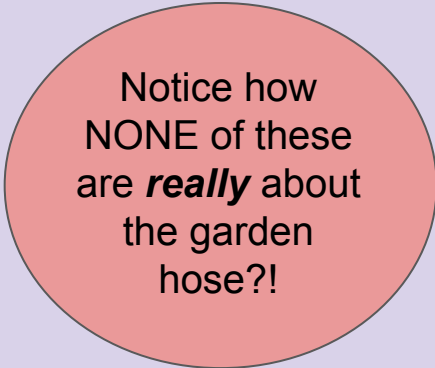
Personal boundaries being crossed, stated or unstated

People feeling disrespected/unseen

People feeling scared of losing belonging/  
value/control

Unaddressed smaller issues that compound  
into larger issue

Past trauma/experience being brought to bear on the present



Notice how  
NONE of these  
are **really** about  
the garden  
hose?!

# Community garden structure and conflict management



Gardens provide benefits to families and community members that include: improved multicultural relations, food security, health education, environmental awareness, and an array of social benefits that empower participants. However, These same benefits can also be a locus of conflict

Systems and structures that clarify garden operations are necessary for sustainability, engaging the community and cultivating a robust volunteer workforce.

Addressing conflict equitably and following a clearly understood procedure builds trust between the gardeners, and reduces the risk of unfair treatment. Conflict management and mediation strategies help gardens promote a fair, safe, and enjoyable gardening and volunteer experience

Empower members of the garden to be responsible for day to day operations with effective tools for management and structures and processes for conflict resolution



# Formal and Informal Garden Structures

## Formal

In a formal structure, the rules, regulations and policies within the garden are typically written and explained so all gardeners and garden managers understand how things work. This documentation may take the form of a detailed contract, chart or a sheet of rules

Most Formal garden structures have a hierarchical structure - Director, coordinator, who are the producers of the document  
(Hopefully with gardener input!!)

Collaborative and collective structures can also be formal and non hierarchical

## Informal

In an informal garden structure, the community garden doesn't operate under the guidelines of a written document that spells out the rules, regulations and "chain-of-command".

Under this structure, the garden operates by a system developed by gardeners based on modalities that have proven effective over time

Informal structures are unique for every garden, because they are based on the legacy of the garden, the number of gardeners, demographic of the gardeners and collaborative techniques developed over the life of the garden

# Formal Structures For Community Gardens

## Pros

The primary advantage of a formal structure is that::

It clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of gardeners and partner organization/s. As a result, everyone knows what they have to do and how they're supposed to achieve desired outcomes.

The formal structure also keeps work processes under centralized control, because there is an established method of decision-making and implementation of directives.

Everyone has the same information in immutable form, clarifies processes. Proof of someone's agreement to processes is also readily available

## Cons

Requires staff time

Resources for translation of written materials

Vulnerable to staff turn over

There can be a disconnect between staff/employees and gardeners due to differing priorities

Formal structures can perpetuate inequalities if they're not directly and intentionally challenged. For instance, organizations with white-dominated management may have decision making power over BIPOC gardeners.

# Informal Structures For Community Gardens

## *Pros*

Break down hierarchy

Require less staff resources

The major advantage of an informal structure is that it's highly adaptable to change. An informal structure is fluid enough to make that changes quickly and efficiently.

## *Cons*

Barriers in communication, unclear rules and procedures

Cultural differences in communicating and receiving information

Another disadvantage of informal structure is that the absence of supervisory authority can lead to disorganization and more conflict if gardeners are not adequately resourced and empowered to hold each other accountable

# Best practices in any community garden structure

- 1) Anticipate and review potential sources of conflict before they arise and develop a procedure for dealing with different types of conflict
- 2) Cross cultural knowledge and communication skills
- 3) Train garden leaders to observe signs of conflict, including (discomfort, avoidance, tension, misunderstandings and incidents)
- 4) Community garden should develop and approach what is clear and consensus driven

**Using this approach, conflict can be mitigated by empowered leadership and accepted rules**

**There is no one size fits all.**



# Examples of internal garden conflicts

- 1) Encroaching into other's garden spaces/ Stepping on someone's garden
- 2) Stolen vegetables
- 3) Failed conflict resolution
- 4) Words exchanged



## Conflict with landholder

- A landholder may be a parks manager, property manager or staff from an organization. They may have power to withhold services, ask people to leave or close the garden.
- Use similar strategies for conflict resolution as in one-on-one conflicts
- Talk with other gardener organizers - share strategies, have a stronger voice together



# Conflict with community outside of the garden

An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure

Important for community gardens to engage wider community through events, education and green spaces that are open to everyone

- Reduces vandalism
- Promotes sense of stewardship, belonging
- Gives neighbours a stake in the garden
- Opportunity to educate, build connections – about pollinators, cultural practices like growing medicines and ceremonies – make a statement that these practices are welcome



# *Personal* skill sets for conflict resolution

-Ladder of Inference

-HALT- Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired

-Using I statements

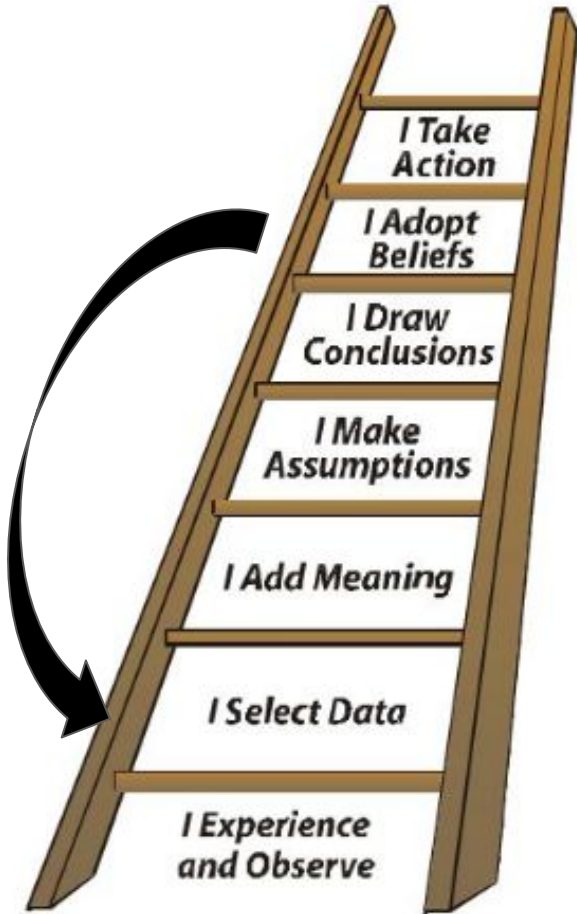
-Goals, Intentions, Values

-Where's the fire?/Determining urgency

-Breathing/grounding to stay present



# Ladder of Inference



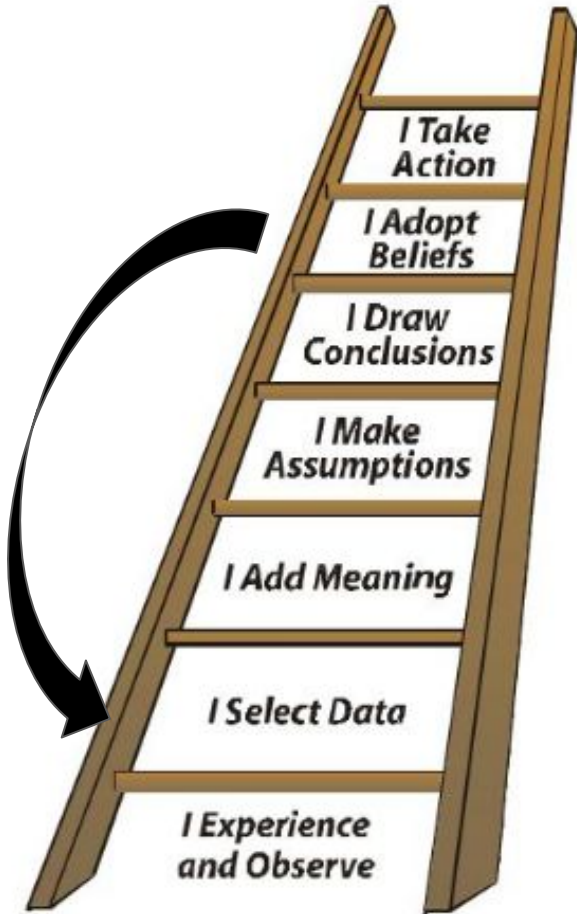
Model for understanding how we make decisions and take action.

Main point is that we often don't have enough information to make a conclusion or take action, and that we often select data/information about the situation based on our already underlying belief systems.

Before we “fill in the blanks” with our own assumptions, we need to ask more questions, or else risk taking action in an uninformed way, which usually leads to conflict

\*The arrow was added by me, to show that our beliefs usually impact which kinds of data we select to begin with

# Ladder of Inference: Example



➔ I write an angry text to my fellow gardener reminding them of how to put the hose away properly

➔ **I can't trust my fellow gardener, I am more trustworthy/better than most other gardeners, I have to do everything myself to make sure it gets done.**

➔ My fellow gardener is lazy and doesn't care about the garden as much as I do.

➔ X fellow gardener must have been the one who didn't put the hose away.

➔ The sign in sheet says x fellow gardener was here last.

➔ The garden hose was not put back properly.

**Hungry**  
**Angry**  
**Lonely**  
**Tired**

**HALT**

## H.A.L.T Model

Great, easy self-check in to use before making decisions/acting/instigating conflict

Often these factors affect our decision making, and make us less available for productive dialogue

If possible, it's great to be resourced in all of these areas before having difficult conversations/resolving conflicts

# Using “I” statements

- helps alleviate accusation
- grounds the conversation in your experience of it + allows others to express their own differing experiences
- allows for openness and flexibility and to come to a collective understanding of what happened
- Centres in feeling/impact and not “fact” or intention, which can be subjective

## “I” STATEMENT



# Goals, Intentions, Values

**Before we move to resolve conflict:** can we ground ourselves in what our goals, intentions and values are in the situation?

Is the conflict in opposition to any of these three categories? Can we name this clearly?

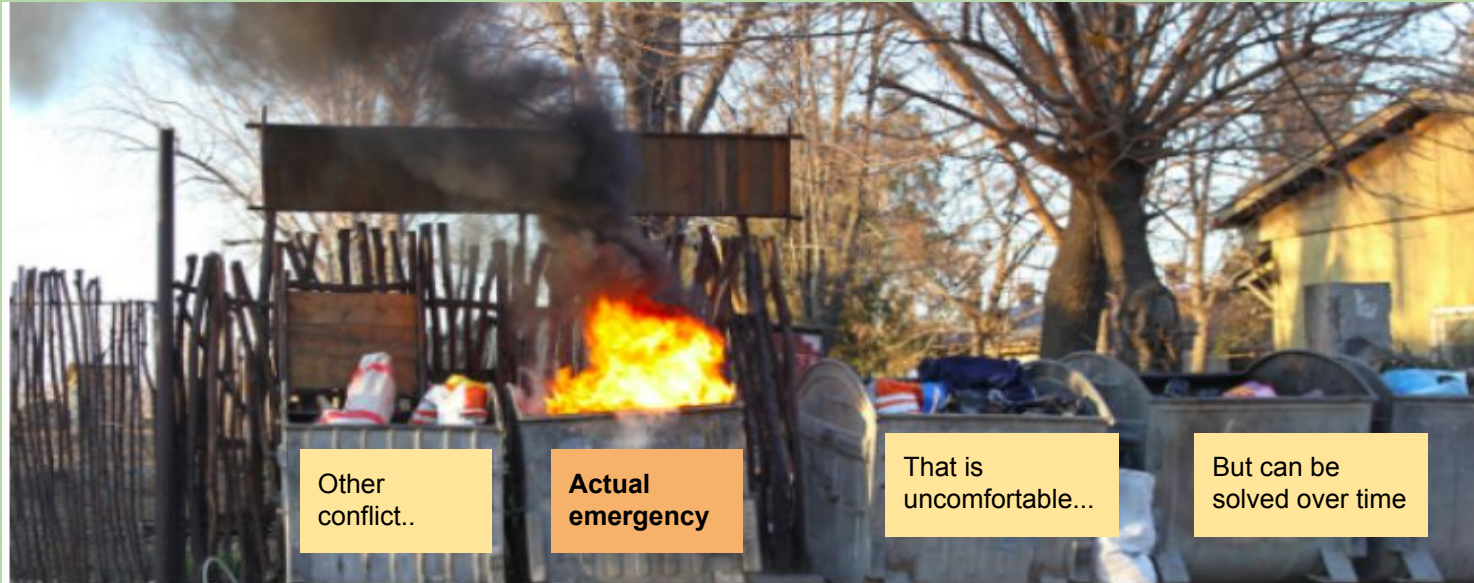
**During Conflict:** Can we name our goals and intentions for the conversation clearly to the other person during conversation?

Can we refer back to an agreed upon set of goals, intentions and values that we both/all share?

Are we giving ourselves and the other person enough time to have the type of conversation that honours our goals, intentions and values?

*\*\*If the conflict is not in opposition to any of these categories, it could be more related to your own ego, which may be more of a “you” issue than a “them” issue.*

# Where's the fire/Determining Urgency



Anxiety/discomfort can make us have a hard time knowing what is urgent and what can be solved over time.

**Actual** emergency that need to be resolved **NOW/ASAP** are ones where there is immediate actual danger, a threat to someone's body/life or, in the case of community gardens, a threat to the ability for plants to stay alive. Most other conflicts can be solved over time and in fact will probably be solved in a better way if given space..

# Check in with the Body



Image via emmacameron.com

These three elements outlined here can help us be present and grounded in our bodies before/during and after.

Ask yourself:

**Can I feel the ground?** Are both my feet planted on the ground?

**What is my breathing like?** Can I slow my breathing if it is fast? Can I feel the breath coming in and out of my nostrils?

**What is my posture like?** Am I hunched over/small or am I taking up a lot of space? Am I standing in an open posture that lets the other person know I am open to dialogue?

# *Collective* skill sets for conflict resolution

## **Before** conflict occurs

- Work to create secure, supportive environment where trust and mutual respect are fostered
- Conduct frequent meetings where small/medium issues can be discussed before they lead to larger issues
- Create very clear roles, responsibilities + channels of communication
- Create codes of conduct + procedures for how conflict gets addressed



# *Collective* skill sets for conflict resolution

## **During conflict:**

**-Creating the Container:** stating intentions for conversation, grounding in collective goals of trust, care and positive hopes for the future

**-Mirroring:** reflecting back to the person what they've just said , to clarify and affirm mutual understanding

**-Centring curiosity:** asking more “why” questions to get at the heart of the issue/behaviour. “Why” helps us fill in the blanks that we often leave up to our own assumptions

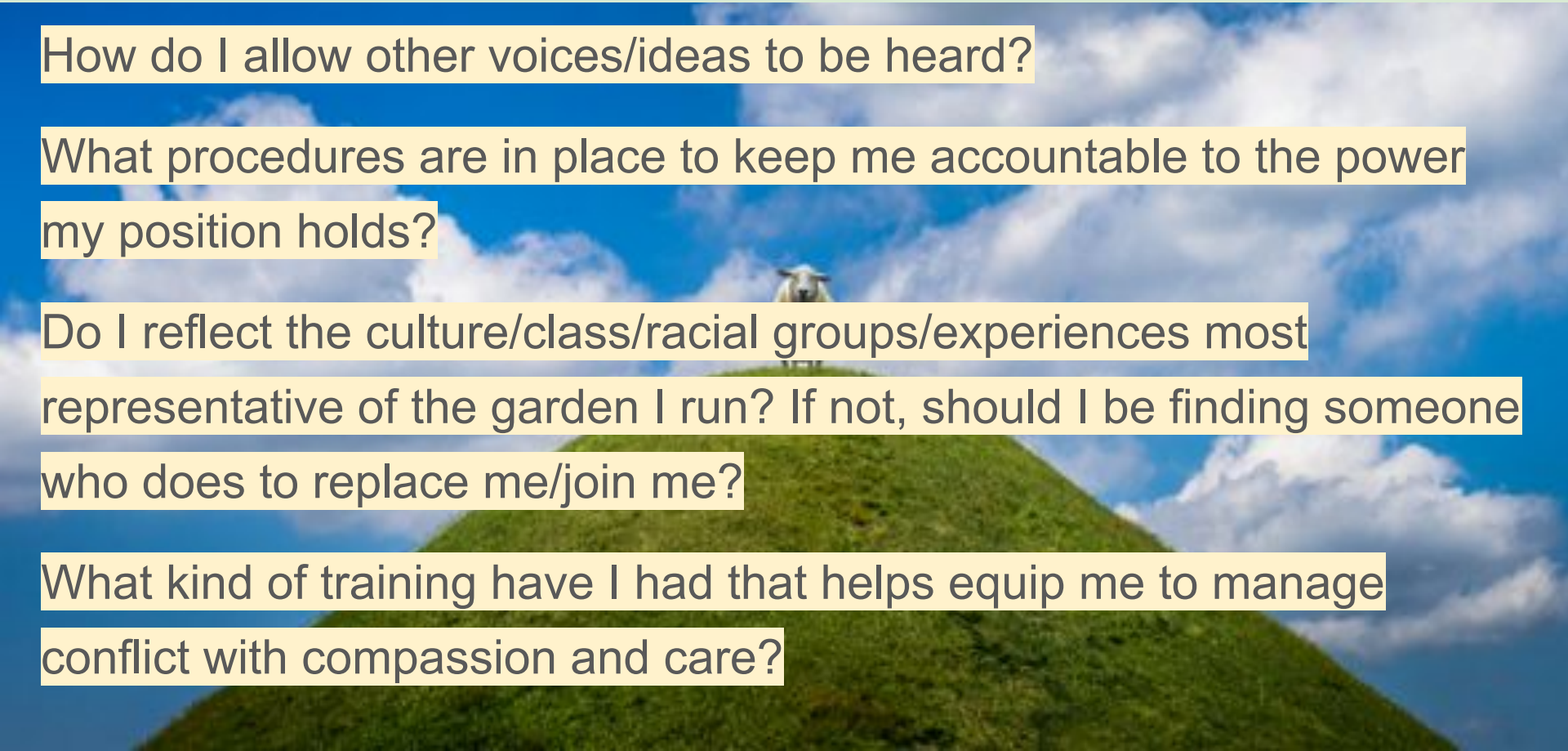
# *If you are in a position of relative power:*

How do I allow other voices/ideas to be heard?

What procedures are in place to keep me accountable to the power my position holds?

Do I reflect the culture/class/racial groups/experiences most representative of the garden I run? If not, should I be finding someone who does to replace me/join me?

What kind of training have I had that helps equip me to manage conflict with compassion and care?



# Question and Answer TIME

Workshop supported by



TD Friends of the  
Environment  
Foundation

# **Brave Spaces - Working Through Scenarios**

March 30 7:00 - 8:00

## **Conflict Resolution Part 2**

*We will be presenting scenarios and reviewing/using skills learned here to problem solve together what steps to take.*

## **Sourdough: Intermediate**

**March 17 6pm - 8pm**

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/copy-of-sourdough-bread-201-intermediate-workshop-tickets-145353003747>

# **Fresh Ways With Balcony Gardening: online**

Saturday, March 13

Author and Illustrator Lara Mrosovsky

[seedysaturday.ca](http://seedysaturday.ca)

# **Conflict Resolution with Deb - online**

Saturday, March 27

[seedysaturday.ca](http://seedysaturday.ca)

## Additional Resources

Projectlets.org-Training to promote peer-led communities of support, education and advocacy for folks with lived experience of mental illness, rooted in disability justice.

Generation 5 Creative Intervention toolkit for accountability (website/downloadable toolkit)

St. Andrew's conflict resolution training-Toronto based

Kai Cheng Thom-I hope we choose love (Book)

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-The Revolution Starts at Home

Adrienne Maree Brown-Emergent Strategy, Holding Change

Mariame Kaba + Shira Hasan-Fumbling Towards Repair